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Warning:

The following material contains strong sexual content meant for mature readers. "No Fear" has been rated NC-17, erotic, by four individual reviewers. We strongly suggest storing this electronic file in a place where young readers not meant to view this e-book are unlikely to happen upon it. That said, enjoy...

Prologue

The Palace of Mirrors

Dominant Red Moon of Morak, Seventh Dimension

6049 Y.Y. (Yessat Years)

"My nieces could be anywhere." He sighed, his hand running distractedly through his mane of midnight black hair. "Leastways, 'tis all I ask of you. One last request before I release you from your instruction that you might rule o'er your own sectors."

High Lord Jek Q'an Ri acknowledged the King of Morak's words with a barely perceptible nod of the head. "If they have fled into the first dimension, Mighty One, 'tis a vow I shall find them."

Kil grunted as he strolled with Jek toward the west wing of the stronghold. 'Twas only one launching pad within the confines of the palace large enough to host the take-off of a ship so huge as a gastrolight cruiser. "'Tis more like than not that the wenches have remained within this dimension, yet there is also the possibility, slim though it may be, that they would seek refuge in the land their *mani* heralds from."

Jek came to a halt before the warring chamber and motioned for an underling to fetch him his weapons. He turned to look at his cousin Kil, the warlord who had been his teacher, whilst a young warrior in training snapped *zorgs* on either of Jek's vein-roped forearms. "You will leave with your

brothers to scour the seventh dimension, then?”

“Shh!” Kil’s glowing blue eyes darted warily about the black crystal corridor whilst he made certain that his cousin’s words had not been overheard by his ever-wily *nee ’ka*. He frowned. ‘Twas Mari’s contention that his nieces should not be forcibly returned to Tryston, even though such was precisely what he and his brothers planned to do.

So Kil had said nothing further on the subject of his leave-taking to her, preferring as he did to refrain from yet another tiresome lecture on pigs in power and subverting dominant paradigms. Inevitably, he thought as his eyes narrowed and his lips turned down, conversations such as that one ended up in the King of Morak seeing no action in the *vesha* hides for a moon-rising or two.

He grunted. Definitely not groovy.

“Aye,” Kil whispered, feeling every inch the dunce for fearing the wrath of a wife whose height barely surpassed his navel. “Though Mari believes I am traveling to the planet Meridian in the fourth dimension on a mission of peace and goodwill.”

Jek shook his head slightly, the beginnings of a grin tugging at the corners of his mouth. He was not a warrior known for smiling o’er much, so the fact that he was grinning at all was a sign to Kil of how humorous he found his predicament to be. Jek was much more lighthearted than ever Kil was or would be, but he had learned o’er the Yessat years that ‘twas desirable to remain stoic of appearance at all times—leastways, with other warriors. Only with a Sacred Mate was it permissible to let one’s guard down a wee bit.

Kil sighed, exasperated. “What would you have me to say to her? Leastways,” he grumbled, “you know how bedamned irritating she is when she gets on one of her femalist kicks.”

“Feminist,” Jek murmured, his eyes twinkling. “’Tis called a feminist kick.”

“Aye?”

“Aye.”

Kil grunted. His hand waved absently about. “Femalist, feminist...’tis no difference. Leastways, the wench can irritate me as can no other with her bedamned prattling.”

Jek’s eyebrows rose fractionally, but he said nothing as they resumed their stroll toward the launching pad. He merely shook his head again, then fell in step next to his cousin.

A topless bound servant passed them in the corridor, her gaze seeking out Jek’s as she strode by. Jek ignored her, not out of callousness but because he truly hadn’t noticed her presence. Having been raised all his life amongst the most privileged, he was arrogantly accustomed to having bound servants aplenty to see to his every need.

The most favored in his harem he might have noticed had she strolled by with her large breasts bouncing in time with her walk, but even then he might not have. Leastways, it wasn’t as if he could feel emotions for a bound servant—not even for a favored.

He would that he could.

It might make his stark life just a wee bit more tolerable.

Since 'twas not permissible by law for Jek to forsake his duties to the King of Morak in favor of searching for his Sacred Mate, it would have been welcomed had he been able to feel any emotion at all these past long Yessat years for any of the bound servants. But he was to be released from his bonds the soonest, he reminded himself. Then, finally, could he search the galaxies for the wench that had been born to belong to him.

Yet first there was duty.

Although Jek had been raised with a crystal fork-spoon in his mouth, it had come at a steep price. Because he would one day be a king by virtue of his birth and not by virtue of his own might, he had found it necessary o'er the Yessat years to be harsher, stronger—mightier—than every other warrior, that he might prove his worthiness to command.

'Twas ironic for a certainty.

His good friend Cam K'al Ra had followed the same life-course as Jek for the opposite reason. Cam had wanted to prove that he, the son of a lowly *trelli* miner, was worthy of the Emperor's daughter's hand in marriage, whilst Jek had wanted to prove that he, the beloved firstborn son of the Emperor's cousin, was worthy of ruling o'er his own sectors not because he had been born to rule them, but because he was mighty in his own right.

And so at a very young age Jek had pleaded with his sire to allow him to foster under the King of Morak, a warrior so feared 'twas common for enemies to surrender unto him without any battling at all. Just the mere whisper of his name was enough to make many insurrectionists forsake their illegal activities in favor of retaining their lives.

Jek had not been disappointed, for the rumors had all been true. Kil was as deadly, if not more so, than legend allowed. The king had mellowed some in the last few years since the birth of his children, at least on the surface for Queen Mari's sake, but for the longest part of Jek's tutelage Kil had been as cold and merciless as his legend.

Jek had learned from the mightiest, the strongest, the most deadly.

No fear.

A weak warrior asked. A strong warrior took.

No fear.

A coward walked away when his enemies outnumbered him. A hero stayed and fought even if it cost him his life.

No fear.

And so it came to pass that Jek Q'an Ri became the very image that Kil Q'an Tal had made him into: ruthless, merciless, cold, and unforgiving. He rarely smiled, wasn't given to jest, and never backed down once he'd set out on a course.

At least amongst other warriors. Whilst visiting with the females of his line he allowed his guards to

slip just a bit that he might have the freedom of laughing and jesting in their presence. Mayhap, though, all warriors were given to such dual behavior. 'Twas difficult indeed to remain grim and stoic every hour of every day, so 'twas probably a necessity of nature that allowed for a warrior to relax in the presence of wenches.

Not that he was complaining. Everything came at a price. The price of respect from underlings was steep, but Jek had paid it.

"You've enough gastrolight stored on board to last you ten lifetimes should you need it." Kil motioned toward the spaceship as they neared the launching pad. "Have a care the pilot hits naught, for the resulting crash would take your lives in the blink of an eye."

Jek nodded. "I take with me Yar'at. 'Tis no finer pilot than he."

"You have named Yar'at your first in command when you leave for your own sectors then?"

"Aye."

Kil inclined his head. "A worthy choice."

No more words passed between the warriors until they reached their destination. They absently watched whilst an underling led Jek's harem aboard the gastrolight cruiser, shooing them toward their awaiting bedchamber.

Kil grunted. "You are taking enough bound servants along to last twenty quests. Leastways, 'tis for a certainty that the long trip shan't bore you o'er much," he said dryly.

Jek's eyes twinkled, but he didn't smile. "Aye, Mighty One."

Kil nodded, serious once more. "Be prepared to turn around and hightail it back should I hear tell of my nieces in another dimension or galaxy. Until the laws of succession force me to release you from your duty to me you are still my handpicked first in command." One eyebrow rose arrogantly. "I want you at the ready at all times."

Jek's gaze strayed toward the awaiting gastrolight cruiser. He sighed, actually hoping that the king did call him back. Leastways, the trip was bound to prove a failure, and a dull one at that. No warring. No hunting for a Sacred Mate. No nothing. "Aye, Mighty One." His gaze shot back to his cousin's. "I am ever at the ready."

Chapter 1

Houston, Texas

The United States of America, First Dimension

September 19, 1986 A.D. (Anno Domini)

Brynda Mitchell's eyebrows shot up as her curious gaze strayed toward the old man standing at the

opposite side of her desk. His head was thrust back, his eyes closed in bliss as if he'd just reached nirvana, while he thrust open his trench coat and gave her a close-up view of his naked, and extremely wrinkled, seventy-year-old body.

Exhibitionism, she absently thought, letting the Psychology term mentally roll around on her tongue. She had just studied the section on sexual disorders in her Psychology textbook and could spot all sorts of wicked mental problems from twenty paces. Not that this one was particularly challenging. The trench coat and the nudity more or less gave it away, she conceded on a sigh.

Brynda shook her head slightly, suppressing the urge to sigh a bit more dramatically. Having worked in a library since she was old enough to hold down a job, she'd seen it all. Flashers. Junkies. Prostitutes. Once she'd even had to call the cops on an annoying pantomime artist who'd become irate when she couldn't figure out what in the hell his hand gestures had meant. She had calmly informed the pantomime of the fact that he was a failure at his craft, which had enraged him enough to break the cardinal rule of pantomiming—he had spoken to her. Bellowed actually. And none too prettily at that, she recalled.

The public in general tended to think of libraries as sedate places where little to nothing in the way of odd might transpire, but on the contrary, the odd was so commonplace that it seemed rather normal to her. From couples that wanted to spice up their sex life by carrying on in a library aisle to hookers seeking a safe haven from pursuing pimps, Brynda had seen it all. She supposed all the weirdness helped to shake up the monotony of her otherwise staid existence, so she didn't exactly mind any of it. Not even this seventy-year-old man and his naked, if a bit disgusting, body.

"That's nice George," she said distractedly, her gaze flicking back down to the textbook she was reading from. She had an exam in her graduate level Psychology course at the university later this evening and wanted to make certain she aced it. "Did you have a book you wanted to check out or do I need to call your daughter to come pick you up again?"

George closed his trench coat with a huff, nirvana forgotten as quickly as it had been found. "No, I don't want you callin' Emmy," he snapped in an amusingly irritated voice only old southern men can perfect. He wagged a skinny finger at her. "I ain't gettin' sent to my room again, Miss Brynda, and that's a fact."

Brynda blinked at him over the rims of her large-framed spectacles. "Then I highly suggest you keep Mr. Wiggly under wraps. And I do mean that literally." Her gaze flicked back down to the book. This particular chapter was actually quite interesting as it not only dealt with various sexual disorders and their remedies, but it had accompanying photographs as well. "There's a new series of books on UFOs that came in today," she said absently. "You might find them interesting."

He hesitated. "Do they got pictures?" George asked begrudgingly, his interest snagged.

She glanced up and smiled. "Artistic renderings. I don't believe anybody's actually photographed an alien yet. Aisle D5, George."

He grunted, curious despite himself. "Oh all right dammit, I'll go have me a look." His bushy eyebrows narrowed, forming one long caterpillar looking creature. "And no tattlin' on me to Emmy while I'm thumbin' through the alien books, y'hear?"

"Loud and clear," she said indulgently as she turned the page in her textbook.

An hour later, when the library was getting ready to close down for the evening, Brynda stood up

and headed for the women's washroom to make herself presentable for class tonight. She wished she had time to run home and change into more comfortable clothing, but the visits to the doctor's office directly after work made her free time between the library and the college nonexistent.

When she arrived at the women's washroom, she made a direct beeline for the mirror, wanting to tidy herself up as much as possible. She studied the sensible, dependable image she presented as she straightened her neat little bowtie. Made out of red ribbon, she had read in a women's magazine that a spiffy little ribbon bowtie was part and parcel of the proper image a modern businesswoman of the eighties should present. Accompanied by a pinstriped cotton shirt, a pair of matronly black pumps, and a no-nonsense skirt that ended just below the knees, she felt ready to take on the world. Or if not the world at large, she conceded, she at least felt ready to take on the Psychology exam at the university tonight.

Sometimes, especially during moments like this when she was tired and not feeling particularly well, she wondered if it was all worth it. Why bother going to class at night when she knew she'd never live to see graduation day? But in the end she always pulled herself together and carried on with life, for she wanted to keep hers as close to normal as possible for as long as possible.

Only thirty-six-years old, Brynda realized she would never marry and bear children. A small part of her grieved the loss of what could have been if only Harry hadn't died, but he was gone, and she had her reasons for not wanting to entangle another man in her life.

Harry had been a good man, if not a particularly fascinating one. He had cared for Brynda wholeheartedly, and while she might have wished for him to be a tad more on the inventive, entertaining side, he had been a dear friend and a thoughtful lover. Unimaginative, even complacent perhaps, but thoughtful regardless.

Not that Brynda herself was particularly fascinating and entertaining. On the contrary, she knew she was a wallflower, knew too that people tended to think of her as a dull little mouse. She was interested in her work at the library, pursued her advanced degree in Psychology at night at the local university, and that, unfortunate as it might sound to others, summed up the whole of her existence.

But Brynda was happy. She might occasionally grow bored with the status quo, might every once in a blue moon wish she led a wilder, more exciting life, but all in all she was quite content with the life she had. Brynda preferred predictability. She sought out stability and normalcy, and she didn't much care for anyone or anything that shook up her ordered, sensible life.

Harry had been good that way. He had been as mousy and sensible as she was, which had made for a smart, if a bit boring match.

Only forty, it had been a shock when Harry had died of a heart attack. It had taken Brynda nearly two years to recover from the loss of him, but eventually the grieving period had ended and now when she thought back on his memory it was more with a small nostalgic smile as she remembered the good times, rather than with tears as she recalled the pain and abject loneliness of losing him.

But it had been difficult. She had always expected it would be her that would go first and not Harry. Now that she understood what it felt like to lose someone you love, she knew that she would never put anybody else through such a horrific event as what she'd gone through herself.

And so the status quo would remain. She would continue on with her life, lead it in the way she knew how to, and she would have no regrets, no wishes that she hadn't dragged somebody else into her

life only to leave and break their heart.

Brynda drew in a deep breath as she studied her image in the mirror. She was an average looking woman, she supposed. Neither ugly nor gorgeous. She possessed long blonde hair, clear blue eyes reminiscent of a wolf's, but was otherwise rather ordinary looking. Still, she was fairly certain that if she wanted to she could find another man to date.

But, she reminded herself, she didn't want to. She might be lonely—terribly lonely even—but she would not do to an innocent man what Harry had done to her. She would not allow a man to grow to care for her, only to have her die on him in less than a year's time.

Brynda finished arranging the ribbon bowtie around her neck, shoved the pair of spectacles back onto her face, and reached for her briefcase. She wanted to get an early start before rush hour traffic hit, realizing as she did that traffic on a Friday was terrible. There was only two hours left before the exam tonight and the doctor's office was clear across town.

The doctor, she thought, as she took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. She wondered why she was even wasting her time by driving across town. She knew what he was going to say, knew too what the test results were liable to be—they were going to confirm what her body was already telling her:

The cancer had come back.

What had began as a small tumor in her stomach had spread throughout the rest of her body, slowly eating away at her internal organs until they were rotted. She had gone into remission for a short while—twice in fact—but every time her body began the process of healing itself, the cancer had come back within months, stronger and deadlier than before. She realized that her time on earth was very limited, understood and accepted the fact that she would never live to see her thirty-seventh birthday.

No fear.

Brynda closed her eyes and took a steadying breath. She had lived a full life and had been a good person. She had given her love freely to others and had expected nothing in return. She would die with no regrets.

No fear.

Her eyes opened slowly. She gazed at herself in the mirror.

Except one regret, she quietly admitted.

No matter how much she tried to convince herself otherwise, no matter how many times she tried to deny the desire buried deep within her heart, she knew the truth:

She grieved the fact that she would never live long enough to fall in love.

She grieved too the loss of the child that would never be.

Brynda straightened her shoulders and held her head high as she gathered herself together. She needed courage and strength to get through the next few months, not a sense of grief and regret from having lost things she'd never really had to begin with.

There was no such thing as a miracle. There would be no last minute advances in technology to save her from her impending fate.

There was no such thing as a faerie tale. There would be no magical kisses bestowed by Prince Charming that would awaken her from within the glass coffin.

There was no glass coffin. Just a cold steel cage she'd already bought and paid for, patiently awaiting her arrival at the cemetery.

She was going to die.

No fear.

Brynda left the women's washroom with her dependable briefcase in hand, sensibly determined to carry on with life as best as she could. And if she secretly dreamed of the impossible, if she secretly prayed for a miracle, she would never admit it to anyone. Not even to herself.

Especially not to herself.

Chapter 2

Quietly humming to herself as she flicked through brochures on the jungles of Central America that her travel agent had given to her, Brynda smiled as she found the perfect hotel to stay at during her two-week vacation from the library. The hotel was jungle-themed, each individual apartment made to resemble a small hut. Perfect.

After seeing the doctor last Friday and having him confirm the worst, she had decided to spend her last months of life living it to the fullest. She had no intention of quitting her job for she was ever the dependable, reliable type, but that wasn't to say a little respite from day to day living wasn't in order.

First things first, she wanted to explore a jungle before she died. Well, she conceded, it wasn't so much the jungle in and of itself that had snagged her attention as it was the desire to see and experience a culture and habitat very different from her own.

Native Indians. Predatorial animals. Mayan ruins. Big bugs—

Perfect, she grinned.

Brynda's heartbeat sped up when she came to the part in the brochure that listed the dates of the various guided tour expeditions slated for this year. She immediately noticed that the next scheduled tour into the Belizean and Guatemalan jungles would commence three days from now.

Last minute prices were bound to be sky-high, she considered as she nibbled on her lower lip. She could probably afford it, but the two-week sojourn into the jungle would cost her over half of her savings. She hesitated.

The vacation would be fun, she admitted, but she wasn't really the type to squander money as if it grew on trees. She was a sensible woman. A practical woman...

A dying woman.

Brynda's gaze flicked toward the coffee table where the test results had been laying since she'd haphazardly flung them there last Friday night. She took a deep breath as she straightened her shoulders.

It's time to let go and live a little, Brynda, she admonished herself. *No Fear.*

Determined to take out a new lease on life, she picked up the telephone and rang her travel agent.

* * * * *

Concentrating intently, Brynda squinted her eyes and mumbled to herself as she studied the English to Spanish translation book she'd purchased to take with her on vacation. Sitting at her desk in the library, she went over the phrases she thought she was likely to get the most use out of.

"Excuseme señor," she said in a monotone southern American drawl, "Por donde es el servicio sanitario de las damas?" *Which way is the ladies' room?* She smiled politely as she pretended that a native Spanish speaker had answered her question. "Gracias," she returned. "Muchas muchas gracias." She frowned. "Maybe just one 'muchas' will do it," she muttered.

"Oh god, Junior—oh my gawd...yes!"

Brynda's head shot up. Her gaze flew to Aisle K7 where a couple in their late forties was currently getting it on. Located somewhere between Krentz's latest romance paperback and King's newest horror novel, the Texan couple was apparently more interested in spicing up their sex life than in the Dewey Decimal System. The male's pants were down below his knees as he repeatedly thrust into his female companion from behind. Her sundress was unbuttoned all the way down, showing off everything there was to see about her body.

"Mierda bendita," Brynda mumbled as she absently set down the English to Spanish reference book. ***Holy shit!***

"Oh baby yeeeeeeah." Junior half grunted and half groaned as he thrust twice more then spent himself inside of her. His cowboy hat fell off mid-thrust. "That was one good fuckin' you gave me, Cindy Ann."

Cindy Ann harrumphed. Apparently she didn't agree. "You stopped before I got started—damn it Junior you're always doin' that!"

Brynda's eyebrows drew together thoughtfully. *Premature ejaculation*, she decided, the Psychology term mentally rolling around on her tongue. *Poor Cindy Ann.*

"That ain't true," Junior grumbled as he slapped his cowboy hat down on his head, effectively covering his receding hairline. "Now come on—let's get outta here and head over to my mama's for some beer and barbeque. The ballgame's on tonight."

Cindy Ann rolled her eyes. Her frosted pink lips pinched together in a frown. "Be still my beatin' goddamn heart."

Brynda absently watched the couple adjust their clothing and hightail it out of the library. Cindy Ann mumbled to herself the entire time, her disgruntlement obvious. Brynda didn't know whether she should feel sorry for the woman or envy her. After all, at least Cindy Ann had a sex life to complain about.

Stop it, Brynda, she chastised herself. *You've made your choices and you've made them wisely.*

Besides, she told herself consolingly, she had a two-week trip to the Central American jungle to look forward to. There was approximately fifteen minutes left of work today, then she'd go home and pack and be headed out on the first flight leaving Houston for Belize City tomorrow morning. Perfect!

A cold puff of air hit Brynda squarely in the chest, interrupting her thoughts. She let out a small gasp as the wind hit her, inducing her nipples to harden into tight points.

Her brow furrowed in confusion as it occurred to her that she was downright cold. Well that wasn't entirely true. Most of her body was warm, but her chest...

Slowly, very slowly, Brynda's gaze flicked downward. *Please, God*, she silently pleaded with the heavens, her heartbeat picking up and her brow perspiring. *Please tell me my medications haven't affected my memory that badly. Please tell me that when I got dressed for work this morning I remembered to put on a —*

Brynda's eyes rounded in dawning horror when she glanced down to her chest and realized that she was completely naked from the waist up. Her breasts were sitting there for the world to see, her nipples hard from the chill of the library's air conditioning system.

Oh. My. Gawd.

Her heartbeat picked up dramatically and her cheeks flamed scarlet red when she realized that her indecency hadn't gone unnoticed. *Somebody is here*, she thought hysterically. *Somebody is watching me*. Mortified, she wondered how many other people had witnessed her public humiliation today as she thrust her hands over her breasts to shield them as best as she could. Her breathing labored, she shot up from her chair, preparing to dash into the washroom.

Only...she couldn't move.

"Oh dear god," she breathed out. "What's happening to me?"

Just then the remainder of Brynda's clothing flew off right before her very eyes. She gasped as she watched first her skirt and then her underwear fly out of her reach and seemingly disintegrate.

Naked. She was completely naked.

Holy shit!

"Optical hallucinations!" she cried out in a panic, the verbal iteration of the Psychology term somehow comforting. "Brought about by the repeated use of certain prescription drugs. Chapter five, section three of Heinrich's Thesis on—"

"Uh, Ms. Brynda..."

Brynda closed her eyes briefly to steady herself when the familiar sound of George's voice reached

her ears. *You're hallucinating, Brynda*, she frantically reminded herself. *You aren't really naked. George is the only exhibitionist around the library. Address him as if nothing is amiss for crying out loud!*

She plastered on a smile and forced her shoulders to straighten. "Yes, George?"

He studied her as one would an abstract piece of art. "I hate to be the pot callin' the kettle black here and all, but uh..." His wrinkled face scrunched up in confusion. "...why the hell ain't ya got no clothes on?"

Brynda gasped. Mortified, confused, and a thousand other things, she frantically recovered her breasts as best as she could with one hand while her other hand flew down to shield her mons. "What do you mean," she squeaked out. "I'm not naked."

George looked as confused as she was horrified. The seventy-year-old flasher was about to comment further on her state of undress when both of them were startled speechless by the arrival of five huge men who proceeded to surround them on all sides at Brynda's desk.

Her jaw agape, Brynda watched as the largest of the males slowly strode toward her. He was handsome, she conceded somewhere in the back of her mortified mind. Tall and muscular and...

She gulped. And huge, she thought in a panic. At least seven and a half feet tall and so heavy with muscle that he probably weighed in the vicinity of four hundred, maybe five hundred pounds.

And his eyes. Good God in heaven...

"Who are you?" she whispered. She nervously pushed her spectacles further up the bridge of her nose.

The large male cocked his head as if he couldn't understand what she had said. He appeared to think that over for a moment, then slowly raised his massive hands to his neck and unclasped a bizarre necklace he wore from around it. He held it up, then slowly resumed his walk towards her...

Holy shit!

She gasped.

"Holy shit!" George announced, effectively stating Brynda's thoughts aloud. "Let's get outta here! I've got a trench coat you can wear, Ms. Brynda—come on!"

Brynda tried to nod, tried to follow George as the old man scurried away, but found to her rising panic that she still couldn't move. Not that she could escape if she could move, for huge, gargantuan males surrounded her on all sides—all of them dressed in similar leather outfits as their leader. Although the giants had let George pass them by, something inside told her she'd never be so fortunate.

The men were odd looking to say the least. Not only were they the most massively sculpted men she'd ever seen, not only did their eyes glow like something out of a horror movie, but their manner of dress was bizarre. They looked like high-tech Hell's Angels dressed all in leather as they were with unidentifiable contraptions secured to their arms. And their hair...she'd never seen any group of males that braided their hair at the temples. In 1986 men simply didn't do that.

The leader of the group of barbarians stopped a few feet before Brynda and studied her face and her body with such intensity that it frightened her. When his eerie gaze clashed with hers she tried not to appear as though she was scared of him, but failed. She tried to maintain eye contact so as not to look submissive and docile as is the natural instinct for many people when confronted with a larger enemy, but she knew that, again, she had failed.

The intense stare of his eyes was so possessive as to be alarming. He didn't smile, didn't show any outward signs of having emotions at all, yet his eyes—

He softly murmured one single word in a deep, masculine voice that sounded almost computerized, a word she had no idea the meaning of...

“Nee'ka.”

Brynda's wolf-blue gaze flicked up to meet his glowing one. Her eyes rounded and her jaw fell open further when, a moment later, the dark-haired giant banged on his chest, let loose a ferocious war-cry, and charged the rest of the scant distance toward her.

Oh. My. Gawd.

She gasped, her mind finally panicked enough to do the unthinkable and allow her to faint.

There was only one psychology word that came to mind as her eyes rolled back into her head and her body proceeded to fall backwards like a stiff board:

Sociopath.

And a gigantic one at that.

Holy shiiiiit...

Chapter 3

Jek pulled himself up from the raised bed where he had been busily staring at his sleeping *nee'ka* and followed the warrior-guardsmen up to Pod One—the sealed off chamber from where his pilot was commandeering the gastrolight cruiser. Upon entering the pod, he noted immediately that the mood inside of the command centre was a tense one. Leastways, Jek had ordered that he not be bothered with trivial matters whilst he was attending to his Sacred Mate, so he knew without asking that some sort of trouble was afoot.

He raised an eyebrow. “What goes on here, Yar'at?”

The pilot turned in his crystal-carved chair and began to speak. Jek waited patiently for his report, not wanting the soft-spoken giant to feel as though he thought him a lesser warrior because of his troubles with speech. Indeed, Jek knew what sorts of names were whispered about Yar'at behind his back as though his name was but a great jest—idiot, dim-witted, dunce—he'd heard them all...and had severely reprimanded any who thought to make sport of his giant friend.

Yar'at's gaze clashed with Jek's. "W-we..." He took a deep breath and expelled it, then slowly enunciated his words that they might not trip o'er each other. "We have received a holo-call from the King of Morak, my lord."

Jek nodded. "And?"

"And," Yar'at softly continued, "He wishes us to depart for the third dimension in posthaste."

Jek's eyes narrowed as he considered the king's command. The third dimension was not a safe place for his *nee'ka* to be. Leastways, 'twas not a safe place for anyone to be, let alone a wife not trained in the warring arts. He would protect his Sacred Mate with his life as would his men, aye, but the necessity thereof would handicap them for a certainty, which caused him to believe their hunting party was ill-suited for such a trek as this one. "Did you tell my cousin of my Sacred Mate?" he rumbled out, surprised Kil would ask him to go knowing that a *nee'ka* was counted amongst their numbers. Warriors never played a game of chance with the life of a wench who was biologically capable of breeding their kind—not ever.

"Nay," Yar'at admitted. "The c-connection was cut short."

"For a certainty did we try to recontact the king," a warrior-hunter named Kaz seconded. Kaz was another of Jek's favored amongst the warriors. He was younger than Yar'at so not so deadly as the giant, yet 'twas a given that the young man had proven himself a worthy hunter these past three Yessat years. "Yet did we receive no acknowledgment that our holo-call was received?"

Jek sighed as he ran a hand o'er his jaw. 'Twas possible his wee cousins were in trouble in the third dimension, yet 'twas for a certainty he had no desire to take his *nee'ka* into a universe that was riddled with predators, slave traders, thieves, and little else. "Did the king narrow our search down to a specific planet or...?"

Yar'at nodded. "Aye. 'Twas to the three outlying p-planets we are to go."

Of course, Jek thought moodily, 'twould be to the three planets he least desired to venture into that he had been commanded to hunt within.

His jaw clenched tightly, realizing as he did that he had been given little choice but to see to the task. Without a verbal affirmation from Kil that would release him from the duty, 'twas treason plain and simple to do aught else but adhere to his cousin's command. If he broke his oath of allegiance and refused to venture onward to the third dimension, he would automatically be sentenced by the Holy Law to death in the gulch pits, High Lord or no.

And then what would become of his *nee'ka*? Jek thought grimly. The warriors would never return her to the dimension of her birth if he were sentenced to die in the gulch pits. Leastways, without her having birthed a son, they would keep her in Trek Mi Q'an as naught but a servant if the next eldest of his brothers didn't claim her in time.

'Twas done this way with the *nee'kas* of the eldest in a line that another male's seed might not infiltrate a royal dynasty. Jek had never seen the wisdom in keeping with this custom. Mayhap many millions of Yessat years ago it had been necessary to do as much, but now after so much biological evolution had transpired 'twas simply not possible for any male to impregnate a wench the fates did not decree he should mate.

Regardless, to the other warriors his woman was but a potential bound servant for the time—at least until she had born a son.

Nay.

Jek's eyes narrowed at the mere thought of it.

From the very moment he had first laid eyes on her, his hearts had gone all aflutter. His stony countenance had never wavered, for he had been taught well never to be the sort of warrior to show a weakness, yet 'twas for a certainty he had felt all the giddiness of a young boy by merely locking gazes with her.

His jaw tightened. For a certainty none other but him would ever touch his *nee'ka*. It would never come to pass that his wife was passed about from warrior to warrior, forced to cater to their sexual whims.

And that easily was his decision made. He would not be sentenced to die in the gulch pits. His biological makeup would allow him to do no other but insure his survival that his *nee'ka* might not know the *vesha* hides of any but him.

Jek relented, albeit with grave reservation. "Carry onward by decree of the king."

* * * * *

Wide-eyed and frightened, Brynda wrapped a strange looking animal hide around her naked body and quietly scampered to the other side of the cabin she'd been imprisoned within. *I've got to get out of here!* she thought hysterically. *Before that giant comes back!*

When Brynda had awoken some time ago, it had been to the feel of that huge, scary-looking man who'd charged toward her in the library stroking her private parts in the most intimate way imaginable while staring down at her with an intensity that had been so terrifying she'd been afraid to open her eyes and let him know she was awake. She didn't have to see him to know it was him, nor did she have to visually confirm that he was staring at her—she just *knew*.

And then, much to her mortification, another man had entered the room and seen what the giant had been doing to her. Brynda's eyes had been closed, but she'd known that he could see her. How could he not have? she considered with much embarrassment. She had been lying on her back with her legs spread wide open while the leader of the Hell's Angels had rubbed her clit and labia in slow, methodic circles.

The second man had called the leader away, much to Brynda's relief. But much to her shock and confusion he had done it a language that sounded completely foreign from any known tongue on Earth, and yet...she had understood what he was saying.

As soon as the leader had left, Brynda had bolted up from the bed and searched for clothes to wear for her impending escape attempt. But she had found nothing. The single closet-like structure within the cabin had housed nothing but leather-like outfits for the gargantuan-sized male and these weird little see-through skirts and strapless bikini tops for some floozy to wear.

Not sure of what to do, but knowing that she needed to do something, Brynda had attempted to remove the strange, jeweled chain that had been clasped around her neck. She didn't know why she was so obsessed with the necklace, only that some female intuition deep down inside was telling her that the bizarre piece of jewelry was connected to the entire sordid experience. And so she had pulled at it and twisted at it and gritted her teeth as she'd tried to forcibly remove it, but it hadn't worked. She couldn't find any clasps to loosen it with, and no matter how hard she had tried to break it, the damn thing was impenetrable.

After she gave up her assault on the necklace, Brynda turned her attentions to escaping. With nothing but a blanket of sorts to wrap around her naked body, she was mortified at the thought of escaping like this, but she realized she had no other choice. It was either escape in the nude or remain behind in the nude—either way she was still nude.

And already two men—two strangers—had seen her entire body naked and splayed out, and one of those men had touched her intimately without permission. What if the leader decided to rape her, she thought as she swallowed roughly, and then...what if he decided to share her with the others?

Pale and terrified, Brynda ignored the bizarre voice in her head that kept whispering to her that everything would be all right and that the giant meant her no harm. Her lips pinched together in a frown as she chalked the bizarre voice in her head up to side-effects from her medication and left it at that. No way was that huge guy as harmless as her mind was saying he was!

Determined to escape at any cost, her chin went up a notch as she studied the intricate—and odd—shiny black door before her. If the men caught her and murdered her during the escape attempt then it didn't really matter, she told herself with more staunch than she felt. She was, after all, already dying. Being murdered would simply speed up the inevitable homecoming with the family crypt.

Don't be morbid, Brynda, she chastised herself. Just get the hell out of here!

Resolved to do just that, Brynda gritted her teeth and raised her hand to the door. *I'm getting out of here!* she silently vowed. *I'm breaking out of this place! I'm—ah shit...where in the hell is the doorknob?*

Her heart beating rapidly, Brynda's eyes rounded as she frantically rubbed her hands up and down the length of the part of the door she was able to reach in a futile effort to find a doorknob. *Please God*, she thought hysterically, *please let me find a way to open this door!*

Frightened, panicked, and somehow sensing that the giant was preparing to return to her, she slammed the palm of her hand up against the door in frustration. *Let me out of here! Let me—*

Her eyes widened when the shiny door whizzed open, the sound of compressed air being freed causing her face to momentarily scrunch up in confusion.

She shook her head. She'd never seen a door like this one except on reruns of Star Trek.

Forget it, Brynda, just get out of here!

Forcibly snapping her mind back to deal with the issue at hand, she stepped through the door, took a quick glance in either direction, then sprinted at top speed down the long corridor. Her breathing labored, her heart pumping dramatically, she clutched the animal skin securely around her body as she ran as fast as her feet could carry to—she didn't know where.

She ignored the eerie pulsing lights she saw every few feet as she ran down the length of the long corridor, ignored the bizarre hieroglyphic writings on the walls as she then veered to the right and sprinted down another. Her head was pounding, a feeling of nausea was overwhelming her, and she understood from experience that she needed to get home and get to her medication before she became so ill that she wouldn't be able to leave her sickbed for days.

Of all the times to get sick, she thought frantically, please don't let this be it.

Determined to escape, she ignored her pounding head and concentrated on locating an avenue of escape. She ran for what felt like hours but could only have been minutes, perspiration dotting her brow and pain lancing through her all the while.

And then at last—*at last*—she spotted...something—something a ways down the corridor that looked like it led to the outside for she could see nighttime and stars through a large window at the mouth of the wide hallway. She smiled for the first time, sprinting toward it at top speed, the animal skin forgotten as it fell toward the ground during her mad dash toward what she assumed to be the exit of the building she was imprisoned in. “Faster!” she verbally encouraged herself, refusing to succumb to the blinding pain she felt throbbing in her head. “Run fa...”

She stopped abruptly when she reached the end of the corridor and stared wide-eyed out of the large porthole she was looking through.

“...faster,” she whispered.

Brynda didn't know what to do, didn't know what to think, as she stared surrealistically at the spacey scene before her. The porthole was not a door leading to the outside, but a mere window showcasing what lay in waiting on the other side of it...

“Outerspace?” Brynda murmured, her eyes round as full moons. Even the sharp, shooting pains lancing through her skull were forgotten in her confusion. “It's not possible,” she whispered. She shook her head slightly, too dumbfounded to do anything but stare. “It's not possible.”

The blackest night she'd ever seen lay on the other side of the porthole, the occasional twinkling star breaking up the otherwise pitch darkness of the atmosphere. And then surrealistically, horrifically, the structure she was in made a smooth veer to the left and the image of a... *planet?* ...appeared before her. It was big, so massive, and toward the middle of it there was—

She gasped.

A giant red spot.

* * * * *

“'Tis called Jupiter by the primitives within this dimension, my lord,” Kaz explained to Jek. “Yar'at and I have performed an analysis of the chemical compounds within the large red spot. 'Tis for a certainty the atmosphere within it is naturally charged enough to create the necessary speed for dimension transfer.”

Jek raised an eyebrow at Yar'at, satisfied when the giant nodded his head in agreement. "The chemical breakdown is charged enough that 'twill create a wormhole of sorts?"

"Aye," Yar'at softly confirmed.

Jek nodded, then turned away to make his exit. An odd intuition passed over him, telling him 'twas necessary to return to his *nee'ka* in posthaste. She was frightened and confused and—

He walked faster toward the exit. "Carry on as you were then," he called out over his shoulder. "Enter the red spot."

* * * * *

Her jaw slack, Brynda stared in dawning horror at the planet—and the red spot!—that was getting closer and closer with each passing moment. She had never been particularly interested in science back in college, but the couple of requisite courses she'd taken had been in astronomy. She remembered all too well what her professors had pontificated on at length concerning the atmosphere within the red spot of Jupiter...

Nothing—*nothing*—could survive within it. The gases and chemicals within the massive spot were like a violent, noxious storm that never ceased. No life of any sort could even enter it, let alone survive it.

And the structure—the ship?—she was in was about to enter it...

Oh. My. Gawd.

Brynda's eyes all but bugged out of her head as she watched the red spot loom closer and closer—so close that she could make out dizzying images of the violent storm torpedoing within it. She gasped, her hand flying up to her throat. *Holy shit!* she thought hysterically. *Holy shiiiiit!*

Frantic, desperate, and not certain whether or not she was dreaming or had indeed been kidnapped by suicidal aliens, she closed her eyes tightly and, not knowing what else to do, screamed loud enough, and bloodcurdling enough, to wake the dead.

* * * * *

Jek came to an abrupt halt before his shrieking *nee'ka* and let out a breath of relief. When he had not found her as he'd left her, asleep and lying abed within their chamber, he had nigh unto panicked. But she was here before him and she was all right, he assured himself, allowing his muscles to unclench for the first time. She had not injured herself out of ignorance for how mechanisms within the gastrolight cruiser worked.

She looked...terribly frightened, Jek thought, a feeling of empathy jolting through him. Alone and scared and panicked. He had not a care for her to experience feelings such as those, for he had awaited her his entire life and wanted only her happiness.

He walked toward her slowly, approaching her as one would a frightened animal. He thought only to

comfort her, to tell her ‘twould be all right, when she suddenly looked up, mayhap because she’d become aware of his presence, and stared at him as though he was as horrifying a sight as a hungry *heeka-beast* .

The rejection stung more than he wished it did, causing his hearts to sink and his eyes to dim. He forcibly clamped down on his emotions, telling himself that whether his Sacred Mate found him displeasing to look upon or no, she still belonged to him.

As if she understood what he was feeling, and was confused because she did, her face scrunched up as she continued to look at him. She said nothing for a long moment, simply stared at him, her eyes flicking over his face as she slowly but surely calmed down.

“You’re not displeasing to look upon—” She stopped her whispered words abruptly, then shook her head slightly, as if surprised she had admitted as much, surprised too that she’d wanted to restore his pride.

His eyes glowed, though he didn’t smile.

Who are you?” she whispered, her beautiful clear-blue eyes round. “What are you?”

Jek’s gaze trailed over her face, over her breasts, then back up to meet her eyes. “Yours,” he said softly. “As you are mine.”

She closed her eyes briefly as if steadying herself. “I don’t understand...”

“You will,” he promised her in a voice that was as gentle as it was gruff. “’Tis a vow amongst Sacred Mates that you will.”

She looked as though she wanted to comment further when suddenly, as if in pain, she thrust a hand up to her head, closed her eyes, and began to sweat.

Jek narrowed his eyes as he studied her, uncertain as to what malady was ailing her, but very much wanting to put an end to it. “*Nee’ka?*”

Her eyes flew open and clashed with his. “I need my medicine,” she said in a strangled voice, her breathing growing labored. “Please...”

Jek’s gaze narrowed further in confusion, then widened when her eyes rolled back into her head and she began to collapse before him. His hearts rate soared as he whipped out a heavily muscled arm and snatched her up at the last possible moment.

Dumbfounded as to what had just occurred, he placed her limp body within his embrace and walked briskly toward their bedchamber.

Chapter 4

Meanwhile, on planet

Tryston...

High Princess Zara Q'ana Tal glanced warily toward the chained-up male who was her homework. A mere humanoid and not a warrior, she had been taught by her betters all of her life to think of any male not a warrior as inferior to her species and therefore not worthy of her notice.

Leastways, it wasn't arrogance on her part, not even a true feeling of superiority that had her trying to hide her interest in the male...it was simply the way that life worked on Tryston. These lesser males had been captured in battles and taken to the palace that the princesses who lived here might learn how to service their future Sacred Mates on males that the warriors wouldn't mind them touching.

At least not prior to the claiming. After the claiming a Trystonni female was never permitted to touch any male a'tall, save the body of the warrior who owned her. If she didn't go to his *vesha* hides a virgin, and a virgin was considered to be a wench who had never spread her thighs for a warrior, then terrible punishments were handed out. Punishments such as...

Well, they didn't bear dwelling upon.

"For the love of the goddess," her slightly elder sister Zora sighed. "'Tis boring, this."

Zara bit her lip as she quickly glanced away from the captive male she'd been given to practice on. By the holy sands of Tryston she knew not how she would make it through this lesson in her tutelage without giving her deviant feelings away.

Chained to a wall in front of her, the bound and gagged male seemed to watch her through hooded eyes as she stroked his large piece of male flesh in an up-and-down motion. He looked as though he was conscious of what she was doing to him, she thought suspiciously...and very much liking it.

But nay, Zara recalled, comforting herself with the facts. 'Twas impossible for the lesser male to know what she was about. All of these males were held captive by the spells of the priestesses, their chains and gags offering only secondary protection. They could feel sexual pleasure, aye, but they were not able to intelligently process what was happening to them. When she and her sisters had finished their tutelage the males would be released to whence they had been captured, none of them the wiser for what had been done to them.

'Twas the way of it. 'Twas ever the way of it. And 'twas this knowledge that kept Zara from snatching her hand back in mortification because of her physical reaction to the lesser male.

He was just so odd in form for a lesser male, she told herself. So much bigger and mightier...

That must certainly be why her body was reacting to his like a wanton, she assured her ruffled pride. He was tall like a warrior, solid of muscle and brawn like a warrior, and his cock—

She took a deep breath. For a certainty was he possessed of the large cock of a warrior.

“Aye,” Zara muttered to her fraternal twin. “I am nigh unto sleeping from my boredom.”

Oh, she thought as she stroked his stiff man-part up and down, she would that it could be true. But unlike Zora and her younger sibling Klea, she was enjoying her homework. She wanted to touch his thick cock and keep on touching it and...

Leastways, she knew not what. Only that she fair craved to do *something* with it.

Zara felt her nipples stiffen as she slowly, methodically, worked her hand up and down the length of the male’s shaft. Her breath caught in the back of her throat at the steely silk feel of it, and she found her other hand coming up to inquisitively stroke the man-sac that was tight with arousal.

The lesser male groaned softly.

Zara snatched her hands back as though they had been set afire. Her gaze flew up and clashed with the giant male’s.

He seemed to know what she was doing, she thought worriedly. He seemed to understand the effect that his nearness had on her...

Nay, she fiercely admonished herself. *‘Tis nigh unto impossible for the male to break the spell of a priestess. You are acting the dunce, Zara!*

Her gaze slowly trailed over the whole of his body. She nibbled on her lower lip. Never had she beheld a man so fine as this one.

His body was carved of sleek bronzed muscle, his legs long and powerful, his arms vein-roped and heavy with muscle. His face was chiseled as if by the goddess Herself—perfect in its masculine planes and angles, and elegant in its rough beauty. His hair was of the night, the blackest she’d ever before seen. It fell to the middle of his back in sleek, sensuous waves, and had been secured in a jade-colored *vesha* thong at the nape of his neck. And his eyes...so vividly green, so sharp and piercing, so...alert.

Her jaw dropped open. His eyes gazed down upon her as if he knew...

Nay, Zara, for the last time you must cease your bedamned mental prattling! ‘Tis impossible for him to know what you are about!

Zara drew in a deep breath and blew it out. She was nigh unto crazed, she conceded morosely.

“For a certainty you had better resume stroking your captive’s cock,” Zora murmured from beside her where she was busily stroking the shaft of a small six-foot male. “You know how surly the priestess becomes when we don’t see to our studies properly.”

Zara bit her lip. Their sire had seen to it that his daughters were tutored in all things sensual by one of the most acclaimed priestesses in Sand City. Highly skilled in the art of lovemaking, their tutor was none other than the Chief Priestess’ second in command. Indeed, Pali’s services had cost the Emperor more credits than Zara felt comfortable thinking on. If she disappointed her sire after all the monetary reward he had bestowed upon the priestess...

She sighed. He would be angered for a certainty.

Zara nodded to her twin, then resumed her perusal of the lesser male's body. Her eyes darted up to warily search the captive's, and when he appeared to be unaware of what she was doing to him, she relaxed and allowed herself to enjoy the intimate exploration.

Fascinated by the shaft she held in her palm, she sighed softly. 'Twas like the most finely spun *vesha* silk over uncompromisingly hard crystal, she thought as she stroked his stiff cock up and down. She felt her breathing quicken and her eyes narrow in desire as she stared at the shaft she was playing with. She wanted to do more to it, wanted to...

Closing her eyes, she bent her head to place a sweet kiss on his tight man sac.

The male sucked in his breath.

Zara stilled, momentarily frightened he was aware of her actions. But she knew better, of course, knew 'twas impossible for him to break the spell of the priestess, so she forced herself to relax and allowed herself to resume the exploration.

Unable to resist, she parted her mouth slightly and wrapped her lips around the tip of his manhood. She felt him shudder in response, which caused her to feel oddly closer to him rather than frightened. And, perversely, she almost wished 'twas possible for the lesser male to know 'twas her who was making him feel thusly.

Her eyes still closed, she sucked the head of his swollen cock slowly and thoroughly. She felt his muscles clench and tighten, but ignored it, deciding 'twas naught but a body's normal response to sensual stimulus.

"Excellent, Zara!"

Zara jumped at the priestess' words of praise. Embarrassed, she released the captive's shaft and looked away from him.

"Nay, do not cease your activity," Pali admonished as she strolled over to where Zara sat before the lesser male. "Indeed, you are getting a feel for suckling cock that your sisters have not yet mastered." She raised an eyebrow meaningfully at Zara, inducing the Emperor's eldest hatchling to blush. "Mayhap you should continue, that Zora and Klea might watch and learn."

Klea merely rolled her eyes at the chastisement, but Zora, ever the diligent and studious twin, glanced away in shame, biting her lip. Indeed, when they had been younger and tutored together in quantum mathematics and the sciences, it had always been Zora who had quietly excelled whilst Zara had more oft than not yawned throughout the whole of the lectures.

Zara's nostrils flared in anger at the not-so-subtle rebuke, for her twin's feelings were gentle in nature and her hearts easily injured. Truly, other than the mane of fire-berry curls they shared in common atop their heads, the glowing blue eyes of the Q'an Tal lineage, and the creamy tanned coloring of their skins, the fraternal twin sisters shared naught in common either in looks or in personality.

Where Zara was flirty and sociable with the warriors, Zora always kept to her rooms, preferring the company of her holo-books to people. Where Zara was ever the life of the feast, Zora was the opposite, keeping to the corner and as far away from the attention of onlookers as 'twas possible. Where Zara ever enjoyed traveling about the galaxy with their sire and *mani*, Zora preferred to remain behind in the care of their younger brother Jor whilst their parents were away. If Jor wasn't available to care for Zora,

then she would remove herself to the moon of Sypar to stay with her favored uncle and auntie, but never would she stray further than a moon's throw from home.

And so it had always been that Zara was fiercely protective of her elder twin. She knew her as did no other, respected the timidity of her nature, and preferred that others respect it as well. Their uncle Rem and auntie Giselle understood and accepted Zora for who she was, as did their brother Jor, but nobody else was as giving in their understanding, which caused Zara to feel sad in the hearts for the sister who was her twin.

Even their *mani* and sire, as much as they both loved their eldest daughter, often made comments that they wished her to be different, wished her to be more sociable and fun-loving as was Zara, not fully realizing that their eldest hatchling was content in who she was. 'Twas sad indeed that neither the Emperor nor the Empress understood how much their rejection of Zora's true nature hurt her.

And so never would Zara try to change that which her sister was, for she loved her fraternal hatchling deeply and truly. Indeed, the priestess' callous remarks made her fiercely angered on behalf of her timid twin.

Zara's back went ramrod straight. She smiled sweetly and utterly falsely at the priestess. "Indeed, I should love to demonstrate what I have learned." She sighed dramatically. "Though truth be told I will never suckle cock as well as Zora, for 'twas her that showed me how to do it nigh unto two moon-risings ago down in the Pit of Captives."

Zora's eyes widened at the lie. When the priestess' eyes did the same, she grinned at her twin.

"So the deuce of you have been seeing to your studies?" Pali asked, clearly suspicious. In truth they hadn't been doing their homework in the Pit of Captives as they'd been bade, so the suspicion was no great shock to the twins. "Well then," the priestess said disbelievingly, her arms crossing over her *qi'ka*-clad breasts, "do show the lot of us what your twin has taught you, Zara."

Zora looked troubled at the priestess' command, for she knew as did her twin that none of them had seen to their homework. Leastways, they were supposed to visit the Pit of Captives at least once every moon-rising to practice what they'd learned at lecture between Pali's visits.

But until today Zara had felt no great desire to visit the Pit and had instead evaded her homework, just as she'd done when she was younger. And yet now something inside of her admitted she would be visiting the Pit this moon-rising...and every moon-rising until her captive was removed from the palace.

Zara could feel her twin's distress, knew that Zora believed she'd fail at the task that the priestess had set before her. But then Zora didn't know that Zara nigh craved to suckle the lesser male's cock and that Pali had unwittingly given her the necessary excuse to lavish kisses on it the way her deviant heart desired.

Zara ran her hands over the captive's belly, ignoring the way his muscles there clenched at her touch. She sighed, no longer even bothering to mentally deny the attraction she felt toward the lesser male. "I'd be happy to show you," she said almost morosely. Zora's expression was guilty, assuming her twin's upset was because she knew she'd fail at the task when in fact Zara's distress stemmed from the knowledge that she knew she wouldn't. "Quite happy," she murmured, as she lowered her face to his cock.

She wasted no time, for she was nigh unto desperate to be as close to him as 'twas possible. She took

his thick manhood between her hands and immediately sucked the head of his cock into her mouth.

The male's muscles clenched.

Zara took him in further, until she felt the tip of his shaft poke against the back of her throat. She worked up and down the length of him slowly and methodically, her eyes closed as her head bobbed back and forth in front of him.

Faster.

Zara blinked, her lips still firmly clamped around the male's cock. She knew not from whence that thought had come but the desire to suck on him faster overpowered her. *His muscles are so tense*, she thought, as she ran her hands up and down his thighs. *So powerful...*

She closed her eyes and began to suck faster as she rubbed her hands over his hard belly. She felt the muscles there cord and clench as she worked up and down his cock feverishly, loud smacking sounds emitting from her lips on every upstroke. She sucked him faster and harder and—

The male's breathing grew labored. His entire body stiffened.

Zara picked up the pace of her suckling, a soft moan escaping from her throat at the same moment one escaped from his. She felt high unto crazed with the desire to bring him completion as her head bobbed back and forth before him, her lips, mouth, and throat working his shaft at an ungoddlessly pace.

She sucked him faster and harder and faster and—

The lesser male groaned as his entire body shuddered and convulsed. Her eyes flew open as he spewed a sweet-tasting warm liquid into her mouth, which she wantonly lapped up. She drank everything he had to give, her nipples tightly erect just from knowing 'twas her who had made him feel thusly. And from knowing 'twas her whom he wanted to make him feel thusly again. She knew not how she understood as much, only that she did.

Breathing heavily, Zara unwrapped her lips from around the lesser male's cock and warily glanced up at him.

His gaze burned into hers, causing her to realize then and there that aye, he knew precisely what she had just done to him.

Call out a warning to the priestess, dunce! she chastised herself, her eyes rounded and her heartbeat picking up dramatically. *Call out a warning—*

Her breathing grew more labored as their gazes locked and held. In that moment she knew she would never compromise his secret, would never tell that he had managed to break Pali's spell.

"Excellent!" the priestess praised her, inducing Zara to blink and look away from the captive. "'Tis surprised I am, yet your words were true. The deuce of you truly have been seeing to your studies. Mayhap I shall swoon from the shock of it," she finished, her voice as baffled as 'twas sarcastic.

Zara glanced warily toward her twin whose jaw was slack and her eyes mayhap more rounded than her own.

She blew out a breath. *What has become of me?* she silently cried out.

Zara turned her head slowly and braved a glance up at the lesser male. She nibbled on her lower lip as she stared at him, realizing as she did that the look he was giving her spoke volumes. His head didn't move, his body never wavered from its rigid stance, yet his intensely vivid green eyes spoke volumes.

He knew the strange power of attraction he wielded over her. Knew too that she would visit him in the Pit of Captives the soonest.

Feeling a bit shaken, Zara stood up, her breathing heavy. As she quickly walked away from the captive, she ignored the angry voice in her mind that demanded over and over again that she come to him this moon-rising.

Chapter 5

Brynda awoke feeling better than she had in years. She felt no aches, no pains, no dull throbbing in her head—even her skin felt young and tingly. And, she thought as her eyelids slowly fluttered open, she had a feeling that the reason she was in such good health today had something to do with the gigantic alien with glowing blue eyes who was lounging propped up on an elbow beside her.

She shivered as one of his large hands ran slowly up and down the length of her body, all the while gazing down at her as though she was a goddess. She suspiciously wondered if his sinfully handsome exterior was a ruse and he was really a lizard underneath his skin. . . just like on that hip new television show *V*.

V, she thought warily. The capital V stood for Visitors. Big alien visitors with sexy humanoid exteriors who were really vicious green lizards with a penchant for eating human flesh. Her eyes narrowed as she studied him suspiciously, expecting at any moment for a forked tongue to dart out from between his lips.

“Mmmm, *nee'ka*,” he rumbled out, his voice just as digitized in sound as any Visitor's. She gulped. “Your skin feels so wondrous beneath my finger tips.” He pressed his erection against her thigh so she'd know it was there.

“Frottage,” she squeaked out, feeling a bit on the hysterical side. She closed her eyes, feeling safer that way. “The inability to stop from rubbing yourself up against other people. Chapter Seven, page—oh dear.” Her eyes flew open as he grazed her nipples with the palm of his hand.

“Of what are you speaking, wench?” He grinned and wiggled his eyebrows. “'Tis true I cannot stop myself from frottaging you.”

“I—I—uh...” She wet her lips and glanced nervously away as his hand resumed its exploration of her body. She idly considered the possibility that he was trying to find the plumpest part of her flesh to gobble down first, but found that much to her surprise she simply couldn't see him harming her let alone making a meal out of her. In fact, she silently admitted, her thoughts confused, the more he touched her, the more she felt as though she knew him. Weird—very, very weird.

“What are you doing?” she stuttered, her voice squeaky. Her wolf-blue eyes widened. “I, um—I haven't given you permission to touch me,” she said in a rush.

What a stupid thing to say, Brynda! Apparently he doesn't care whether he has your permission or not, or he wouldn't have kidnapped you to begin with!

His large hand stilled, the palm covering one of her breasts. "I thought you found my countenance pleasing to look upon," he rumbled out. "Do you speak an untruth to me now or then, *ty'ka*?"

His hand resumed its slow exploration at her breast, softly arousing the nipple until it stabbed up to hit his palm, causing her to forget her train of thought entirely. She sucked in her breath, not certain what to do.

He grinned, feeling more lighthearted than he had in years. "I have asked you a question, my hearts," he said firmly yet gently at the same time. "'Tis best do you answer it."

She gawked at him. Nobody had ever called her by a pet name like that before so she wasn't altogether sure how she should respond. Harry had never used pet names...he had been much too reserved, God rest his soul, for things of that nature.

She hesitated. She was torn between the mad desire to run away as fast as her feet could carry her and the equally odd desire to blush becomingly and bat her eyelashes. Against her will she blushed and batted her lashes, a small smile tugging at the corners of her lips.

Stop smiling at him, you idiot! Quit egging him on!

She frowned disapprovingly when she realized she'd just more or less encouraged his actions.

His gaze found hers. He raked the nipple with the calluses on his palm, eliciting a soft moan from her. "Tell me," he said thickly, his eyes narrowed. "Answer my question, *ty'ka*." He bent his dark head and drew the nipple into the warmth of his mouth, then suckled it hard.

Holy shit!

"Y-You are pleasing to look upon," she squeaked out, deciding to tell him the truth. Her heartbeat accelerating rapidly, she tried to shove his face away from her breast. It didn't budge. "But—but—oh dear."

Good lord! she mentally wailed as his face left her breast and made a direct beeline for the inside of her thighs, her entire body felt like it had been set on fire. Her nipples were painfully hard, her breathing was labored, and she was willing to bet her eyes were glazed over with lust. What the hell was wrong with her? This man had kidnapped her and she was all but drooling.

She clapped a hand to her forehead and groaned. What the hell is going on!

He grinned as he trailed kisses down her body, a dimple popping out on either cheek. "But what, *nee'ka*?" he murmured. Settling his face between her thighs, his tongue darted out and flicked repeatedly at her swollen clit.

Her jaw fell open, shocked.

He flicked at it harder, then groaned and slurped the clit into his mouth.

Her hand fell to the bed, numb.

He sucked on the clit hard, mmmm sounds erupting from his throat.

Oh. My. Gawd.

Fight him, Brynda—fight him! Why the hell aren't you fighting him?

He moaned again, then began lapping at her pussy in earnest. He suctioned the entire labia into his mouth, toyed with it a bit, then dove once more for her flesh and suckled hard on the clit.

Her eyes crossed as she lay there with her mouth agape, no doubt looking as insane as she felt.

On the other hand I am a dying woman—nothing wrong with living a little!

“What’s your name?” she heard herself breathe out as she instinctively spread her legs wider. She had no idea why she wanted to know or why she even cared, but there it was. She suspected he’d performed some weird alien ritual on her while she’d been sleeping, no doubt some hocus-pocus voodoo kind of ceremony that had caused her to feel no fear of him.

I’m insane! I’ve lost my damn mind! I’ve been kidnapped, I’ve been voodooed, I’ve been touched against my will, and now I’m spreading my legs further apart for—

Her head fell back on a moan as he applied even more pressure to her clit and sucked on it harder. “I’m Brynda,” she groaned.

As if he cares what my name is! He’s the mad alien who kidnapped you, idiot! Why don’t you tell him about being captain of your high school debate team while you’re at it!

Jek smiled from around her clit, his glowing blue gaze drifting up to watch her nipples stab up into the air. He couldn’t see her face, for her neck was arched back, but the sight of her erect nipples made him desirous of mounting her then and there. He idly wondered how any warrior made it long enough to attend a Consummation Feast before claiming his *nee’ka* fully.

“Jek Q’an Ri,” he answered her, mumbling from around her clit.

Knowing he had many, many Yessat years to spend at her side to get to know her, he was less interested in the formalities than she was...and more interested in touching and tasting her. ‘Twas a feeling so heady, like an addicting hallucinogen. Leastways, he knew he should talk with her and tell her about himself and the new life that awaited her in his sectors back on Tryston, yet all he could think to do was touch her, taste her, run his hands all over her.

He felt nigh unto crazed. The emotions this wench elicited in him were so mind-numbing as to be painful. ‘Twas like walking about with a great thirst for hundreds of Yessat years and at last finding *matpow* to drink of. He wanted to drink her up all at once, every last bit of her. He wanted to lick her everywhere, then ram his cock inside of her and take her over and over again until he at last felt replete.

“Oh dear—oh goodness.”

The breathy sound of her own muttered words startled Brynda. She briefly snapped out of the sensual haze she’d been drowning in and experienced a moment’s fear at what was being done to her.

But when she glanced down the length of her body and saw the way he was frantically lapping at her pussy, she felt so turned on that the worry was instantly forgotten.

She watched him suck her clit hard, his cheekbones sensually delineated from the slurping motion. “Oh god,” she groaned, her head falling back down to the whisper-soft pillows. She rotated her hips, instinctually rearing them up to press her flesh closer against his face.

He growled something imperceptible against her clit about her cunt belonging to him, dug his fingers into the flesh of her hips, and pressed his face as close to her pussy as was possible.

“Oh yes—oh god.”

He licked at her and lapped at her, groans erupting from his throat as though he’d never tasted anything better, as though he never wanted to stop. His fingertips burrowed further into the padding of her hips as he sucked on her, the sounds of her clit being repeatedly slurped into his mouth filling the bedchamber.

“Yes—more—yes.”

Brynda’s back arched and her nipples stiffened as he continued to suck on her clit. Her head began to thrash about as she moaned, her hips violently bucking up to press his face impossibly closer to her cunt.

Jek groaned low in his throat as he sucked on her flesh, again growling against her clit that her pussy was his and no other’s.

“I—oh god.”

Brynda’s eyes closed tightly and her entire body stiffened in preparation of orgasm. She moaned long and loud as her body began to involuntarily shake, her back arching and her nipples stabbing upward as he possessively lapped at her.

“All mine,” he growled as he sucked on her clit. “All mine.”

“Oh. My. G—Jek.”

Brynda wrapped her legs around as his neck and squeezed his head in closer to her flesh as she burst on a loud moan. Blood instantaneously rushed to heat her face, then downward to elongate her nipples. She moaned and groaned as she rode the long wave of pleasure out, her hips thrashing madly about.

He lapped contentedly at her flesh the entire time, then softly licked around her swollen clit as the peak began to wane. She shivered as he did so, sucking in her breath when one of his hands reached up and rolled a nipple around between his fingers.

When it was over, when she was at last able to form a coherent thought, her cheeks went up in flames, shame filling her at what she’d just allowed to transpire. She glanced away from him when he rose up from between her thighs and lounged back down on an elbow to lay beside her.

“*Nee’ka*,” he murmured. His hand snagged her chin and he turned it gently toward him that she might meet his gaze once again. “What troubles you?”

Brynda tried to turn her face away, but his hand wouldn't budge. She shifted her gaze toward his vein-roped forearm. "I—we shouldn't have done that," she whispered, mortified. "I shouldn't have..."

Reacted that way, she silently finished.

Good lord above, she thought morosely, loathing herself, what in the hell kind of a depraved woman reacted like *that* to the man who'd kidnapped her? She should have fought him. She should have kicked at him and punched at him rather than moaned and groaned and thrashed about like a—

Jek sighed as he gently brushed a wayward lock of blonde hair away from her eyes. "My hearts—*nee'ka*—look at me." And when she didn't comply, but nibbled at her lower lip instead he said again in a non-threatening tone, though more forcefully this time, "look at me."

Slowly, cautiously, her gaze flicked up to meet his. She blew out a breath as she gazed at him, not understanding or particularly liking the fact that she felt so safe and secure with him. The longer she looked at him, the more her eyes studied his, the more connected she felt toward him. It was wrong to react this way—sick and depraved and...

"'Tis sorry I am," he murmured, "that I took not the time to explain the way of things to you." His eyes searched her face. He smiled down at her, grinning at her confused look. "But I should like to remedy that anon, do you desire it."

He bent his head and kissed her softly on the lips. "'Twill be all right," he promised her, his kisses coming down gently and seductively against her mouth. "'Tis naught to fear of me." His head rose and he grunted in arrogant satisfaction when she instinctively snuggled in closer to him. "Leastways, 'tis naught for *you* to fear of me," he admitted.

Brynda's eyes rounded a bit as her gaze clashed with his. She shook her head slightly. "I don't understand—"

"I shall explain."

His large hand trailed over her breast, then settled there to leisurely play with a nipple.

She gulped.

He grinned.

She hesitantly wondered if she'd have been better off as lizard food.

One dark eyebrow rose slightly as he regarded her. "And I shall explain it anon."

Chapter 6

It took Brynda a day or two to let it all sink in...Trek Mi Q'an, bridal necklaces, Sacred Mates, *qi'kas*, warriors, *nee'kas*, *Kefa* slaves, bound servants, Consummation Feasts, missing—royal!—cousins, gulch pits, execution, devolution...

Damn. Somebody really needed to write a guidebook on it all. Perhaps one that came complete with artwork and family lineages, explanations of the various subcultures, and—

Well, whatever, she thought dismissively, waving that idea away for the time being. The point was that she was finally up to speed. She knew why she'd been captured, knew their ship was headed into what Jek referred to as the third dimension, knew too that the huge handsome warrior had wedded her according to the custom of his race. She'd been told everything, denied no information, knew she should have felt excited by this adventure at the very least, but damned if she didn't feel...

Depressed.

Hopelessly, terribly, horrifically depressed.

Over the course of the last few days, Brynda had come to care for this man, this warrior, in a way she'd never thought it was possible to care for any male, let alone one who heralded from a different planet in a different galaxy. She had tried to fight the feelings...oh how she'd tried, but it was as if the feelings had always existed—as if they'd lived dormant inside of her all of her life, merely laying in wait to come out.

If she tried to be standoffish toward Jek, he'd smile down at her with that dimpled grin and make her feel like a giddy teenager. If she tried to physically and emotionally push him away, he'd gaze deeply into her eyes and speak to her of the babies they would have one day and how wondrous their life together would be. He'd tell her of his deep love of the hearts for her and how he cherished her above all others and...

She blew out a breath.

And she believed him.

Had the words come from the mouth of any man but the one who'd uttered them she would have rolled her eyes, shook her head, and never trusted a word of it. Never. If there was one thing Brynda could safely say about herself it was that she wasn't the type of woman given to melodrama, nor was she the type of woman prone toward creating affection in her mind between two people that didn't really exist. Brynda was a logical, calculated thinker...not at all the kind of female who lives with her head in the clouds.

But she did believe Jek and it terrified her. Worse yet, she was beginning to fear that she felt the same way about him.

She sighed. Who was she kidding? She *did* feel the same way about him.

But to what end? she thought sadly, realizing as she did that her days were limited. Whatever Jek had given to her that night she'd passed out—some bizarre sort of sand that was stored aboard ship—had helped put her body into remission for a few days. But she could feel the dull ache coming back and knew from experience that it would grow worse instead of better.

And he loves me.

She closed her eyes briefly and took a steadying breath. This was precisely the situation she had hoped to avoid back on Earth. She didn't want him to love her, didn't want him to care about her,

because she didn't want to be responsible for hurting anybody when she died.

You will not die, nee'ka, he had said when she'd disclosed the reality of her illness to him. This I cannot allow. 'Twould kill me or drive me to my devolution.

He had looked so serious, she recalled, so matter-of-fact that he'd never let her die, that she had actually grinned at him and his arrogance. It was the first time in the history of her cancer where she could remember laughing in the face of death rather than humbly submitting to it.

And therein lay the problem.

Jek was giving her the one wish she'd carried deep in her heart these past few years, the one simple thing she had secretly longed for but had never voiced aloud...

Hope.

He made her feel hopeful—of living, of loving, of defying the odds, of cheating death. He made her feel hopeful and she hated him for it.

Brynda sighed as she stood at the far end of the gastrolight cruiser, staring out of the porthole and into outer space. She tucked a stray lock of hair behind her ear and ran her hands up and down her arms to ward off the chill she felt creeping into her bones.

She wished she could hate him, she admitted, qualifying her thoughts just a bit. It would make things that much easier. But she didn't hate him. Every day, every hour, every moment, the connection between them grew until it had all but taken on a life of its own.

She took a deep breath.

Don't you realize how it breaks my heart every time you talk about me having your babies, you big brute? Don't you understand that every moment I'm with you, every time I look into those glowing blue eyes, you make me wish for things God never wanted me to have? Damn you!

"Bryn?"

She started at the sound of his deep, digitized voice, not having realized he'd come up behind her. But when he wrapped his arms around her, she found herself relaxing at his touch, allowing him to hold her and to comfort her.

"*Nee'ka*, you gave me a fright. You were not in our bedchamber where I left you," he murmured against her neck before kissing it.

"I'm sorry," she whispered as she stared unblinkingly into outer space. "I couldn't sleep."

He chuckled softly. "Aye. So I gathered." When he felt how tense her body was in his arms, his smile evaporated. Her stance was rigid, her skin cold. "What ails you, my hearts? Have you the need of more sand already?"

When she said nothing, when she merely blew out a breath and continued to stare out of the porthole, he gently turned her around to face him. His gaze found hers and held it. "I want to show you something. Will you let me?"

She shrugged. "I suppose..."

He smiled. "Come," he said, taking her hand and threading his large fingers through her proportionately much smaller ones. "This way."

Brynda's eyes rounded as she walked with him down a long corridor. The entire corridor was windowed, giving it the look of an underground sea aquarium paying customers could walk through. Only instead of sea creatures to ooh and awe over, there was a vast array of stars and planets slowly drifting by to wow her with. "This is beautiful," she murmured. "So indescribably beautiful."

He nodded, then pointed toward an orb-shaped planet emitting a dull purple hue. The planet was quite large and was possessed of at least twenty satellite moons in so far as she could tell. "See you the planet Kampor?" Jek inquired. At her nod he continued. "'Tis very ancient. Mayhap as much as fifteen billion years older than your Earth."

"Wow." Brynda smiled as she walked closer to the crystal wall shielding outer space from the gastrolight cruiser. She had to admit that so far this adventure beat the hell out of trekking through the jungles of Belize. "This is so neat."

He placed a large hand on her shoulder and stared out of the crystal-glass with her. "My people consider the inhabitants of this planet to be crude primitives," he told her, "because the second dimension is far less advanced than the seventh in terms of biological evolution and technology."

She slowly nodded, idly wondering to herself where he was going with this topic of conversation. Jek wasn't the type to state something just for the sake of stating it. In the past few days she had learned much about him, that being part of it.

"And do you realize," he said quietly from behind her, "that the technology of the people of Kampor is approximately one thousand times more advanced than the technology found on Earth."

She froze, at last seeing where he was going with this conversation. If the aliens of Kampor were a thousand times more advanced than Earthlings, and if Trystonnis were far more advanced than that...

Hope. She closed her eyes and warred against it. He was purposely giving her hope. "Jek," she whispered, her eyes opening, pained. "Please don't—"

"Nay, Bryn," he admonished her. "I will not hold my silence when 'tis obvious you have still not come to trust my promises." He turned her around in his arms and waited patiently for her to meet his gaze. "I will not allow for you to die," he swore, his gaze drinking in her features. "'Tis a vow I shall keep."

She took a deep breath and expelled it, her eyes raking over his heavily muscled body. She stared at his vein-roped forearm, not quite up to making eye contact. "Jek..."

He half sighed and half growled. "Brynda, tell me something true." He waited for her to raise her head and look into his eyes before continuing. "'Tis the truth you were raised amongst primitives in a world where your males have not the biological advancement of ours, and yet..." He sighed. "Can you not feel in your belly that the connection between us was forged by evolution, by destiny, before either of us was ever born? Did you not feel connected to me from the very beginning? Did I not become your best friend as if I'd always been?"

She bit her lip, hesitating. "This is strange to me," she cautiously admitted, wanting him to understand she wasn't trying to be contrary. "My people do not mate like this."

"I know. And they won't, leastways not for millions and millions of years yet."

She sighed. "I want to believe," she whispered, her tone as heavy as her heart. "Don't you understand that I want to believe?"

He placed a tanned hand on either of her shoulders and rubbed them gently. "I understand that the goddess Aparna would not have me wait hundreds of Earth years for a mate, only to find her and have her die on me. 'Tis not the way of Her wisdom, *nee'ka* ." One of his hands left her shoulder long enough to slash definitively through the air. "You will be healed, does it take the Chief Priestess Herself to do it. 'Tis my vow unto you."

She smiled slowly, hope rekindling inside of her despite her best efforts to thwart it. "You're determined to make me trust you, aren't you?"

His eyebrows shot up. "Are you deaf of the ear? Or mayhap dimwitted of the mind? Have I not said as much mayhap a hundred times these past few moon-risings?"

She half gasped and half laughed. "I am no such thing! My hearing is excellent and my mental faculties are all that they should be and more!" She smiled. "And yes, you have said as much," she admitted.

He grunted. "If you are neither deaf nor dim, then 'tis insolent you are." His hands trailed down her shoulders, down her back, then lower still until he had palmed her buttocks. He kneaded them gently, his eyes glazing over. "Yet still do I need you," he said thickly, his erection obvious.

She knew he did, and that singular fact both amazed and awed her. She was a nobody back home, the sort of woman men tended to overlook because she was dull and mousy, more plain than beautiful. But Jek...

He was hands-down the sexiest man she'd ever laid eyes on. Tall—very tall!—heavy with muscle, not to mention heavy with emotions that he'd found necessary to suppress for more years than she or even her grandmother's grandmother had been alive.

And, she thought on a gasp as his hands reached down between them and he began to massage her breasts and nipples, he was also the most sensually masterful man she'd ever met in her life...if the oral sex bouts he'd been giving her both day and night were indicators.

Her body responded to his touch immediately, her nipples getting stiff as her eyes did a little glazing over of their own. He began to sensually rotate his hips as if slow dancing, his thick erection grinding against the exposed skin of her belly that a *qi'ka* didn't cover. "I thought," she whispered, her voice giving away her state of arousal, "that it was part of the Holy Law or whatever to wait until the Consummation Feast if at all possible."

He groaned at the reminder, his palms rubbing over her nipples. "'Tis a dimwitted law do you ask me." At her soft chuckle he smiled contentedly as he continued to massage her. "Yet I will try to honor you by waiting."

But Brynda didn't want to be honored. She wanted him to take her—and the sooner the better in so far as she was concerned. She prayed to the heavens that he was right and that the pure sands within the ancient dunes of Tryston could heal her, but if he was wrong...

"Cease," he growled.

She blinked, having momentarily forgotten how good he was at guessing her thoughts. "Cease what?" When he gave her a stern look, she sighed and glanced away. "Jek, please—"

"Nay."

She harrumphed. "You don't understand."

He moved the *qi'ka* top aside and deepened the nipple massage. Rolling the tips between thumbs and forefingers, he waited until her breathing had hitched and her eyes had narrowed before continuing. "Aye, I do. I understand that you are either deaf of the ear or dim of the mind."

Her eyes flew open and clashed with his. A smile tugged at the corners of her lips. She snorted. "You are impossible, do you know that?"

He grinned, releasing her breasts in favor of pulling her closer, but not so close that they couldn't make eye contact. "So you keep reminding me." His smile dissolved, replaced with a serious, searching expression. "And yet do you love me," he murmured.

Her eyes rounded. She bit her lip and nibbled at it as she studied his features.

"Admit it," he half asked and half commanded, picking her up and prodding her to wrap her legs around his waist. He backed her up against a crystal wall, then rotated his hips slowly, grinding the steel-hard erection beneath his leathers against her exposed vagina. "Admit it," he said thickly against her ear, grinding his cock against her in sensual, methodic circles.

Brynda wrapped her arms around his neck even as she tightened the hold her legs had on his waist. "I admit it," she whispered, arching her neck so he could kiss her there. "I do love you." She moaned when he began nibbling at her neck, not even embarrassed when she heard three warrior-guardsmen pass behind them to stroll down the corridor.

"I love you so much," he said hoarsely, his hips keeping up their slow, sensual assault. "'Tis torturing me, having to wait to show you how much."

"Then don't wait," she breathed out. "I'm offering myself to you now."

He groaned, burying his face against her neck. She could feel the perspiration that dotted his brow. "I would that I could have you milk my cock of seed, *ty'ka*, yet 'twill be easier for your first time with me do you have a priestess to aid you."

She pulled his head up and latched her hands around the braids at his temples. "I can feel your pain, you know," she whispered. She smiled wryly. "Back home if a guy had thrown me that line I never would have believed him, but I know when you say it's torture for you, you mean that in the literal sense. And yet you put yourself through it...for me." She shook her head. "How can I rage against my feelings for you when you keep doing things like that?"

Jek grunted, arrogantly appeased by her words. "You cannot fight me. 'Tis truth, I am nigh unto perfection."

She snorted at that, her eyes twinkling. "You know what I've just decided?"

"Hmm... mayhap to remove your legs from around my waist before I rut inside of you like an amorous gulch beast?" he teased.

She chuckled as he set her down on her feet. "No, it's something else."

"Aye?" He pulled her close, kneading her buttocks. "What then?"

Brynda smiled, her gaze basking in his. "I've decided to trust you," she whispered.

Jek stilled. His eyes narrowed. "Do you mean that?" he murmured. "Or do you say it in the hopes of appeasing me?"

"I mean it," she said quickly, nodding. She smiled fully. "We're going to go to the third dimension, find your cousins if they are indeed there, and then and only then will we worry about my cancer." She took a deep breath and expelled it. "For the first time, I'm really getting excited by all of this."

"Excited?" He grunted. "Goddess' truth, I know not of another *nee 'ka* anywhere who would be excited by a trek through the third dimension. 'Tis nigh unto a hell, that place."

Brynda laughed, holding up her arms so he knew to pick her up. When he did and they were eye to eye, she wrapped her arms around his neck. "I'm not giving up, you know."

"Hm?" He kissed the tip of her nose, then regarded her again. "Not giving up on what?"

"On seducing you," she said unabashedly. She wrapped her legs around his waist, then ground her flesh against his still hard erection. A primitive feeling of feminine power stole over her when he gritted his teeth. "I'm not waiting for that damn feast," she wickedly announced.

His nostrils flared. "You're killing me," he said hoarsely. "I beg of you not to bedevil me—"

"Nope." She wiggled her eyebrows. "We librarians-cum-psychology-students know all about depraved sexual behavior." She rotated her hips, grinning at his growl. "And I plan to use all of my knowledge to bedevil the pants off of you. Literally."

"Insolent wench." Jek plucked her from his waist and threw her over his shoulder, inducing her to yelp. "You may tell me all of the dirty, wicked things you plan to do to me whilst I bathe you in the sands," he grumbled as he strode quickly from the corridor. "But I warn you that 'tis gel-fire you are playing with, vixen."

Brynda purposely wriggled her butt against the side of his face, knowing it would make his jaw clench. "Promises, promises."

Chapter 7

Meanwhile, back in Sand City...

“No way...” Marty gawked at her sister-in-law, shocked. She could feel the anger building up, threatening to erupt. “Are you serious? Why didn’t you tell us this before?” she bit out.

Kyra rubbed her temples and sighed. “Because I wasn’t sure. Because I wasn’t one hundred percent, absolutely certain until Geris sent me a holo-call.” She lowered her voice and strolled briskly toward Marty and Giselle. “Ger’s pretty upset. Both of her daughters are missing, yet Dak refuses to allow her to accompany him to go and find them.” She snorted. “Because as is usually the case around here where females are involved, he thinks she’d be more of a hindrance to finding Jana and Dari than a help.”

“Why am I just not surprised?” Marty’s hand balled into a fist at her side. “My lying pig of a husband told me he was going on a mission of peace and goodwill to the planet Meridian,” she seethed. “I can’t believe I ever fell for it!”

“Bloody hell.” Giselle shook her head. “And to think I’d believed Rem when he told me he was leaving with his brothers to go holo-dicing for a fortnight.” Her lips pinched together in a frown. “He doesn’t even like holo-dicing!”

Kyra closed her eyes briefly and took a deep breath. “It gets worse,” she murmured.

Marty and Giselle exchanged a curious look before regarding Kyra. They both thought it odd when the Empress began to nibble at her lower lip and pace back and forth. “Worse?” Giselle cautiously inquired. “Precisely how?”

But it was as if the Empress hadn’t heard the question for her pacing picked up to the point of appearing frantic. “Kyra?” Marty said softly. “What’s going on?”

She turned to face them then, her pacing brought to an abrupt standstill. Her eyes looked wild—and worried. “I think,” Kyra said quietly, her hands twisting nervously back and forth in front of her, “I think that the woman who helped the girls escape was...”

When she didn’t appear as though she was going to finish her sentence, Marty threw a hand toward her. “Was what?” she asked. “Kyra...what is going on?”

“I think...” Kyra took a deep breath and expelled it. “I think the woman who helped the girls escape is my sister Kara,” she whispered.

“Bloody hell.” Giselle shook her head slightly, uncertain what to say in the way of comfort. Unfortunately not much could be said. All three women understood the ways of Tryston enough to realize what was likely to come of the situation.

Marty nodded grimly. “And you fear Zor will have her sent to the gulch pits if he catches her?”

“Uh huh.” Kyra clutched her stomach, looking as though she might vomit. “He can be so fucking rigid. What if it doesn’t matter to him that Kara’s my flesh and blood? What if the only thing he cares about,” she murmured, her gaze far away, “is getting his vengeance on the woman who helped our daughter to escape Tryston, and Cam?” She shook her head. “I can’t let it happen. For all of these years I have grieved...” She glanced up, at last looking at her sisters-in-law. “I can’t take the chance of losing her. Not again.”

The three women stood there in silence for a long moment, saying nothing as they stared at each other. It was Giselle who eventually broke the quiet. "Are you wanting us to do what I think you're wanting us to do?" she asked carefully.

Kyra didn't pretend not to understand exactly what she meant. "Yes," she said simply.

Giselle took a deep breath and blew it out.

Bloody hell. This was getting interesting.

"Geris," Marty inquired, her eyes narrowed, "is she in on this too?"

"Oh yeah." Kyra laughed without humor. "Ger is as pissed and frightened as I am. Not only was Kara like a baby sister to her growing up, but both of her elder daughters are missing. Do you think she wants to wait at home for hubby to return, hoping against hope he was able to find them but not really knowing?" She slashed a hand through the air, her jaw clenched. "No way!"

Marty snorted her agreement, but said nothing.

"Look," Kyra said, rubbing her temples again. "I hate to drag you two into my personal affairs without so much as a warning, but," she said desperately, "I couldn't think of what else to do! I knew my son Jor would get suspicious and perhaps have me watched like a hawk if I left the palace with Geris, given what's going down as we speak."

"Smart thinking," Giselle nodded. "Nobody will suspect Marty and I of anything if you should all of a sudden be overcome with the desire to visit Sypar and Morak." She sighed. "And yet...Kyra, I'm in—believe me I'll do whatever I can to aid you—but how do you propose we lose our guard?" She waved a meaningful hand toward the bedchamber doors and lowered her voice. "Beyond those doors all of us have guards who stick to our heels like unmated warriors to *Kefas*. How will we ever get off Tryston?" She threw her hands up in the air. "Bloody hell, for that matter, how will Geris ever get off of Ti Q'won?"

"I don't know," Kyra admitted morosely. She slumped down on a *vesha* bench. "I haven't figured that part out yet."

Giselle sighed, perplexed. "Perhaps Jor can be reasoned with?" she asked hopefully.

"Ha!" Kyra shook her head. "He might have been a *mani's* boy as a child, but now that he's grown he is his father's son."

"Which means he can't be trusted." Marty's eyes narrowed as she contemplated various ways to subvert the dominant paradigm they were currently facing. She doubted a consciousness-raising protest would render them any results in a galaxy like Trek Mi Q'an. Well, other than to get them all sent to their rooms like recalcitrant children. "No warrior over the age of thirteen can be trusted. They get a harem and it all goes downhill from there," she said grimly.

Kyra snorted at that. "Ain't it the truth. Why bother shaking up the status quo when you realize at the impressionable age of thirteen that the status quo works out damn well for you?" She sighed. "Jor loves me enough to lay down his life for me, but no, he can't be trusted. Not in this."

“I’ve got it,” Marty breathed out, snagging their attention. She smiled slowly.

Kyra shot up from the *vesha* bench, her expression as hopeful as it was desperate.

“What?” Giselle asked, as curious as Kyra was. “Tell us already.”

Marty glanced meaningfully down toward her navel then back up to them. She grinned. “Let’s just say I’ve got connections.”

Chapter 8

Brynda’s gaze was wary but excited as they exited the gastrolight cruiser at the first planet their party was to hunt through. The planet was called Wassa, an outlying planet in the third dimension’s Kabka star system, and according to Jek it was quite small. Indeed, he had made mention that the entire planet would take them but a few days to scour, for it was no bigger in mass than continental Europe.

She immediately noticed upon exiting the cruiser that the atmosphere of Wassa was a frigid one. But then Jek had prepared her for as much, realizing as he did that because the planet was an outlying one and therefore far in distance from the four suns of its solar system, it was apt to be cold.

Brynda immediately likened the daytime atmosphere of Wassa to that of the arctic—but without the snowfall. She could well imagine how frigid it would feel when nighttime fell over the small planet. She shivered, thanking Yar’at with a smile when he wrapped a toasty warm fur around her *qi’ka* -clad body.

Yar’at took her hand and placed it on his bulging forearm, then guided her toward where Jek was currently standing, renting them the use of a submersible conveyance. Most of Wassa’s structures were submersed underwater, for great rains that had never receded had fallen from the skies eons past.

“This is amazing,” Brynda murmured, her eyes wide. “We will really travel beneath the water, even spend the night there?”

Yar’at nodded. “Aye. ‘Tis no land on Wassa I’ve ever heard tell of, save the p-planet’s docking p-port on which we now stand.” His muscles clenched and a blush settled over his face at his stuttered out words, but when Brynda didn’t seem to take much notice of his affliction, he immediately relaxed. He smiled. “I suppose this would be exciting to an Earth w-wench.”

Brynda giggled as her fingers dug giddily into his forearm. “You better believe it!”

Yar’at grinned down at her then resumed their walk toward Jek. “So I feel.” His smile faltered a bit as a thought struck him. “Did your Sacred M-Mate warn you that...”

“That the humanoids here resemble fish?” She nodded, then blew out a breath. “I wish I’d had my camera on me when Jek took me,” she mumbled.

He chuckled at that. “We’ve what we call holo-cams here that d-do the same job yet better.”

She came to an abrupt halt. “Really?” she asked excitedly as she looked way up to meet his gaze. “Do you happen to have one?”

“Aye.” He nodded. “Leastways, you must be circumspect wh- whilst taking holo-images of the natives. “The majority of them make their living in illegal slave trading as does the p-people of the next planet we shall scour. They have not a care to have their activities documented.”

Brynda swallowed a bit roughly. “Slave trading?” She hesitated, fearing the answer but deciding to ask the question anyway. “What kind of slaves?”

“Wenches,” Yar’at admitted. He sighed. “You’ve naught to fear. I should never have—”

“It’s okay.” She took a deep breath and nodded. “I know all of you will keep me safe. But...” Her brow furrowed. “Why do they not have these *Kefas* Jek told me about? Why do they enslave women instead?”

Yar’at shrugged. “They have not the *trelli* sands from the borderlands here.” He sighed. “And truly, would you, a humanoid w-wench, care to spread your legs for a fish-man?”

She blushed at his bluntness, but realizing as she did that that’s how warriors were, she rebounded quickly. “I suppose not,” she muttered. Her lips pinched together in a frown. “But don’t they have any, I don’t know, fishy women here?”

“Aye.” Yar’at shrugged. His difficulty with speech waned more and more as he gradually became more at ease in her presence. “But they are not so valuable as humanoid wenches to the Wassans.”

Brynda harrumphed, feeling oddly indignant on behalf of fishy women everywhere. “That’s terrible. Utterly mean.”

Yar’at sighed. “‘Tis life. In every culture there are people who are valued, and,” he murmured, “people who are not.”

Brynda bit her lip as they resumed their stroll toward Jek. She wondered if Yar’at had been talking in general...or if he’d been using double entendres to speak of himself.

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By the time their group had settled in to eat the evening meal that night, Brynda was as tired as she was excited. It was just so incredibly weird, being on this tiny lime-green planet with its blue water underworld. The waters here were comparable to Earth’s but a bit more violent and, of course, the marine life was intelligent.

By the end of the first day Brynda understood that although the Wassans resembled humans who had been interbred with fish, the people were actually amphibians who spent part of their lives in the waters and part of it within the sealed off chambers of the various docking ports. The docking port they were staying the night in tonight was called Tavern Twelve by the locals and was no bigger than a small, country inn.

Having been invited to partake of the evening fare by Tavern Twelve’s owner-cum-innkeeper, Brynda tried not to stare at the amphibian males scattered throughout the dimly lit chamber, all seated at various tables, as they watched a naked human woman perform a sexual show for their viewing pleasure on a small stage.

Voyerurism, she recollected from Chapter Eight, idly wondering to herself how she'd done on the last psychology exam. Brent Tallmadge had aced the Chapter Seven test, scoring five points higher than she had, so she was hoping she'd aced—

She rolled her eyes. *As if it matters, Brynda! Try not to be such a studious dweeb!*

She sighed, her attention refocusing on the scene around her.

The males here weren't big compared to warriors, but for Earth standards they were fairly large, standing at approximately six feet in height. They looked more human than amphibian, the only giveaway of their race the blue tinge to their skins and the gills on their sides. But otherwise they looked like human men—muscular, handsome human men at that.

Brynda's attention was snagged a moment later by a human woman who was wheeled into the chamber and placed in front of a group of Wassan men that they might eat their meals. Naked and gagged, the human woman had been strapped to a table, her thighs spread wide, various assorted foods placed strategically all over her body.

She gulped as she watched, embarrassed when it occurred to her that the males here ate their meals using a human woman's body as a serving platter. She heard the male laughter erupting from the group of Wassan men, then heard the woman groan from behind her gag when the males' faces fell to her body and they began to eat their meal.

For at least fifteen minutes Brynda watched, her mouth agape, as the amphibian males lapped up their food from the human slave's body. The male seated between the woman's legs used his hands to spread her thighs further apart. She watched as the male dove for the slave's flesh, her eyes widening when his long tongue darted out and lapped her pussy clean. The slave groaned the entire time, obviously as unwillingly turned on by the Wassan men as she was terrified of them.

The slave began to convulsively orgasm, her moans growing louder and louder as the males continued to feed. Suctioning lips were all over the slave, clamped around her stiff nipples, wrapped around her clit, nibbling at her pussy hole...

The woman's body shook violently as the Wassan male seated between her thighs thrust his long tongue deep inside of her pussy and wiggled it around in a series of fast flicks. The slave came violently, her entire body convulsing, as she moaned and groaned from behind the gag. The woman's nipples shot up noticeably further which caused the males suckling on them to mumble appreciatively around them and suck on the stiff pieces of human flesh all the harder.

The slave came over and over, again and again. Her eyes rolled back into her head and practically stayed there as she was brought to orgasm more times than Brynda could count.

When the largest of the males stood up and impaled the slave with his cock, she watched the woman's breasts bounce with each rhythmic thrust. The slave moaned and groaned from behind the gag, her thighs shaking as the amphibian male fucked her.

Brynda's eyes widened in surprise as the slave began to convulse more violently than ever before, her orgasms growing stronger and stronger. When the male pulled out briefly then plunged his stiff cock deeply inside of the slave again, Brynda realized why the woman was coming so violently.

The tip of a Wassan male's cock worked like a vibrator.

Brynda bit her lip, hesitated, then picked up the holo-cam...

* * * * *

Later that night in the chamber they'd rented, Jek sat in a lounging chair-like contraption and splayed Brynda out in his lap, softly stroking her pussy as he gazed down at her. "The *qi 'ka* should be outlawed," he grumbled. "'Tis too much clothing for a wench."

Brynda's eyes glazed over as his fingers rimmed the sleek folds of her flesh. "I think what you need is to fuck me," she said boldly, her voice a throaty whisper.

His nostrils flared as he slid a finger into her cunt. "You think to bedevil me, *nee 'ka*, but 'tis your best interest and no other's that I have in my hearts."

"But why?" she asked for what felt like the hundredth time. She sucked in her breath as he began to slowly finger fuck her.

"Your channel is tight," he said thickly, his eyes narrowing as he repeatedly slid a finger in and out of her. "And my cock is much bigger than a lesser male's."

She gulped, half nervous and half excited. "May I see it?" she whispered. "May I touch it?"

He hesitated, clearly battling within himself. "I fear if you see it 'twill scare you from the *vesha* hides for all times. 'Tis best do you wait until the moon-rising of the consummation when you've a priestess to ease your fears."

Her eyes widened. "Good lord, Jek, you make it sound as big as a small child."

He chuckled, his eyes twinkling. "Not so large as that, but aye, 'tis truth that the sight of my manpart has caused more than one bound servant to swoon."

She rolled her eyes. "What an ego."

"'Tis true," he sniffed. "Leastways, after I join myself to you, you will be thanking the goddess for giving you unto a warlord possessed of a lusty cock so large as mine."

"Prove it," she said in the way of challenge. "Show me."

One dark eyebrow rose. "You think to bedevil me..."

"No," she lied without feeling guilty. She'd arrived at a decision some time ago and that decision was to live life to the fullest. She wanted to be as close to Jek as was possible, wanted to feel the pleasure and closeness of having him inside of her. "Please," she whispered.

His nostrils flared as he guided her hand toward the stiff erection concealed under his leathers and pressed it against him. His teeth gritted as he ground his cock against her hand, the desperateness he felt to be inside of her a palpable thing.

“Take me,” she murmured, her hand masturbating him as best as she could manage without being able to have skin-to-skin contact. “Let me feel you inside of me.”

She felt as desperate for him as she could surmise he was for her. His breathing was labored, his erection was as stiff as was possible, and she felt herself actually praying that he’d fuck her. For almost an entire week she had done her damndest every night to seduce him into making love to her, but every night he had gently set her away from him, reminding her it would hurt and that she needed the aid of a priestess.

“Please,” she breathed out, sitting up in his lap and thrusting her breasts in front of his face. She moaned when he dove into them, his face smashing into her chest, his mouth latching desperately around a nipple. “Please fuck me.”

“*Nee’ka*,” he said hoarsely from around her nipple. “Do not do this to me.” He closed his eyes and sucked on it hard.

“Please,” she begged again, moving her skirt in such a way that she could straddle his lap and grind her wet flesh against his restrained cock. “Jek I need you...” She felt crazed to be near him, she conceded—desperate and crazed.

She thought she was about to get her way, thought from the grinding of his teeth and the way he reached down to his leathers preparing to free his erection that finally he was about to join his body to hers, when at the last possible moment his eyes flew open, and he gently picked her up and set her away from him on her feet.

Her breathing labored, her *qi’ka* askew that it exposed all of her private parts, she balled her hands into fists at her side and screamed. “You’re killing me!” she shouted. “You’re determined to kill me!”

Jek’s nostrils flared. “’Tis you who are determined to drive me to my devolution!” he growled, shooting up from the lounging chair. “I am trying to be the gentleman, I am trying to have a care that I don’t split you asunder with my wicked big cock—”

Brynda’s eyes rounded. A smile tugged at the corners of her lips.

“—and yet you bedevil me day and night with your lusty charms!”

Her heart soared. Until she’d met Jek, she’d never felt beautiful, had never felt sexy.

His hand slashed definitively through the air. “I can stand no more, wench! Rest assured that if you think to bedevil me again, ‘twill get you the rutting you so desperately crave.” He pulled down his leathers, and his erection sprang free. She gulped. “If you are desirous of being split asunder, I am the only warrior who will ever touch you thusly!”

“Stop this!” Brynda shushed him, her good humor restored. “And wait right there,” she called out over her shoulder as she fled into an adjoining chamber.

Jek was still worked up, still horny and hungry and needful of a rut. “Why?” he growled, his jaw as tight as his muscles.

She reappeared a moment later, the holo-cam in hand. She grinned. “Smile and say ‘cheese’.”

He harrumphed. And then he complied.

Chapter 9

The next planet the group traveled to was called Dementia, the second furthest planet from the solar system's four suns. They had only to scour this planet, then travel on to the outermost planet called Brekka, and their quest was complete. Brynda didn't know whether to be happy that the end of the journey meant being taken to the healing sands, or sad that the quest would be over because she was having such a good time.

Both Jek and Yar'at warned her repeatedly before their party exited the gastrolight cruiser that Dementia was as wicked of a place as it sounded. Strange hallucinogenic substances could be found in the predatorial plant-life of the entire planet, carnivorous animals roamed about the cold jungles freely, and the humanoids who dwelled here were gorilla-like in appearance.

Jek and Yar'at had expected her to be afraid, but Brynda had been in awe instead, noticeably anxious to explore the outlander planet that sounded as if it resembled her favorite movie as a child, *Planet of the Apes*. Hesitant about bringing her inland, Jek had forewarned her to keep close to either him, Yar'at, or Kaz at all times, for Dementia was a hostile place given to much battling and bloodshed. Worse yet, the gorilla-like males of Dementia kept human female sex slaves just as the Wassans did, and wouldn't turn down the chance of enslaving Brynda, High Lady or no, if they could capture her away from the eyewitness of warrior onlookers.

None of the warriors had any knowledge concerning whether or not the two planets had similar customs beyond that, but all of them doubted it. The Wassans were goddess-worshippers prone toward wanting peace, while the Dementians worshipped a male ape-god and were prone toward war. It had been the experience of both Jek and Yar'at that as a rule goddess-worshipping planets always tended to be less overtly hostile than god-worshipping ones, while polytheistic planets such as the fabled Khan-Gor tended somewhere toward the middle. They didn't know why, only that it was so.

And so it was with much fear, mingled with much excitement, that Brynda exited the gastrolight cruiser with her Sacred Mate on one side of her, Yar'at on the other, and warriors armed to the nines surrounding them. The atmosphere was a bit chillier than that of Wassa, so Jek immediately threw a fur over her shoulders, as both protection from the elements and to keep the heavily-muscled gorilla-men who watched her every move from seeing all of her "charms" as Jek always referred to them.

Wide-eyed, Brynda gulped as their party strode by a slave-trading block, young and frightened looking human girls of no more than eighteen being splayed out naked for the potential buyers to inspect their bodies. The slave girls' wrists and ankles were shackled, chains securing them to a slab of stone, rendering them completely defenseless from the gorilla hands that touched and examined them everywhere.

Brynda's body stiffened, for she was truly afraid for the young girls. The males of this planet were huge and frightening looking. Though not so large as warriors, the males stood at least seven feet tall and were as thick with muscle as any warrior.

Although the body hair of the males was quite short, the shaggy manes atop their heads were long, like medieval warriors from old. Possessed of two deadly incisors, their teeth were otherwise similar to

humans, as were their eyes, which glowed a portent green. Their manner of dress was quite similar to a warrior's, though all of the males wore black leather garb instead of various colored leathers to signify rank. Their body colors ranged from medium brown to dark black, just as most gorillas did back home. Their faces were most definitely gorilla in appearance, their noses flat and broad, the skin of their faces a plastic-looking dark brown or black depending upon the color of their bodies.

She supposed that in a ruggedly masculine, dangerously virile sort of way the males here could be considered rather handsome. They personified maleness at its most primitive hour, the danger they were capable of in their well-honed bodies a tangible thing. In many ways their appearances were reminiscent of that of warriors, for even the way they moved about bespoke of a humanoid ancestry.

Or perhaps it was the other way around. Perhaps the warriors of the seventh dimension had evolved from these third dimension males.

Or perhaps it was neither—it could be, she thought to herself, that the warriors and the Dementians shared a common evolutionary ancestor, but neither had been spawned of the other.

The planet itself was rather dark and gloomy, Dementia's nights longer than its days. A barely perceptible red tint hazed the dreary gray skies, making the planet look perpetually overcast, as though it was always preparing to be rained upon, though Jek had told her that it scarcely rained here.

Brynda bit her lip as she watched one of the prettier girl's get her labial lips spread wide apart by one of the gorilla soldiers thinking of purchasing her from the slave trader who'd stolen her away from her planet of origin. The gorilla fighter lowered his face to her flesh, sniffed it, then licked her there in one long swipe that started at her anus and ended at her clit.

The slave girl gasped when his rough tongue hit her clit, her eyes round and terrified. The heavily-muscled male growled something imperceptible against her clit then took the bud into his mouth and sucked on it hard. The girl's head began to thrash about, her desire to not orgasm for the male obvious. But in the end the potential buyer won out and the girl groaned as she came violently for him.

Brynda felt oddly turned on as she watched the slave's young nipples stiffen and stab upwards, then watched the male's fingers pinch and tweak at them as he continued to suck on her clit. She briefly glanced away from the scene, ashamed she'd felt aroused at the girl's expense, but turned back to watch as their party continued down the dirt-trod path that led to what she suspected was somebody's home.

The gorilla fighter brought the human slave girl to peak two more times before his face surfaced from between her thighs and he stood up from his kneeling position. Grabbing her hips, he plunged his thick cock deep inside of her, causing the slave to gasp. Three or four males laughed, strolling over to watch another male of their species fuck a human female.

"The little lass has gorgeous tits," one of the males purred, his gaze clashing with Brynda's. She gulped. It belatedly occurred to her that he'd probably spoken in Trystonni on purpose so she'd understand what he was saying. It made it easier to intimidate her. "The unworthy human wench should feel blessed indeed to have a male of our species mount her."

But his friend paid him no heed, for the fighter was lustily stroking in and out of the slave girl's body, his cock pounding over and over again into her pussy. When a rival male reached down and touched the slave's breasts, the gorilla fighter bellowed loudly, then backhanded him with such force that the other male fell to the ground, blood spurting from his mouth.

The girl's eyes widened in growing fright, as did Brynda's. The male mounting the slave murmured something that seemed to console her a bit for she looked a bit less frightened. His large hands settled possessively at her breasts and palmed them as he thrust deep and fast into her flesh.

The girl groaned, the moment of her release obvious, for her nipples stiffened outrageously more as her eyes rolled back into her head.

On a groan the male followed her, throwing his head back and bellowing frighteningly as he spurted his seed deep inside of her body.

Brynda covered her ears, afraid.

"Do not stare, *nee'ka*," Jek warned her. "The males here will think you are a bold wench desirous of a rutting and try to steal you away."

She gulped, her gaze immediately bolting forward, her hands falling back down to her sides. She thought about the male she'd made eye contact with, the one who had spoken to his allies in Trystonni so she could understand him. "I don't want to stay here," she breathed out. Her heartbeat was picking up at an alarming rate. "I've changed my mind."

Jek pulled her close to reassure her. "'Twill be all right, my hearts. You must know I cannot return you to the gastrolight cruiser now that the males here have beheld you," he murmured. "They would tear it apart to get to you."

She closed her eyes briefly, feeling as though she might be ill. "What about the other women, the bound servants..."

"Shh," he said softly, reminding her to keep her voice lowered. "Their sense of smell is great, yet not so great that they can smell through a contraption so thick as that one. For a certainty they will never know do you not give the secret away."

Brynda nodded like a marionette. She ignored the stares the gorilla fighters were giving her as their party continued onward. "Where are we going?" she whispered, hoping they reached a safer destination sometime soon. Her eyes flicked over the jungles surrounding them on either side. "Not in there I hope."

Jek sighed, then squeezed her hand. "I don't yet know," he murmured. "Leastways, on this moon-rising we shall stay in the hut of General Zaqari. He is leader to the hoard whose lands we are in. Until I break bread with him 'tis impossible for me to know the route we must take, if any."

She held to him tightly, an ominous feeling she couldn't quite pinpoint settling over her. "I'm afraid, Jek," she whispered. "I'm very afraid."

He squeezed her hand again. "No fear, Bryn." He gently lowered his face then raised her hand to his lips and kissed it. "I would die to protect you, *nee'ka*."

Brynda swallowed roughly, her heart palpitating. It dawned on her that that was precisely what she was afraid of.

* * * * *

Jek narrowed his gaze at Lieutenant Zaab even whilst he listened to General Zaqari expound upon some recent political events that had transpired within Dementia. The gorilla fighter known as Zaab was clearly challenging him for the right to Brynda, which caused Jek to feel an anger and a hatred that went beyond anything he'd ever experienced before. He wanted to kill the lieutenant with his bare hands, challenge him to fight in the pits as two prime males with no weapons.

Zaab returned his stare, his gaze unblinking, as two naked slave girls rubbed his shoulders from behind.

"Have you heard a word I've said, Lord Q'an Ri?" The general narrowed his green gaze first at Jek, then at Zaab. He was an older male, if his regal mane of salt and pepper hair was an indication of age, but his sharp green eyes bespoke of keen mental acuity. He turned to the naked slave girl who stood beside him, placed a kiss on the belly that was ripe with his child, then murmured for her to go to their bedchamber and await him there. He turned back to face the men as she wobbled away. "What goes on here?" he demanded.

Sitting next to Jek in the hut around an oblong table made of stone, Brynda bit her lip as she kept her gaze submissively lowered, afraid to look at any of the gorilla fighters overly long. Naked human slave girls scurried around the table, stopping to fill goblets or refill trenchers every few minutes. From what Brynda had overheard, she surmised that the only way a human female could lose her slave status and become mated to one of the gorilla fighters was by proving her worthiness of him by bearing his child.

Indeed, Brynda had listened to the whispers of the slave girls with half an ear as one of them had excitedly announced that she was fairly certain she had been impregnated by the general's brother. A moment later the slave girl had shyly whispered what she believed to be true in Zaqari's brother's ear. The large male had looked arrogantly pleased as he'd bade her to sit upon his lap and partake of the meal with them. Even now the slave girl was feeding him from the trencher they shared as she sat naked in his lap, her legs splayed wide open while he possessively rubbed her cunt for all to see. The girl was smiling and giggly, playfully placing fruit bits on her nipples for him to suck off, then gasping and groaning when he bent his head and relented with a low growl.

Brynda glanced toward Yar'at whom she noted had his hand grasped tightly around a weapon of some sort, as if he expected to use it at any moment. Zaab's second in command was doing the same, both of them ready to step in and protect their respective leaders should a gauntlet of sorts be thrown down. She swallowed nervously, the tense situation at last getting to her.

Jek's nostrils flared, but his glowing blue eyes never strayed from Zaab's green ones. "Mayhap you should ask your lieutenant," he murmured.

"Zaab?" The general threw a hand toward him, absently glancing at the naked slave girl who was seating herself on his lap to feed him. "Either issue challenge for the wench and fight to the death for her as is our way, or let it go." He folded his heavily muscled arms over his massive chest, then, thinking better of it, wrapped one of his arms around the slave to hold her securely while she simultaneously fed him and massaged his chest. "The choice is yours but make it quickly."

Holy shit!

Brynda gasped, drawing all eyes toward her. She felt a moment's fear at being the center of attention, but ignored it. "Please don't," she breathed out. "If I've done something wrong, or in any way led you on, I apologize for my ignorance of your ways, but please—"

“Stay out of this, Brynda,” Jek softly ordered her, his eyes relocking with Zaab’s. “’Tis between the lieutenant and me, this.”

Her nostrils flared. “This is ridiculous,” she hissed under her breath to him, not aware of the fact that Dementians were possessed of acute hearing. “I’m not letting you kill that man just because I didn’t understand I was flirting with him by making eye contact.”

Zaab’s eyes widened. His gaze darted over to Brynda. “You think to save me, lass?” he asked incredulously, his tone shocked. “Think you I cannot hold my own against the warlord?”

Brynda bit her lip, afraid she’d inadvertently done something else offensive. “W-Well...” she stuttered.

Zaab folded his massive arms over his chest. He was a wickedly handsome man, gorilla in appearance or no, she’d give him that much. “Speak only the truth of it to me.”

She reached up to nervously push her spectacles up the bridge of her nose, only then remembering she’d quit wearing them days ago. “Well, um, the thing of it is, you see...” She gulped. “No,” she squeaked. “I don’t think you can win.”

The atmosphere inside of the hut was so quiet she could have heard a pin drop. Brynda bit her lip as she glanced at Jek, idly noting the look of arrogance that smothered his features. And there was something else there. Something dangerous and primal. She deeply suspected he wouldn’t be waiting for a Consummation Feast to breach her after the events of this night.

Well at least something had come of it all, she thought with down-turned lips.

The dead silence within the hut was broken a moment later when Lieutenant Zaab threw his head back and laughed. His men joined in, all of them believing Zaab would emerge the victor from any challenge that took place.

Jek exploded at the insult, growling as he sprang up from his chair and jumped towards Zaab. The naked slave girls jumped out of the way, looking as though they were quite accustomed to brawling and thought little of it.

Jek picked the lieutenant up from his chair and held him over his head, his massive muscles bulging, then hurled him across the hut’s dirt floor. Zaab sprang to his feet the moment he landed, snarled at Jek, then charged toward him with a guttural growl. Their bodies clashed as they lunged toward each other, two massive males in their prime battling hand-to-hand.

Oh. My. Gawd.

Brynda gawked at the sight, deciding she must have done something very, very wrong to have caused this. “Oh goodness.”

“’Twill be all right,” the general assured her, patting her hand. “They are but sparring, my dear, no challenge has been issued.”

She took a deep breath as she looked at him, blushing when she noted that two slave girls were kneeling before him, taking turns sucking on his cock. “Nobody will die then?” she asked wearily as she

glanced down at one of the slave's heads bobbing up and down before the general, moaning as she sucked on him.

Brynda sighed as she rubbed her temples. The weirdness of the past week was finally catching up to her.

"Nay." General Zaqari shook his head. "A bit of blood and bruising, mayhap, but no more."

She expelled the breath she'd been holding in. "Is this common here?" she asked dryly. She didn't know if she meant the sex or the fighting.

"Aye."

Her eyebrows shot up. She didn't know if he meant the sex or the fighting. "I'd never fit in here," she muttered.

A few minutes later when the fight escalated, Brynda shifted her eyes about the hut to make certain nobody was paying her much attention. When she was fairly sure that nobody was, she shrugged her shoulders, bit her lip, and reached for the holo-cam...

The fighting continued, slave girls fleeing to the hut's kitchen to get out of the line of fire.

"Why does the lass defend you thusly, warlord?" Zaab asked as he punched Jek squarely in the jaw. "I cannot smell your scent upon her, so 'tis obvious you have never mounted her."

Jek's nostrils flared as he landed a punch to Zaab's eye, busting open the flesh there. "Because she loves me, dunce. Mayhap if your kind tried love instead of slavery you'd understand," he sarcastically replied. He kicked him in the stomach. "Leastways, you shall smell my scent upon her by the morrow, fighter. 'Tis for a certainty, that."

Zaab grunted, then tackled him, both males falling to the hut's floor.

Brynda's mouth hung open the entire time, having never seen such a primitive display of brute male strength before. "This is positively barbaric," she said in a disapprovingly matronish tone even as she held up the holo-cam and snapped a few good images.

Zaab's brow furrowed right before he punched Jek. "Why does your woman take holo-recordings?" he asked, perplexed.

Jek shrugged before he punched him back. "She heralds from the first dimension," he said in the way of explanation.

Zaab nodded as if that explained all. "Go to the heart of the jungle, warlord, and within it find the hut of the Mantus hoard leader." He grunted as his next punch found Jek's jaw line, cutting it. "If any have heard tell of the royal lasses, the old man would know."

"'Tis grateful I am," Jek grunted back as he kicked him in the face, "for the information."

"I warn you now, warlord," Zaab said as he regained his footing, swiping the blood from his jaw. He ceased the sparring and reached for his hand to shake it. "The Mantus hoard is not known for playing fair. Mount your woman before you go that your scent is upon her, permeating her skin and her cunt."

Give them no reason to issue challenge for her.”

“Tis done,” Jek growled, his eyes darting toward Brynda. The intensely possessive look he gave her made her gulp, made the holo-cam fall to her side forgotten.

“Tis done,” he murmured as Lieutenant Zaab picked up two slave girls and strolled from the chamber to fuck them both.

Chapter 10

Jek knew Brynda was frightened as he slammed the wooden door that partitioned off the bedchamber they’d been given to use from the rest of the hut. Leastways, when she turned around to face him, she began to slowly back away from him, as if afraid he would hurt her.

He strode slowly toward her, his boot heels thumping on the tightly packed dirt floor, his gaze never leaving hers. He summoned off her *qi’ka*, mentally throwing it to the floor, causing her to gasp.

His jaw clenched. “I would sooner die than hurt you, *nee’ka*,” he said hoarsely, his eyes raking o’er her body. “This you know.”

She wet her lips and glanced nervously away. “Then quit staring at me like that,” she breathed out. “You’re behaving like a madman.”

He realized he mayhap was, realized too he should probably not touch her this moon-rising when he felt like a crazed gulch beast in heat, yet knew too that there was no chance of her leaving this bedchamber unbreached by him. Zaab’s near challenge, harmless or no, had brought out a predator in him far more deadly than even he had known lurked within him. “I need to join with you, *ty’ka*,” he said thickly. His nostrils flared as he came to stand before her, his hands possessively tangling themselves in her hair. “I need for these males to smell my scent upon you.”

Brynda’s eyes widened. “You want to mark me,” she breathed out.

Jek’s hands unwound from her hair and trailed down her naked body. He ran his large hands over her breasts, his callused palms grazing the nipples. “Aye,” he growled.

She wet her lips. And then she smiled. “Oh Jek...that is the sexiest thing a man has ever said to me!” She held up her arms for him, laughing as he instinctively picked her up.

He sighed, looking bewildered.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and placed a series of quick kisses all over his face. “You are so sexy,” she mumbled between kisses. “And I want you to mark me so incredibly badly.”

“You are mayhap the most bizarre *nee’ka* in existence,” he groaned as he carried her to the chamber’s wood and *rama*-hide bed and splayed her out on it. He grinned as he summoned off his leathers and settled himself atop her. “Thank the goddess,” he murmured.

She ran her hands over his vein-roped forearms, feeling his skin beneath her fingertips as she trailed up, then wrapped her arms around his neck once again. Her grin faded as a serious expression

commanded her features. She searched his eyes, her feelings there for him to see, to feel. "Thank you," she whispered.

His eyes glowed even as they narrowed in desire. He brushed a lock of blonde hair out of her line of vision as he studied her eyes. "Do you know how lonely I was all of these years, waiting on you to be born?" he murmured.

When she considered that he'd lived hundreds of years according to her time standards and that he had been subjected to stark loneliness for the majority of them, it damn near made her cry. She took a deep breath instead, not the type to tear up. "No," she admitted, albeit a bit shakily. "Not like that." She expelled the breath she'd drawn in. "I can't begin to imagine—."

"Aye, you can." He stared deeply into her eyes. "I had the comfort of knowing all these years that one day I would find you," he admitted, his body covering hers fully as he settled himself between her thighs. "And yet oft did I despair, letting the black moods settle in out of misplaced sorrow for myself. But you..." He bent his head and placed a kiss on the tip of her nose. "You knew naught of my existence, believed you would die alone and without knowing love of the hearts, yet never did you weaken, never did the light inside of you cease to shine."

"Stop it," she whispered, the tears welling despite her best efforts to thwart them. She took a deep breath. "I might have been stoically resolved on the outside, but on the inside I..." She sucked in her breath. "I prayed every night for you to find me," she whispered.

"And so I did," he murmured. He rotated his hips a bit, poising his erection at the mouth of her vagina. "I love you, Bryn."

She smiled. "I love you too." Then she hit him. "Now quit getting me all teary and mushy, you big brute. It's ruining my lusty mood," she teased.

He grinned. "If you love me, then mayhap you will forgive me."

Her brow wrinkled. "For— *whaaaat!*" she screamed.

He groaned as he plunged his cock deeply inside of her, seating himself fully. He gritted his teeth, perspiration dotting his brow. "For that," he said hoarsely.

Holy shit!

Brynda blinked a few times in rapid succession, her fingers digging into his steely buttocks as she adjusted to the length and width of him. "No problem," she squeaked.

Jek drew himself up on his elbows, palmed her breasts, and gently kneaded them as he began to slowly stroke in and out of her. His eyes closed on a groan as he thrust in and out, his hips grinding in slow, methodic circles. "Do you hear the sound your pussy makes for me," he murmured against her ear. "'Tis wet for need of me."

"Yes," she gasped. Wrapping her legs around his hips, Brynda arched up, already wanting more. "Please," she urged him. "I'm fine now. We've waited too long as it is."

His nostrils flared as he continued to slowly plunge in and out of her. "Don't tempt me, Bryn," he said hoarsely. "I'm still feeling nigh unto crazed from Zaab's near challenge."

Her eyes widened when she realized he wasn't lying. She could feel the controlled rage still simmering below the surface. Every muscle in his body was clenched tightly, his jaw was set, his breathing heavy.

"I want to rut inside of you like a beast marking his territory," he murmured.

Her eyes narrowed lustily as she arched her hips up and ground her cunt against him. When she heard him growl, it turned her on all the more. "You better mark me," she brazenly challenged him, hoping to make him snap, wanting him to unleash on her, "before we have to go deeper into the jung—"

She moaned as he slammed into her, his hips rapidly pistoning back and forth. He growled as he pounded deeply into her flesh, his thrusts possessive and branding.

"*Oh god,*" she groaned, her head falling back and her eyes closing. "*Oh yes.*"

"Mine," he said dangerously, his teeth gritting. "All mine."

He mated her hard then, rocking in and out of her with mind-numbing speed, his muscled buttocks clenching and contracting over and over again as he slammed his cock deep inside of her. She moaned and groaned, her fingernails digging into his arms as she threw her hips back at him, meeting him thrust for thrust, her breasts jiggling beneath him from the hard pummeling.

"*Harder,*" she demanded. "*More.*"

He growled against her ear as he buried himself inside of her, his cock violently rocking in and out of her cunt. He rotated his hips to the left, then quickly to the right, see-sawing back and forth, then slammed forward again and again, causing her body to shake and her moans to grow louder and louder.

Brynda gasped as her eyes flew open, the sound of their flesh smacking together reverberating throughout the hollow walls of the hut's bedchamber. She squeezed her legs around his waist as tightly as she could, holding on with everything she had as he rode her hard.

"Tell me no other male shall ever fuck you," he ground out as he rotated his hips and slammed into her pussy. "*Tell me,*" he growled.

"No other man," she breathed out as she threw her hips back at him, rearing them up to get as much friction against her clit as possible. "*Never,*" she groaned, her eyes closing as she felt an orgasm fast approaching.

The feel of his perspiration-soaked body mounting hers, the feel of his cock slamming possessively into her flesh, the sounds of their mating when their sexes pounded together, the dangerous excitement of being with a man you knew would kill another just for touching you...

Brynda's body instinctually prepared for orgasm, her hips thrashing up madly to meet his deep thrusts. Her head fell back on a low moan, her neck bared to him as he fucked her harder and harder, slamming his cock possessively inside of her, over and over, again and again.

"*Oh god.*"

She broke on a groan, blood rushing to her face to heat it. Her back arched as her nipples stabbed

upwards, and her eyes closed as she rode out the wave of exquisite pleasure.

He moaned as he pounded into her, groaned when he felt her tremors and her pussy began milking his cock for seed. “*Nee’ka*,” he growled, his eyes closing tightly as his teeth gritted. He held her body possessively as he slammed into her once, twice, three times more and—

“*Brynda.*”

He came on a groan that sounded half delirious, his eyes opening on a primal growl as he rode her hard, draining his tight balls of seed. He didn’t stop, took her over and over again, then bellowed as the bridal necklace began to pulse.

Brynda’s eyes widened when the shockwave of sensation hit her, not having realized this was to happen when they mated. She held onto him tightly and rode it out, the mind-numbing release causing her groans to sound hysterical and tortured.

When it was over, when they lay in each other’s arms relaxing from the intense release, Jek grinned at the dumbfounded expression written all over her face.

He raised an eyebrow. “’Twas wicked good, aye?”

She could only gawk at him.

He chuckled. “Think you they have a psychology term for our mating?”

Her teeth clicked shut. She shook her head as if in a daze. “No. But I sure as hell wouldn’t complain if I got that disorder.”

Chapter 11

Meanwhile, back in Sand City...

Naked, Kyra sank into the warm, lulling water of the bathing pool within her bedchamber. She smiled at Giselle who was already in the bathing pool, her three-year-old son Kaliq sitting between her legs while she combed out his hair. “He’s got the sweetest little curls.”

She grinned. “Bloody hellish to work a crystal-comb through, though.”

“Are you taking him with us?”

She shook her head. “No. I’m leaving him here with the rest of the kids now that he’s weaned.”

Kyra’s eyes flicked over the baby, then to the other side of the bathing pool where Zy’an and Zari were giggling and splashing at each other. She sighed. “Gis—”

“You didn’t drag us into anything,” she interrupted without looking up from her work. She nodded definitively. “Marty and I had a choice and we’ve made it.” She glanced up. “Besides, it’s not as if we’ve no manner of protection at all. Those Wani warriors...” She grinned. “Wow.”

Kyra grinned back. “Wow is right.” She nibbled at her lip and glanced away. “Still, I feel a bit guilty.”

“Zari,” Giselle called out, “come get Kalīq from *mani*.” She set the crystal-comb down on the side of the bathing pool and sighed as she looked up at Kyra. “Well don’t. Dari and Jana are my nieces too—Marty’s as well. And if we can help your sister whilst we find them, then even better.”

“I hope we find her,” Kyra murmured, her gaze far away. “I don’t know why I’m supposed to go find her, only that I am.” She climbed up on a soft gel-rock and laid down on her belly, careful of her engorged breasts by propping up on her elbows.

Giselle kissed the baby on top of his head before handing him over to his big sister and cousin. Zari and Zy’an waded with him to the other side of the bathing pool and put him in the Trystonni version of a floatie toy. They giggled as he grinned and splashed the water up and down, his feet energetically flailing beneath him.

Just then Marty strolled in, an arrogant smirk on her face. She quickly discarded her *qi’ka* and waded into the water, stopping next to the soft rock Kyra was lounging on. She frowned down at her breasts, muttering something about gigantic floating apples.

“Well?” Kyra asked.

Marty grinned. “Well, my dears, I just spoke with Jor and we’re all set.”

Kyra bit on her lip. “Shit, I feel so guilty lying to my son.”

“Which is why you didn’t and I did.”

She snorted at that. “And? What did he say?”

“All three of us are permitted to visit Morak, provided our guards escort us.” An eyebrow shot up. “Our ‘guards’ that day will be, of course, Tulip, Gardinia, and Flora.”

Kyra blew out a breath. “Good job,” she murmured. “I just hope Jor doesn’t get in trouble with the big oaf if we get caught.”

“He won’t.” Marty waved that way. “We’ll think of something. Kil always accuses me of being manipulative and wily, so in this case I’ll just have to make sure I am.”

“And Geris?” Giselle inquired. “Have you spoken with her yet today? Has she figured out a way to get away from Dar and meet us at the rendezvous point?”

“Yep. I told you, we’re all set.” Marty grinned. “This is so fucking groovy.”

Giselle’s lips curled upward. “Kinda like *Thelma & Louise* except, you know, there’s like four of us.” At Marty’s baffled look, she waved a hand dismissively. “Never mind. Forgot it was after your time.”

“Subverting the dominant paradigm,” Marty said nostalgically as she climbed up on the gel-rock next to Kyra. “Too bad we don’t have a doobie to take with us.”

Kyra chuckled. "Maybe not, but Death sent over some moonshine *matpow* a while back." She wiggled her eyebrows. "I've been saving it for the right occasion."

"Far out." Marty grinned as she laid back. "Bring it on, sister."

* * * * *

Zara clamped her hands over her ears, the mental call of the lesser male driving her daft. For a fortnight he had been calling her thusly, and every moon-rising became harder than the next to resist the lure of visiting the Pit of Captives.

She wanted him.

Fiercely. Possessively. Mayhap insanely.

But there was...something not quite right about him, something too foreign about the idea of mating him.

Something that warned her 'twould change her fate forever did she mount him.

Zara rolled over onto her back upon the raised bed and began frantically massaging her pussy, the need for completion greater than the need for breath.

She groaned. For a certainty something was not right.

Chapter 12

"Khan-Gor?" Jek bellowed. "Do you take me for a fool, old man?"

The leader of the Mantus hoard growled low in his throat as he surged up to his feet, his muscles clenching. He and Jek locked eyes. "I have been called many things in my life, warlord, but liar was never amongst them."

"That planet is naught but a fable," Jek hissed, his words precise.

"He speaks the truth, Lord Q'an Ri," Lieutenant Zaab said from behind him. He shrugged when Jek turned to look at him. "Or mayhap at least in so far as he knows it."

Jek sighed. He had come to trust the judgment of Zaab this past fortnight they'd been trekking through the treacherous highland jungle together. The lieutenant had taken it upon himself to serve as both guide and bodyguard to their traveling party. When first Zaab had made the offer Jek had been insulted, assuming the lieutenant was trying to defame his warring skills in the witness of his *nee'ka*. But the gorilla fighter had assured him that wasn't the case and he meant only to aid him.

In the end Jek had agreed, thinking 'twas probably best to have a male familiar with the jungle counted amongst their numbers. Leastways, he had been correct on that score for the rugged highland terrain was filled with predators the likes of which none of the warriors had ever heard tell of. Zaab had

proven invaluable. Not to mention trustworthy.

He pinched the bridge of his nose for an indecisive moment then turned back to General Kwall. "These Brekkons you captured," he said on a sigh. "They claimed to have seen two royal wenches?"

"Nay."

Jek's brow furrowed. "Then..."

"They claimed to have seen one royal wench, accompanied by a female below her in rank." The general sat back down, a naked slave girl resuming her massage of his shoulders when he did. "An onyx-skinned lass with the eyes of your lineage..."

Jek stilled.

"...accompanied by a lass with hair of fire." He waved a dismissive hand. "The eyes of the fiery-headed wench did not signify a royal lineage."

"Did the Brekkons mention a royal lass who is golden both of hair and body?" Zaab inquired of the general as he strolled over to stand before him, asking the question he knew would be put to the old man anyway.

General Kwall scratched his chin as he thought that over for a moment. "Nay. Only a male."

Jek sighed. 'Twas best if Gio was not told as much for he knew the warlord carried about the hope that the male had been long removed from Dari's presence. "And these Brekkons were able to convince my cousin of the existence of Khan-Gor?" He sighed and shook his head. "Dari is either panicked of being caught or the Brekkons speak an untruth of her," he muttered under his breath to Zaab.

"General," Lieutenant Zaab intoned, "my friend here assures me that the princess is not a lass easily fooled. What proof did the Brekkons offer unto her? Were you told?"

"Nay," the old gorilla fighter sighed as he accepted a chalice of hallucinogenic brew from a slave girl. He nuzzled her large breasts, waiting for her to giggle before turning back to face them. "If 'tis that important for you to know, then ask them yourselves."

Jek nodded. "You've my thanks. I'll hunt them in Brekka and get them to talk."

The general chuckled. "Not necessary, that." At Jek's raised eyebrow, he waved a hand toward the hut's door. "My prisoners still hang in the cage, warlord. You may interrogate them at your convenience."

Jek didn't wait to hear more. He turned on his boot heel and strode briskly from the hut, Yar'at and Zaab bringing up the rear.

"Now then," General Kwall said as he pulled the naked slave closer to him. "Mmm," he growled, "what young, stiff nipples you have, lass." He used his rough tongue to lick them thoroughly. "Now," he said arrogantly, "put my thick gorilla cock inside of your tight little human cunt."

* * * * *

Brynda swallowed nervously as their party made its way through the eerie Dementian jungle. She yelped when a carnivorous bug landed upon Jek's arm and stabbed him, her hand flying up to cover her mouth when her husband hit it with such force that it exploded, bursting like a blood-filled balloon. "That was just so gross," she mumbled from beneath her hand.

He sighed and took her hand, rethreading their fingers together. "One more fortnight and we'll be on our way home."

Her wide eyes tracked the slow movement of a predatorial vine. It curled itself around a low-hanging branch, then relaxed, as if preparing to sleep. Or to watch. "Two weeks can't come soon enough," she muttered.

* * * * *

Groggy with sleep, Brynda's brow furrowed in confusion as she woke up in the middle of the night to the feeling of being gagged.

Her eyes flew open. Her heart began palpitating rapidly.

There's nobody here, she thought, dumbfounded. *Am I dreaming or—*

A vine wrapped itself around her leg, shocking her. Another vine lassoed her arms, tying her wrists together above her head.

A hysterical scream bubbled up in her throat, desperate to erupt but unable to do so. The gag, she realized in dawning horror, was part of the vine itself. Her body shook and her head thrashed from side to side as she tried to scream, tried to wake up the husband who was asleep beside her.

Please wake up, Jek! she mentally screamed. *Please!*

She turned her head and her eyes widened in shock when, a moment later, a tiny spike within the vine shot into her thigh, injected her with some sort of substance, then retreated back inside of the plant just as quickly as it had emerged.

I'm being drugged, she thought hysterically. *Oh god I'm...*

Brynda smiled dreamily, the need to giggle overcoming her, as the hallucinogenic properties of the plant's drug took effect. She closed her eyes and slept blissfully, not even aware when the vines dragged her out of the animal hide tent and into the heart of the jungle.

Chapter 13

Meanwhile, in the far reaches of Zyrus Galaxy...

Kari Gy'at Li, nee Kara Summers, narrowed her gaze at the gigantic ice-coated planet that seemed

as if it was taking forever to reach. She sighed as she switched the gastrolight cruiser onto auto-pilot, then settled back in her seat. "It looks a lot closer than it is," she announced in a monotone. "It'll be days still before we reach its perimeter if the holo-reading is correct," she said tiredly.

Princess Dari Q'ana Tal nodded to her companion. She turned her head to the front, her gaze absently flicking over the planet Khan-Gor. "Rest whilst you can," she murmured. "I've the feeling it shan't last."

Kari turned her head, her eyes studying Dari's profile. She was silent for a long moment, just simply stared at her, but then she murmured, "tell me about him."

Dari stiffened, knowing precisely who she meant. "There's naught to tell of Gio," she said quietly.

Kari snorted. "Don't give me that." At the princess' sigh she said, "Come on, Dari. You tell me your story and I'll tell you mine."

Dari turned her head long enough to grin at her. "Ah. Like two warriors of old reminiscing on battles won and lost."

"Something like that," she said on a smile. She was quiet for a moment, then gently prodded her again. "We don't know what's going to happen down there. One of us could die or all of us could die," she said softly. "Let's at least face the unknown as friends."

Dari's wary gaze darted toward her. "I keep you in the dark not out of disrespect, Kari, but—"

"I know." Kari smiled. "And thank you for trying. But I'm too entangled to back out now."

The women sat in silence for a long moment, the only sound the dull whirl of the gastrolight cruiser's auto-pilot navigation system. Kari had almost drifted off to sleep when Dari whispered, "where should I begin?"

Kari opened her eyes slowly and smiled. "At the beginning."

Chapter 14

Brynda awoke slowly, her mind in a daze, as if everything around her was taking place on a surreal plain. It was the middle of the night. It was frigidly cold. And yet she felt warm and bubbly and...aroused.

The vines. The vines were—

Her eyes widened when it occurred to her that her clit was being licked.

She closed her eyes on a groan, not needing to look down her body to know that somehow it was the plants doing this to her. Her mind was hazy, so incredibly dazed...

"Beware of the vines, lass," Lieutenant Zaab had warned her. "They feed upon the juice of wenches."

She swallowed nervously. "They drink their blood?"

"Nay." He chuckled, his gaze raking over her naked body. "'Tis the intoxicating juice of the cunt they crave."

She blushed, but grinned. "That doesn't sound so bad..."

"Nay, lass." Zaab shook his head, his expression serious. "Between the amount of juice they take and the hallucinogens they feed to you..." He sighed. "Let us just say 'tis the method with which my people break human slaves to our bidding." His eyes trailed down to where Jek was possessively rubbing her pussy, her husband having commanded her to spread her thighs wide so the gorilla males could easily smell his scent upon her. "The vines can drive you daft."

Brynda glanced down her body, visually confirming the gorilla fighter's words as the truth. Two vines were wrapped around her, pinning her spread eagle to the jungle's floor, one of the vine's flowers clamped around her clit, suctioning it into a peak of delirious arousal.

She groaned from behind the plant-gag, unable to move, unable to do anything besides lay there and submit with her thighs spread wide open and her arms thrust up over her head.

Her eyes rolled back into her head and her back arched as the suctioning mouth of the flower drew harder from her. She came on a low moan, her nipples stabbing up into the frigid nighttime air, then groaned when two flower-mouths clamped onto them and suckled vigorously.

She whimpered from behind the gag, another orgasm fast approaching.

The flower bud working on her clit drew harder still, sucking and sucking and sucking and—

She burst on another groan, her body shaking as she came violently, the beautiful red bud soaking up her cunt juice while the two pink buds that were clamped around her stiff nipples suckled them harder still.

"It only gets worse," Zaab murmured, his erection obvious as he watched Brynda's body convulsively orgasm around Jek's cock. Jek had placed her on his lap, her back to his chest, and bade her to ride him in front of the gorilla fighters that they might be given proof of his claims of ownership according to their own customs. Her tits jiggled as she groaned and rode him.

"The more cunt juice you give the vines, lass, the more they will crave of you." He growled as two slave girls began to suck him off. They took turns pleasuring him, one sucking his staff while the other one suckled his tight balls. "Day and night, unrelenting in their passion..."

He spurted on a loud, reverberating growl.

"...drinking of your witch's brew until you've been driven insane..."

Brynda's body shook violently as she came harder than she had the last time. By this point her system had been pumped full of too much hallucinogen to experience panic, but oddly enough, knowing that she should have felt panic but didn't somehow served to panic her.

The flowers of the vines continued their assault, suckling harder and harder still, making her burst and groan and moan, over and over, again and again.

It kept up for three more hours. Three mind-numbing, unrelenting, violently orgasmic hours.

By the time Jek found her, by the time he'd killed the vines and unwrapped their limp fibers from around her body, Brynda's eyes were wild, her body shaking, her mind splintered from the combined effect of hallucinogen and climaxes.

"'Tis best do I mount you," Jek gently assured her as he plunged his stiff cock into her cunt. His teeth gritted. "My cock will make you feel better, *nee'ka*."

Brynda whimpered as he fucked her long and hard, her mind half-crazed, not altogether certain what was happening. All she knew for sure was that she needed his cock buried inside of, knew too that her husband was in a great deal of pain for he refused to orgasm lest he set her bridal necklace off.

"Why," she whispered weakly, the world around her fuzzy and skewed. She could focus on nothing, see no one, so she concentrated on her Sacred Mate's voice and the cock he was ramming inside of her.

"Zaab says the vines pumped you full of aphrodisiac," he ground out, his eyes closed as he fucked her harder, his cock slamming into her cunt again and again. "'Tis how they break the slaves, making them ravenous for cock."

He rotated his hips and plunged deeper, her soft moans telling him he was giving her the proper amount of gentle release without allowing her too much. "You must allow yourself as much gentle release as you need, *ty'ka*," he said hoarsely. "Know that I will not send you to your madness by allowing you too much."

His words made no sense to her. Nothing made sense to her. She only knew that she felt good, that she needed to keep feeling his thick cock plunging into her, that she needed the friction.

He fucked her for what felt like hours and probably was, giving her warm and fuzzy releases that served to calm her. She moaned and she groaned as the cock she so desperately craved fucked her, ramming into her cunt over and over, again and again.

Surrealistic—like a dream-state.

When it was finally over, when she was weak and exhausted but momentarily feeling rational and sane, Jek lifted her up into his heavily muscled arms and carried her from the jungle, determined not to stop until the gastrolight cruiser could be seen in the distance.

* * * * *

The hallucinogens had long since worn off, but it had taken two days of constant sex before she'd felt completely calm and normal again. The deep impalements Jek gave her had worked for no more than an hour at a time when she'd feel desperate and crazed again, needing to be relieved.

But now it was over.

Brynda stared out of the porthole as the cruiser lurched upward, waving goodbye to Lieutenant Zaab and General Zaqari. Odd as it sounded considering what had happened to her in the jungle, she

was going to miss Dementia. And the Dementians.

"I've a feeling we'll see them again," Jek murmured in the way of comfort as he too waved goodbye.

She smiled. "I hope so," she said softly, watching as the gorilla hunters disappeared into the jungle. She glanced up at Jek. "If it wasn't for Zaab's near challenge I'd still be waiting to make love to you."

He chuckled as he planted a kiss atop her hair. "Mayhap," he said. "But I doubt it."

Chapter 15

Jek frowned, his brow furrowed. "For a certainty I cannot understand why you are sulking." He grunted as he threw a hand toward her, watching from the gel-rock he lounged upon as she combed out her hair in their bedchamber bathing pool. "Leastways, 'tis o'er. You are healed. You have cheated death." His look was perplexed. "Why the sadness?"

Brynda sighed as she set down the comb. "You don't get it? You really don't get it?"

"Nay," he said as if speaking to a dimwit, "I do not."

She waded toward him in the lulling water. When she reached the gel-rock she propped her elbows onto it and plopped her chin down onto her hands. "Me neither," she admitted.

Jek snorted. "Ah, at least 'tis good sense you are making, *nee 'ka* ." He bent his neck and kissed the tip of her nose.

She smiled. "I guess it was just so...so..."

"So what, Bryn?"

"So...anticlimactic." She sighed. "I've been fighting this disease for years and years. I was so sick, in fact, that I would have died within a few months had you not shown up and whisked me away."

"Ah." He nodded. "I see what you mean."

She groaned. "I know I'm being ridiculous! I mean, the point is I'm alive and well and scheduled to live for oodles and oodles of years, but..."

"...but," Jek finished for her, "you mayhap wanted a bit more of a dramatic healing than Ari waving a hand at you and announcing 'twas done."

"Exactly!" Brynda's lips pinched together in a frown. "Damn, I'm a moron."

He chuckled, bending his neck to kiss the tip of her nose again. "But 'tis my moron you are, Lady Q'ana Ri."

She playfully slapped his chest, grinning up at him. "Gee thanks."

He held her hand against his chest, then growled when he felt her other hand wrap around his erection. "'Tis gel-fire you play with, vixen."

She chuckled as their lips met, smiling as they performed a little tongue duel. She ground her hand against his swollen cock, loving it when he hissed in response. "Please," she teased, "split me asunder anon, big boy."

Jek grinned as he raised his head. He wiggled his eyebrows. "'Tis wicked big, aye?"

She rolled her eyes. "What an ego." She grinned. "But yeah, it is."

His smile faded as his expression grew serious. "You know something, Bryn?"

"Hm?" She smiled.

"I think you were healed," he admitted, "before ever you had an audience with Ari."

Her brow wrinkled. "I don't understand..."

"Aye you do," he murmured.

She thought about that for a moment. "Because I let myself believe?"

Jek nodded. "The mind is quite a powerful ally. Leastways, you have seen what I can do with mine."

She inclined her head, conceding the point. "I think you may be right," she said on a smile.

"'Twas either that or..." Jek grinned, the teasing light back in his eye as he grabbed his manhood by the base. "Or 'twas this wicked big cock."

Brynda laughed, realizing as she did that he was trying to keep her mood light. The past no longer mattered. Old battles no longer mattered. Only the present and the future were of importance now. "By the way, what happened to all those hatchlings you promised me?"

Jek plucked her out of the water, causing her to yelp, then set her astride him that her legs straddled his hips. "I've the feeling you will get with my *pani* this very moon-rising, my hearts." He wiggled his eyebrows. "Best grab the recorder, Bryn. I've a feeling 'tis a holo-cam moment."

She chuckled as she enveloped his cock inside of her, then grinned when the slow undulation of her hips made him growl.

And later, when the belly flutters began, she would learn that he had been correct.

It *had* been a holo-cam moment.

Epilogue

Chained to a narrow raised bed, Vador commanded himself to move not a muscle whilst the

fiery-headed High Princess walked slowly towards him, her expression defeated. He had felt her distress on each occasion that she had disobeyed his mental summons, and verily, it had taken its toll.

She looked tired. Tired and weak and defeated.

“What do you want of me?” she brokenly whispered.

Weak—far too weak. He should have forced his will upon her days ago, weeks ago.

She stood before him naked, not having bothered to don the customary dress of her people, for verily she must have known he would only remove it anyway.

When one of his chained hands rose up and his thumb began to massage her erect nipple, she shuddered breathily, no longer trying to shield herself from him for she had to have realized by now ‘twould do her no good.

His jade-green gaze found her glowing blue one. One side of his mouth kicked up, displaying his fangs. “Everything,” he purred.

* * * * *

Yar’at tried to keep his attention on what was being said unto him by the High King Jor Q’an Tal. He had trekked into Sand City to the Palace of the Dunes this moon-rising to report his third dimension mission under High Lord Jek Q’an Ri unto Tryston’s ruler. And yet, try as he might to focus on the High King, ‘twas to the beautiful fiery-headed wench standing quietly behind him that he found his gaze continually straying toward.

He could tell from Jor’s stance that the High King was fiercely protective of his elder sister, for he kept her securely a foot behind him, shielding her from the need to speak with others.

Yar’at had heard whispers of Zora Q’ana Tal’s beauty and he could see for himself that they were true. But he had also heard cruel jests spoken of her name because she was so different from other wenches. ‘Twas said she wasn’t given to flirting with the warriors and from what he’d heard amongst rumormongers ‘twas also said she rarely even spoke to any of them save the males of her lineage.

And yet he found her shy gaze constantly straying to meet his...

Yar’at forcibly clamped down on the emotions he felt, telling himself he was delusional if ever he thought the eldest daughter of the Emperor Himself would have a care for his affection. ‘Twas ridiculous in the extreme to even hope, let alone to test her.

And so with heavy hearts he prepared to leave the Palace of the Dunes after his verbal report was complete. When the High King finished handing out his instructions, Yar’at’s gaze strayed one last time to clash with Zora’s. He inclined his head respectfully to her, garnering him a wide-eyed expression and a sincere smile that did more to his hearts than he wished it did.

Yar’at turned on his boot heel and walked briskly from the dining hall lest he do something foolish that would cause others to make more jest of him—such as test the eldest hatchling of the Emperor for the ability to mate with him.

He would that it could be true.

But he was slow of the tongue, he reminded himself.

And if ever the High Princess had heard the rumormongers speak of him, she would also believe him to be slow of the mind.

* * * * *

“The beginning,” Dari sighed, her head arched back on the seat’s *vesha* -pad. She absently watched as the legendary planet Khan-Gor loomed closer and closer in the encroaching horizon. “Tis hard to decide just where and when it all started.”

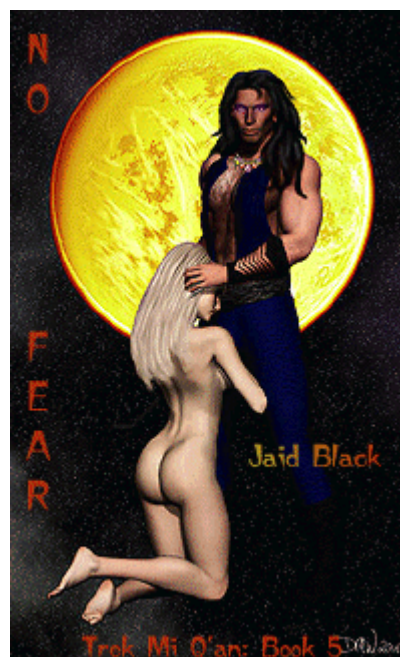
A *vesha* hide wrapped around her, Kari laid her head on the padding of the pilot seat and smiled. “How old were you when you were sent to live with Gio on Arak?” she murmured.

Dari glanced over to her. “Fourteen.”

Kari nodded. She was silent for a moment and then, “and how old were you when you fell in love with him?”

Dari’s eyes widened. She smiled softly as she looked away, staring out into the night. “Fourteen and a day,” she whispered. “Fourteen and a day.”

* * * * *



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