

CHAOS

A movie poster for the film "Chaos". At the top, the word "CHAOS" is written in a large, stylized, metallic font with a fiery, orange and yellow texture. Below the title, a woman with dark, curly hair, wearing a long, flowing blue and white dress, stands with her arms outstretched. She is looking upwards. To her left and right are two large brown bears. The background is a dark, smoky, and cloudy sky with some jagged, dark rock formations or structures. The overall tone is dramatic and mysterious.

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Zora is an exploration expert. She can assess the biology of new worlds and determine what kind of an impact colonization will make. General Carser and Captain Wayk have been assigned to help her, and the Oefric multi-shifters are ready, willing and able to help. The planet they were on was supposed to be inactive, but they wake the consciousness and it wants to interact in the worst way. Zora gives her body to her companions and to her surprise, she gives her mind to the planet under her. The planet used underhanded methods, but Zora couldn't fault the bait she used.

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Chaos

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CHAOS
A TERRAN TIMES NOVELLA

BY

VIOLA GRACE

CHAPTER ONE

Zora Berger fidgeted as she waited for the other half of her exploratory team to arrive. She hadn't worked with the Oefric before, but they were in search of a new colony world and that meant an exploration.

Zora was an experienced biological-assessment officer. Her skills had been useful on nine worlds to determine safe crops and livestock that could be had from those indigenous to the planets. Once the Alliance confirmed that a planet was not sentient or that it had no intelligent life in any form, the planet was cleared for habitation.

At that point, Zora went down with a team and did a final check that included assessments of seasons and migratory patterns. When she okayed a planet for occupation, it was good to go. She had never had a problem with any of her worlds.

Being requested by the Oefric high command to assess their newest planet was a huge responsibility. They were an old race that was coming back to the Alliance, along with a few

others. Her assignment officer had been delighted and agreed before Zora had even returned from a friend's wedding.

Now, Zora was fidgeting while waiting for two members of a race that she had only heard about in whispered rumours. She hated waiting at the best of times. This was almost intolerable. She was on an Alliance warship and the small shuttle was loaded and ready to drop as soon as her tardy companions showed up.

She was pacing when the com chirped and a diffident voice came through. "Officer Berger? Your party has just docked and they are requesting that you use their shuttle for the drop."

She stifled a snarl of frustration. "Where are they?"

"Bay fifteen, next to your shuttle. What is your response?"

"I will deliver it directly. I am on my way to the shuttles. Don't warn them I am coming."

The small *beep* from the com was the last thing she heard as she stormed out of the door and down the halls. Crewmembers slammed up against the wall as she glowered her way to the shuttle bay.

She had an audible growl in her throat as she gave her credentials to the security officer. He passed her through and she continued her angry stalk down the aisle to her shuttle. The gleaming shuttle next to hers was the height of technology,

but it didn't have the equipment and lab that she needed.

She stomped up to their shuttle and pounded on the door. "Oy, Oefric. We need to have a talk."

Zora stood back as the door opened and the stairs descended.

Two men emerged and she had to stomp on her hormones ruthlessly. She had seen gorgeous men before. Interest in Terrans was usually fleeting. She was more of a novelty notch in the bedpost to most of them.

She crossed her arms and scowled at their ridiculously handsome faces. "Which one of you thinks it is a better idea to take your shuttle? Mine has all the equipment I need to run the scans *your* people want."

"I am General Carser, this is Captain Wayk. We will move your equipment and supplies for you. Our shuttle is superior to yours and is faster as well."

"Two hours late? Tell me how it's faster. Were you doing each other's hair?" Her hostility made them both wince.

They both had dark brown hair and what Zora would classify as tanned skin, but Carser's eyes were dark brown and Wayk's were a bright green. Each of them had strange pupils, but she couldn't pinpoint the animal they reminded her of. She only knew they didn't look quite human.

"I understand your irritation, but there was a delay at the jump point. We had to wait until there was a ship that could transport us." The general was walking toward her shuttle and she stomped along with the captain behind her.

Her palm was all the key she needed and as she entered the shuttle, they were on her heels, making the space seem tiny. Reluctantly, she could see their point. She was five ten, but they had to be over six and a half feet tall. Her shuttle was about a third of the size of theirs. Silently, she started to haul the instruments out and they loaded their arms and disappeared with her treasures.

They kept the unloading process going at a remarkable pace, but eventually, they had cleaned out the interior of her exploration vehicle, right down to her personal recorder and her duffel.

Sighing, she sealed the shuttle and walked to the com station. "Flight control?"

"Yes, this is flight control."

"This is Bio-assessment Officer Zora Berger. I am leaving with the Oefric contingent and leaving my exploration shuttle behind. Acknowledge."

"Acknowledged. We will keep it safe for you, Officer Berger."

"Thank you." She grunted to herself as she stomped back to the Oefric shuttle and marched into their home base.

Her temper was frayed by waiting and she

knew that she should be calmer and more relaxed with her hosts, but she just couldn't stop being grumpy. It was her defining characteristic.

A hair-trigger temper had not always been part of her makeup, but since leaving her friends and family back on Earth, she had begun to feel the strain of being a woman without a home world she could go back to.

"Please have a seat, Officer Berger. We will leave for Pakrik as soon as we get clearance." General Carser gave the order in a polite tone. His low voice rumbled over her nerves, soothing her.

She shook her head to clear the hypnotic effect and took one of the seats in the four-person cockpit. The captain was at the navigator station and he was entering coordinates as well as running the pre-flight checks.

The general ran through the details of the flight with flight control as well as a pick-up schedule for seven days later. If there were any delays or emergencies, a beacon would be relaying the information that the other party needed to receive.

Zora tried to remain as calm as she could, but still gripped the armrests tightly as the shuttle lifted from the hangar floor, gliding soundlessly to the launch tunnel. The colour-coded count down made her breath come faster and before it keyed them for launch, she was almost hyperventilating.

She was pressed back in her seat as the shuttle

was pushed out of the warship by a magnetic pulse and she held tightly to the seat as her consciousness faded.

Waking on the bunk was embarrassing, having the Oefric watching her in concern was worse. "How long was I out?"

She tried to sit up, but Captain Wayk held her down. "You passed out, Officer Berger. Wait until I complete my scans."

"Wayk is also our medical officer while we are checking on the surface. Bear with him." The general was visible behind Wayk's shoulder and he was looking at her with concern.

"Based on the elevation in blood pressure as well as the chemical traces of adrenaline, you had a massive panic attack. Why would you be nervous? Based on your history, you travel frequently in space."

Wayk was looking at her with those serious leaf green eyes and she blurted out the truth. "I have to be the one at the controls. I was kidnapped once for a few days and ever since then, I have been afraid of not being pilot-in-command."

The men blinked at her in surprise.

The general frowned. "That was not in your file."

"I know. It happened while I was on a vacation. My friends came to get me, but it stuck in my mind

that if I had been free to take the controls, I could have escaped. Ever since that day, I have always been able to weasel my way into the pilot's chair."

She sat up to find them in orbit around the candidate planet, Pakrik. "I am sorry to have inconvenienced you. Thank you for your assistance."

There was nothing like vulnerability to take the wind out of her irritation.

The men looked at each other and nodded. "Would you like to take us down to the surface? The controls could use a woman's touch."

She fought the sob of relief that formed in her chest. She let Wayk help her to her feet and smiled. "I would be happy to."

Behind the controls, she dashed away the tear that got away and set the course selected by the Oefric command to the colony site. With only a few keystrokes, she had her trajectory and moved them efficiently through the sky of the world that would soon belong to the multi-shifters and those they invited to live among them.

Just a few more years of service and Zora would be able to obtain a home of her own on a distant world. A silent home where she would be able to live her life in the wilderness with no one to matter or miss her. She sighed silently. Better for her peace of mind just to get on with the job.

CHAPTER TWO

"I have to say, Officer Berger, that was one of the best landings I have experienced." Captain Wayk's tone was admiring.

"You may call me Zora. Using titles for a whole week would be tiresome, Captain." She grinned as he blinked in confusion.

Down on the surface, her demeanour changed. The bear in her became a playful cub. It was peculiar, but walking on an actual world made her happy. The dark thoughts and fears of the past faded with the possibilities held by each new world.

Everything here was bright and new. No intelligent being had set foot here before and she was part of the first team to run the landscape.

"Is there a temperature reading?"

Wayk took the reading and frowned. "Below freezing. We have arrived in winter it seems."

"We are also at a high altitude. Your elders wanted a city in the mountains, so that is where we

are." She chuckled and released the harness on the seat. Without ceremony, she dug through the boxes and bags they had loaded.

Carser was looking at her with a curious glance. "What are you looking for?"

"Cold-weather gear. I can't shift into something fluffy, so I have to wear thermals." She found her duffel and crowed in triumph.

"Zora, I can't help but notice your demeanour has shifted." Carser was frowning, the divot between his eyes showing his confusion.

"I apologize for my beastly behaviour on the shuttle and the ship. I always feel better with a planet underfoot. I have no idea why. I don't know if it is the gravity, the wind, the energy in the living things, but I do feel better."

Wayk smiled. "Glad to hear it. Do you mind if we accompany you in other forms? You will have to carry our clothing."

She chuckled. "I will be wearing a pack. I can take a few pairs of clothing and boots with me."

As soon as she said it, they began to disrobe. Before she could do more than blink in astonishment at the rush of lust that filled her at their lean and muscled physiques, they were out the door and animal noises were coming from the snow outside.

Zora grabbed her pack and went through her practiced checklist—monitors, scanners, rations,

water, a change of clothing and dry socks. She folded the clothing of Carser and Wayk and tucked it into her pack, stomped into her cold-weather suit and boots and joined the men outside. Whatever she thought their preferred forms was, it was not the two huge bears that were frolicking in the snow.

She covered her mouth with her hand and stifled a laugh. Zora was a bear off planet. They were bears on it.

She checked her scans and started for the nearest-recorded water source. "I am heading for water. If you want to come with me, feel free. If you want to continue chasing snowflakes, by all means, do so."

The bears grunted and shook themselves before falling into step beside her. Each one's shoulders reached her own as she led them from the shuttle and into the wilds of Pakrik.

Zora felt like a surreal goldilocks with her two bears. The forest moved and swished around them, wind whipping the trees into a swaying chorus. She kept her hood up and her eyes on the display, tracking the water table under the surface to the spring.

Zora didn't bother trying to talk. Her early life on the prairies of Earth gave her a practicality about weather. Wind this cold would make any attempts at speech a stuttering mess.

The bears on either side of her provided a windbreak. Carser was slightly in the lead, so when he stopped, she saw him. Wayk froze as well, his hackles rising.

Balls. She switched scanners and saw a gathering of predators. Similar to wolves, the beasts were hunting the strangers. She dropped her mittens onto their cords and pulled stunners from her belt. Her fingers were rapidly getting icy, but if it kept her alive, she could warm them later.

Carser *whuffed* and Wayk turned to face their attackers. Zora watched the rear and checked her charges.

The beasts emerged from the dark of the forest and Zora had to concur with the assessments. They looked like wolves. Scrawny wolves.

She fought her talent as it tried to run a diagnostic on the animals. She knew that they were thin due to lack of food, but at this point, she didn't really care if it was environmental or because their prey had gotten smarter.

She could analyze it later. Right now, she was worried about surviving the assessment phase. The bears behind her were snarling and roaring, but only half of the wolves yelped and ran. The tougher ones stayed to attack.

Zora shot a few with her stunner, but one managed to grab her arm. A huge furry paw shattered its skull a second after she cried out.

Wayk roared at the few wolves that were left on her side and they ran. Pain was radiating in waves and she fell to her knees.

Zora raised her face to the sky and instead of the clear blue with occasional clouds, a roiling dark was covering the skyline. She knew those clouds. This was not going to be good.

"We have to get to shelter. A storm is coming. Can we make it to the shuttle in an hour?" She sheepishly realized that she hadn't been paying attention to how far they had travelled.

Blood splashed her white suit where the teeth had ripped through the fabric and into the flesh of her left arm. It was freezing rapidly, which would slow the bleeding, but that much blood wasn't good.

Carser nudged her to her feet.

Wayk shoved her up onto the general's back.

She weakly gripped his fur with her left hand and clung for her life with her right. Her legs straddled him in an untidy sprawl, but he began to run in a rocking gait and she stopped worrying about how she looked and focussed on hanging on.

The world around her suddenly got darker and the wind ceased pushing her off Carser's back. Hands pulled her off instead.

"Come on, Zora, let go."

Wayk's voice was determined and he pried her hands free of Carser's fur. The moment she was

loose, Carser shifted into a dimly lit collection of hard muscle and flesh. She wished she had more inclination to watch the men move around her without their clothes, but the pulse in her arm was distracting.

"There are emergency supplies in my kit. Flares, medical that kind of thing." She bit her lip as Carser slid the pack off her back and over her mangled arm. "I am so sorry I got bit. Really."

Wayk gave her a serious look. "It wasn't your fault, now relax, I have to expose the bite."

She smiled weakly. "Good luck. I am wearing three layers."

He smiled back. "I am up to the challenge."

With deft movements, Wayk removed her outer suit, then her thermal barrier and finally her ship suit. She was naked from the waist up and no one even cared.

She shivered in the cold air, her nipples formed tight points and her skin roughened with the temperature. "I don't suppose a fire is on the to-do list? I don't have whatever insulating powers you Oefric seem to."

Wayk smiled. "Carser is working on it. Those canine teeth are exceptionally sharp, aren't they?"

She took a deep breath as he turned her arm to examine it in the light of the white curtain of snow. "Excellent. Unfortunately, they are an important part of the balanced ecosystem. Mind you, the

Oefric engage in hunts, right?"

"We do."

"Then you will be replacing them as alpha predators, kill 'em all." She winced as he examined a flap of skin that had torn loose.

"I will need to wash your arm before I start working on it. I can scent water further down the cave. Come with me and we will get you cleaned up before I put you back together." He kept up polite chatter as he lifted her in his arms and carried her into the darkness.

"Are you sure there is water?" She cradled her arm against her chest and tried not to concentrate on the pain.

"Positive. If there is one thing our shifted senses can tell us, it is where to eat and where to drink. This water smells sweet and wholesome."

"Wonderful. I am thirsty already." She smiled and enjoyed the feel of her naked back against his arm. The pain in her arm was a dull throbbing in the back of her mind, but she worked very hard at pushing it aside with a flickering of lust.

It didn't work, but it was fun to try.

CHAPTER THREE

Phosphorescence lit the interior of the cave, a slow dawn in the darkness. Carser had a fire going behind them and it threw the sparkling water into a glittering frenzy.

"It's very pretty." Zora was shaking with cold.

"Shush. You need care. Hold still." Wayk lowered her to the floor and supported her arm as he dipped it in the water.

She watched the crimson of her blood swirl away into the depths and her skin became visible, it was slowly cleansed in the lightly lapping waves. The water felt warm on her flesh and for water that clear, it was unusual. "Where is my scanner?"

"Back with your pack. Why?" Wayk lifted her arm and nodded to himself.

Carser brought the med kit with him and stroked her hair, the black curls springing under his palm. "How are you, Zora?"

"Fine, a little weak. Why aren't there any animal

dens in this cave?" Something was wrong, her senses were on alert and her talent was trying to fight her for control.

"I don't know. It is completely clean though, a safe place to stay."

Zora knew that Carser was trying to distract her and considering that she was looking directly at his semi-hard shaft, it was working. Being eye-to-cock with a man was not something she was used to, but when he reached to hold her still, it brushed against her ribs and kept her mind off the cauterization that Wayk was engaging in.

She kept her gaze locked with Carser's while Wayk sealed her flesh and when he wrapped it lightly, she blinked and blushed. "Pardon the staring contest."

She wanted to drop her gaze, but it really wasn't safe for her peace of mind.

"We will dress if you would like. Or we can shift into our other forms to block the wind. Whatever you prefer."

"I will leave you to do what you will. This will be your planet, so begin as you mean to go on." She smiled and simply closed her eyes before turning her head toward the pool. Something about the pool made her talent surge to the fore. It was bizarre. She was reacting as if it was a living being, part of the ecosystem and not a body of water.

Zora started to shiver and Wayk packed up the kit while Carser lifted her, bringing her back toward the entrance. A cheerful fire with her survival lamp gave bright illumination. Her bedroll was out and near the fire, her pillow and stuffed teddy bear arranged for her.

"Ah, so you saw him."

"Your toy? Yes. He is very charming. We had a lovely conversation." Carser's voice was serious.

"I was only allowed to bring two kilos of items from home, so my friends gave him to me on my last day on Earth. He was the lightest bear they could find for the biggest size." She was blushing. There was no way to get into her bedroll with her outer layers on and she wasn't sure that she could manage to strip them off so she would fit.

"He reminds me of Wayk, but with different-coloured eyes." Carser grinned and set her down on the makeshift bed. He immediately started removing her boots and she tried to pull her foot back.

"I can do that."

"Not without reopening your wound. Humour us and let us tend you so that we can resume the assignment as quickly as possible. Modesty is fine, but expedience will see you covered in very little time."

She agreed with his logic. "Please help me get into bed."

"I thought you would never ask." He chuckled and Wayk re-joined them, stowing the medical kit on one side of their little shelter.

"Don't tease the Terran. It should be a rule." She snorted as Wayk unsealed her layers and Carser pulled them off.

Naked and blushing from head to toe, she scuttled under her covers until her breasts were hidden from view. "Thank you for your help."

They were both looking at her in surprise, sharing looks of amazement before taking seats on the floor.

"Why do you think the wolves were after us?"

"They are starving. Something has changed the migratory path of their normal prey and they were after anything large and remotely edible." She cuddled her teddy and held him against her neck. She was shivering, even with her proximity to the fire.

Wayk went to her pack and rooted around until he grabbed her ration packs. "You need to eat. Carser, go and get some water."

He pressed the rations to a rock next to the fire and he lifted her out of her bedding. "You can be embarrassed later. You need body contact."

She didn't fight him. "I am aware that I am hypothermic. I just didn't know how to ask for more. You two have already done so much for me today. I have been a royal pain in the ass."

Her teeth chattered as he draped her over his lap. His cock rose under her thighs and prodded her with heat. She cuddled her cold cheek against his shoulder and tried to ignore the other sources of heat that were flaring to life in her body.

Carser raised an eyebrow at her new position and the exposure of her body, but other than a tightening of the skin across his cheekbones and the rise of his erection, he didn't say a thing.

He held the water container out for her and she sipped cautiously. Again, a peculiar warmth ran through her to her toes. Each sip heated her. "Is that just water?"

"Yes. I borrowed your scanner and there is nothing peculiar in it, perfectly clear from melted mountaintops." He held the bottle until she had her fill and then placed his lips precisely where she had while he drank.

There was some significance to the action, Wayk stiffened under her. He took the bottle in turn and repeated Carser's action. The two men glared at each other across her and she broke the stalemate. "Are the rations warm yet?"

A visible shiver had Carser lunging for the ration pack and unsealing it with a practiced flick of his hand. He handed her eating prongs retrieved from her pack and she sat and shivered her way through a hot meal.

She sipped at the water when Carser passed it to

her and the men fought a glaring battle for who would take the next sip every time she finished. It was almost a relief when they finished it.

"Dinner is done, now you need some rest. Carser, get the emergency blanket from the kit. She needs both of us right now."

Zora did a personal assessment. She didn't need a bathroom, which was peculiar in itself. That much water should have demanded an exit. She allowed herself to be pinned between two aroused males on her bedding and they covered themselves with the emergency blanket to turn their gathering into a small oven, with Zora as the potato getting roasted.

Sighing, she let her fatigue take over and allowed herself to drift off.

Hours passed or it might have been days, but Zora felt her soul lift from her body. A light was calling her back to the pool. She stepped away from the silver blanket and her companions and followed the call.

Out-of-body experiences were not unknown to her. Usually, it was her talent dragging her out to investigate something that had skipped her attention the first time. This time, it was different.

The water glowed with a white light, so Zora held to her instincts and walked right in.

Who would drink the water of life?

Surrounded by white sparkling water, she had

one deliberate thought as an immortal mind
pressed on her own. *Oh hell.*

CHAPTER FOUR

This is not hell but the light everlasting. Who are you that you do not know this?

She looked around her and a peculiar temple took shape. A glowing figure sat on a throne at the peak of the temple, so Zora began to climb the steps toward it while she kept up the conversation. *I am Zora Berger, Biological Assessment Officer for the Alliance, of the Protectorate of Terra. Who are you?*

Shisala the eternal, the everlasting, the light within. Why are you here on my world?

Wonderful, it was sentient and the Alliance scans had missed it. *The Oefric wish to begin a colony on your surface.*

Why did they not ask me? The tone was plaintive. *They tried. You did not answer.*

I was sleeping. Your blood woke me, so I thought it was best that I speak to you. The men who cared for you also drank from my waters. What will they do with eternity?

Zora couldn't make herself understand. *What?*

The waters. They change you, make you one of mine and all of my chosen live as long as I wish it.

Can't you wish for them to have normal lifespans for their kind?

I could, but then you would be lonely when your mates departed.

What?

You are not a very bright thing, despite the power I feel within you. I will take you as my avatar. I have not had one in a very long time. How long has it been since I restructured my surface?

Zora racked her brain for the information. Ten thousand years. Your world changed shape ten thousand years ago.

I wanted all traces of those ungrateful creatures gone, so I swept them from me. The entity sounded smug.

Are you the entire planet?

Yes, but I only express myself in the waterways. Through them, I touch every corner of my world.

That explained why they hadn't been able to get in touch with the planet. It was dormant and hidden in the waterways.

I apologize for disturbing you. It was never our intention. We can leave and let you return to your rest. She was almost to the top of the temple.

The entity on the throne stood and approached her. I do not wish for you to leave, nor will you until you allow me into your mind willingly and happily.

I will freeze to death if I do not get to a warmer environment soon.

I will see to it that the cavern is heated, but do not think to leave. There are creatures out there far more formidable than the ones you ran into.

A searing flash of light and Zora was back in her body, her heart pounding in her ears. Carser and Wayk jerked awake with her and stared at her in consternation as she leapt out of their bed and ran for the pool.

She heard voices behind her but didn't stop until she was at the edge of the pool. Taking a deep breath, she let her talent loose and almost moaned at what she saw.

The blinding light that was now visible to her enhanced vision was running through the walls of the cavern and underfoot. Her extremities felt a marked increase in temperature and by the time the men were at her side, she knew one thing. They were totally screwed.

"This isn't good, this isn't good." She chanted it and backed away from the water's edge. One of her toes had been in the water and she noted the glow where it touched.

Her arm was lit up like a streetlamp to her enhanced senses. Strands of light were binding, healing, working to make her whole.

Carser caught her as she slumped in shock. "What is it, Zora? Did you have a nightmare?"

"Take me back to the fire and I will tell you, not here." She was shivering but not with cold.

He carried her back, but she could feel the curiosity buzzing in them.

Next to the fire, she knelt and stared into it for a while. When she looked at the Oefric, she realized that she had not turned off her talent. They crackled with energy. They would be right at home here on Pakrik.

"The teams that examined this place for sentience missed something." She blinked until her vision returned to normal.

Carser straightened. "What?"

"The living being that is Shisala. This planet is alive." She bit her nails in agitation.

Wayk gently drew her hand away from her mouth. "What do you mean?"

"I mean the living being that is in everything on this world had a conversation with me while I slept."

Carser was shocked, but Wayk kept her hand. "What did it say?"

"Shisala wishes for the Oefric to join her here and she wishes to take me as avatar." She swallowed heavily.

"What aren't you telling us?"

She tried to bring her fingernails to her lips again, but Wayk held her hand down. "That water was filled with the essence of Shisala. She said she controls when we die now."

Carser gave her a piercing look. "We?"

Zora blushed. "She seems to think we are a set because you took care of me."

Wayk nodded. "We will just have to leave and get back to the shuttle and get off the surface."

"She said she wouldn't let us until I take her into me. She also won't let us leave the cavern."

"I will see about that." Carser stood and walked to the entrance. The snow was still a curtain of white.

He shifted into a bear and ran out of the cavern. Zora held onto Wayk's hand as they waited for something, anything to happen. A few seconds passed before Carser came barrelling back into the cavern. He stopped and shook his head in confusion, shifting back into his walking form.

"What the hell happened?"

Zora looked to her companion. "How would we know? We were here."

"I was running in a straight line and then I ended up back here." He sat back next to them near the fire and slammed his fist against the ground.

"I am sorry. It's my fault. If not for the wolf attack, we wouldn't be here." She sank into a dejected heap.

Wayk stroked her face and lifted her chin. "It isn't your fault. We should have been more careful. It was just so nice for us to be able to romp as we willed in this wilderness. We were not on alert as

we should have been."

His kiss caught her by surprise. One moment he was comforting her, the next her body was exploding in a riot of need. Her talent flicked on and her skin and his were lit from within by the energy of the planet.

She pushed him back. "Stop. The planet is making you do that."

Carser was behind her, cupping her breasts and nibbling at her neck. "Is she making me do this?"

"Probably." Zora snivelled. His fingers teased at her nipples while his pinkies caressed under her breast.

"What if we don't care?" Wayk came back in for a kiss and she gave in to his lack of caring.

Wayk slid his hands down her ribs before snaking one finger between her folds. His caress discovered the heated moisture her body had been producing since he took her hand.

His groan preceded his gnawing the way down her neck and shoulder while he pressed her to her side before he pulled her over him.

Unheeding of her arm, she mounted him and smiled as he slid home. It was a tight fit, but she enjoyed every moment of it. The electricity where their skins connected spurred her to ride him in a hot, wet slide of sensation and pursuit of her own release.

The drag of his cock as she lifted almost to the

point of releasing him was as pleasurable as the rush of energy when she dropped until their bodies slapped together. As her peak came within her grasp, she shifted and moved in a rapid pace that had him gripping her hips as his own orgasm rushed over him.

She let out a sharp yelp as she came, surprised as always that her body was willing to give over such sensations.

The moment that Wayk unclenched his hands from her hips, she was rolled to her back and she found Carser hovering over her with a determined light in his eyes. "Will you take me as well?"

She smiled up at him and tangled her fingers through his hair, dragging him down so she could kiss him. "I will if you don't mind."

He slid into her and a bright light flashed in his eyes as he sank home. Carser stroked into her with attention to her expression and the lift of her hips against him.

Her body was so sensitive, it was on the edge of release again in no time, each stroke causing sparks to fly behind her eyes. She dug her nails into his back and wrapped her legs around him to pull him tightly to her on each inward thrust.

She shivered as the flaring head of his cock pressed against her g-spot with each stroke. A low moan started in her throat and when Wayk slipped his fingers between them and stroked her clit, she

shrieked in shock as her talent rushed to the fore and she was lost in light.

CHAPTER FIVE

Sneaky bastard. Zora was a backseat driver to her own body as Shisala took it over.

I did what had to be done. There is enough water in snow that your lover came back covered in me. I thank you for your sacrifice. It has been a long time since I had an avatar and I will endeavour not to abuse your hospitality.

I suppose I will have to make the best of it.

In return for your voice, I offer you an entire world of your own and the power to keep your body as young and healthy as you wish it.

Carser was shaking his head, one hand pressed to his temple. His cock still shone with her juices. "What the hell happened?"

"Shisala has her avatar." Zora sat up and felt the glow in her eyes. "We can leave the cavern now. She will let me lead you to your shuttle."

Wayk and Carser looked at her in concern.

The general said, "I thought you said she wanted you to agree."

Zora pressed a hand to his cheek. "I did. She rode you both into me."

They looked at her in shock. "What?"

She unwrapped her arm and examined the perfect skin where gouges should have been. "She used your body and the moisture from the snow to get inside me and I let it come, willingly."

Her torn suits were unappealing, so she stripped the liner from her sleeping bag and wrapped it around her like a toga. Her teddy bear was tucked under her arm and she walked to the opening of the cavern. A light pursing of her lips and the blizzard disappeared. Bright, cheerful sunlight warmed the surface and the snow gleamed brightly.

She turned to her companions. "We can leave now. I will get my pack."

Humming to herself, she packed everything but her clothing. She didn't need it. Nothing on this world would hurt her.

You would let your mates go?

They are not my mates. They were your tools. I want them to live a long and healthy life with the women of their choice.

You are the woman of their choice.

I am a woman of convenience. There is a difference.

"What were you just doing? Your eyes were flickering between green and gold rather rapidly."

"Arguing with Shisala."

"About what?"

"Girl stuff. Now, let's get you back to your ship so you can rendezvous with the warship on time." She shouldered the pack and started for the entrance.

"Wait one minute. What do you think we are going to do? Leave you here?" Carser grabbed her shoulder and spun her around.

"Yes. The planet is open to a colony if your organizers will accept the space on a living world." She looked up at him and smiled brightly.

"Stop talking about the colony. What about us?" His words were more growl than speech.

"There is no us. You were here. I was convenient. It has happened before, it might even happen again." She shrugged.

Wayk looked shocked. "That is not what happened here."

She cocked her head, "What?"

"We chose you as our mate. We had to wait for you to be free from previous obligations, but we selected you out of all the possible candidates our elders presented us with. The only problem lay in which one of us you would choose." The twist of his lips ended in a frown.

"I don't understand." She needed to sit down, so she exited the cavern and sat on a rock.

Carser continued when his companion looked lost for words. "You were the best woman for the

job, but if we had simply wanted a final evaluation, there were other officers who were not occupied. We wanted you."

They were both smiling now and she couldn't help but be a little flattered. Zora scowled to fight the flutter in her chest. "It doesn't matter. If you stay here, you will be stuck with me. Shisala will make sure of it."

Wayk tried the practical attack. "What if that is what we want? The Oefric are trying desperately to get Terrans into our genetic lines. We want you, you want us, there is nothing wrong with that."

Her frown deepened. "I have always wanted to be wanted for my genetics. Nothing like not being wanted for my personality or my looks."

They looked at her in shock, as if they didn't know what to say.

"Shisala will let you go. I promise. Come back or not, it will not affect my decisions. I am her avatar and I must remain here." She used her best brush-off technique and when their expressions shut down, she knew she had succeeded.

Inside, she was wailing like a child, but outwardly, she maintained an expression of calm. "I will need to retrieve my belongings as well. The sooner we get going, the faster you can be on your way."

They shifted into their bear forms and she stared into the snow. Each step she took landed her on

dry, warm grass, the snow melted at her approach. Her companions were sullen, but they moved through the snow with ease.

Shisala invaded her thoughts randomly, trying to get her to ask them to stay. Each time, Zora fought her back.

She was going to send them home where they could each find the woman for them. She wasn't going to keep them from being happy, even if her own heart was breaking with every step closer to the shuttle.

The wolves didn't bother coming in for another attack. Her gentle caress on their minds sent them running for cover long before they would have been visible.

The bears on either side of her weren't romping, weren't enjoying themselves. They simply trudged along until the shining silver of their shuttle was visible again. Carser made his way to the door and shifted so he could palm the lock. As soon as they were all inside, he locked the door.

"Zora, I don't think you understand what has transpired here. Oefric mate for life and both Wayk and I have chosen you as our mate. Multiple matings do not happen often, but it does happen. What's more, you accepted both of us as your mate. This means that we are not going anywhere without you."

"Why did you lock the door?"

"So that you can't leave before we make our call in to the warship. Wayk?"

"Yes, General." Wayk sat at the nav station and started entering the call details. "This is the exploration team on Pakrik calling the Ninth Star."

"This is the Ninth Star, go ahead, Captain Wayk." The voice was low and female.

"One of our team members has been selected by the planet as its avatar."

"Captain, that was supposed to be an inert planet."

"We are aware of that. However, the entity was dormant and restricted itself to waterways. Regardless, we are requesting authorization to begin colonization with the planet's permission. Should the Oefric agree, colonization can begin with only a few concessions."

"Understood. Routing the information to the Oefric council chambers. Will have an answer for you in a few hours."

"Thank you, Ninth Star."

"Call me, Becks. Say hi to Zora for me. Ninth Star over and out."

CHAPTER SIX

Zora was confused. "What was that about?"

Carser shrugged. "Did you really think we were going to just leave you behind?"

"Well, yes."

Wayk shook his head, "You have a fairly low opinion of the honour of men, don't you?"

"Yes." There was no reason not to be honest.

Carser looked through the storage bins and produced a tunic. "This should fit better than that liner."

She stripped and dropped the fabric over her head. It covered her to mid-thigh. "Thank you. I just don't find those ship suits appealing now. Shisala is a little old fashioned when it comes to clothing. It is either a dress or nothing at all."

"We will make a note of that. The colony will be supplying you with all clothing and lodgings in the future." Carser nodded and Wayk continued to enter information into their computer.

"What is he doing?" She noticed Carser

approaching her but didn't give it much thought.

"Sending a message to our home world with more details." Carser wrapped his arm around her and sat, pulling her into his lap.

As he spoke, he slid one hand up between her thighs. "Now, Zora, as for you, I won't ask how you could think we would abandon you here. Instead, I will ask if you want either Wayk or myself."

She sighed and bit her lip as he pushed her thighs apart to allow his hand access to her folds. "You know I want you. You are both gorgeous, but I won't sacrifice my dignity to pursue males again. Twice was enough."

"Then we will simply have to pursue you. It's a matter of honour." He grinned as he slid one finger into her while his thumb flicked and pressed her clit in turn.

She pressed her face into his shoulder and successfully hid until his free hand lifted her chin for his kiss. She loved the taste of him—male, wild and honey all together—as his tongue touched hers and explored her mouth.

Her moans were given to him as his hand slowly coaxed her to the edge of release before allowing her to tip over. She shuddered in his arms as her palpitations gripped his fingers.

He withdrew from the kiss and removed his hand from between her thighs when she stopped

pulsing around him.

"We have one priority for you. We need to create a house for you, near water, with good drainage and a nice view."

I have just the spot.

"Shisala has just the spot." Zora was confused. They had had sex with her but were still showing interest after the fact. In her experience, that didn't happen.

"Can we fly there?"

Yes, the best spot is a few miles away. Take the helm.

"She wants me to fly there."

Zora smiled as he gestured for her to take the helm. She took the coordinates from Shisala's mind and lifted the shuttle from its moorings. With the landing gear safely tucked into place, she turned the ship and flew it to the designated area. The image in her mind had her setting the shuttle off to one side, so she did it.

"We're here. This is where she wants our house to go."

The wide meadow was covered in snow and a stone's throw from the cavern where they had sheltered.

"It looks familiar." Wayk finally looked up from his data entry. His expression was what Zora used to call *monitor face*. If you spent enough time doing nothing but interfacing with a computer, you lost your ability to form an expression.

She chuckled and patted his hair. "Glad to hear it."

You can clear the trees on the left and use them for the housing. The cliff face hosts a waterfall in the spring and you should enjoy the view very much.

Uh, Shisala, we won't have a problem with people drinking your water, will we?

A chuckle ran through her thoughts, *No, I have my avatar and her consorts. I need no one else, but if they come through you, I will grant healing.*

Good to know. An added bonus to the colony, I am sure.

"You are talking to her again."

"Yes, she is agreeing not to possess any of the colonists and is offering her waters for healing if the colonists come through me."

Wayk and Carser looked delighted, "You are serious?"

"Yes. I know my emotions are somewhat flighty, but yes, I am serious." She chuckled and watched the sun warm the unending white of the meadow.

Carser grinned. "I am glad that you are adapting well to the planet inside you."

She held her lips shut about what she really wanted inside her. That little tease had only whetted her appetite. "She promised to make it easy for me. So far, she is keeping her word."

"Good. Where do we start?"

"She mentioned those trees on the left as being suitable for felling, but I have no idea how to make a house."

Wayk smiled. "All those applying for the first colony wave had to take survival and subsistence-construction courses. We can handle it if you clear a path for the foundation."

He headed for the door and Carser joined him.

Zora was amazed. "You want to start now?"

"No time like the present, isn't that a Terran saying?" Carser was smiling and back to being eager to hit the great outdoors.

She filed away his knowledge of the saying and looked for equipment. "How are you going to fell the trees? Do you have a laser blade or something?"

"Yes, but we will use our other forms to do the bulk of the work. It gives us more practice."

Shrugging, she joined them as they left the shuttle. She followed Carser and he walked a large rectangle that she cleared using the field of power that Shisala gave her.

Wayk was off to one side in the form of a huge beaver. Trees young and old were felled as he gnawed at the bases.

Zora opened her talent and determined that the trees on the right contained nests, but those on the left were empty. Shisala knew her stuff.

Once her foundation had been cleared, she sat

meditating in the centre of it as she absorbed and understood the rhythms of the planet. Shisala's light was everywhere—tiny shrews, rabbit-like creatures and the wolves were the immediate inhabitants of the vicinity.

There were larger animals over the mountains, some on migratory paths, but her area was fine. Nothing came through without Shisala's invitation. This was her glade, her cavern, her planet. No creatures could come through without her authorization. Their instincts wouldn't let them.

The Oefric were assembling a large pile of felled trees and she wondered how they were going to go about stripping and splitting the wood.

Her thoughts kept straying from the planet to the memories of Wayk beneath her and Carser over her. It was hard to think of anything else when their energy signatures remained the same no matter which form they took.

They worked on the lumber until the sun faded in the sky. At some invisible signal, they all turned and walked to the shuttle. Time for a hot meal and a shower.

"I feel horribly lazy with you two doing all the work." Her words broke the silence of the last few hours and they shifted forms to answer her.

"Your body is still adapting to the planet's occupation. You have enough to do right now."

Wayk wrapped an arm around her waist and together they entered the shuttle that was acting as their shelter.

A trill of curiosity ran through her mind and she had to ask, "Shisala wants to know what your plans are for the foundation."

"We will split some of the wood we dropped today and lay them to form a flat floor for our home."

Another question came forward. "Would you prefer a stone base?"

Carser gave her a strange look. "It would be optimal, yes. Flooring can be placed over it for warmth at a later time."

"Good. Let's see what she comes up with in the morning. Shisala is getting excited." She smiled and took the food that Wayk handed her.

Food and a shower, the shuttle offered them both and she smiled in anticipation. It was one thing to enjoy her own arousal, another entirely to deal with the residue of semen that was irritating her inner thighs.

Confined in the shuttle, the scents of sweaty male and the strange musk from their animal forms clung to them and filled the air. Zora finished her ration pack and smiled. "I call dibs on the shower."

"Be our guest. It's a gel cleanser."

She wanted to stomp her feet in

disappointment, but it was the sign of a ship that was set up for long hauls. The gel would coat her, harden and flake off, taking all of the dirt and oils with it. It wasn't her favourite way to clean herself, but it would do until something better came along.

She entered the lav and removed the grass-stained shirt. The cleansing unit was larger than usual, but knowing the size of her companions, she was really not surprised. The gel came out warm and she used her hands to smooth it into every crack and crevice of her body before it hardened.

The rush of heat as it hardened made her smile. She loved being warm from the outside in. It was even better from the inside out.

When the gel shattered, she turned on the vac system and sucked off all the residue. Clean and warm, she slid back into the tunic Carser had given her and she re-joined the men Shisala called her consorts.

"First one to get clean gets laid." She expected a scramble to the shower, but instead deep breathing greeted her. They were both slumped at the table, resting their heads next to their plates.

"Well damn, there goes that idea." She folded out a bunk and nestled into the bedding. She wasn't going to try to manoeuvre them. They could work out the kinks in the morning.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Waking on the edge of orgasm was a new sensation for Zora, but the moment she opened her eyes, two hot hard cocks slid into her. One in her ass and one in her channel. The feeling of being overfilled was fleeting, rocketing into a shattering scream as her body reacted to the penetration by causing her to catapult into a roar of sensation and power.

Groans and grunts bracketed her and she felt two cocks pulse inside her as the power flowed into them through her. Part of her cried out as she realized that it was Shisala binding them together. They were truly her consorts now, whether they wanted it or not.

Coming back to her senses, she looked into Carser's eyes as he rapidly became erect once again. His surprise was visible as was Wayk's behind her as he swelled to fill her ass once again.

"I know I am proud of my stamina, but what the hell?" His whisper in her ear made her smile.

"Shisala has bound us together. She likes to ride

the energy of passion. It opens our minds to her." She ended on a gasp as Wayk withdrew and slid forward slowly, gripping her hips.

Carser groaned as Wayk's motions rocked Zora on him, sliding her channel around his erection and stroking him through her body. It was a peculiar sensation that Zora was positive Shisala was enhancing.

Carser leaned up to kiss Zora and she moaned as the act of leaning forward opened her completely to Wayk's thrusts. He was slow and deep with every motion, his actions driving the passions of all three of them.

She broke the kiss with Carser and used her teeth lightly on his neck and shoulders. Her skin was alive with sensation and Wayk clutched one hip while stroking her spine. Carser's hands were on her breasts, ribs and sliding between them to caress her clit as he rocked with Wayk's movements.

If she hadn't been watching Carser's face, she never would have noticed his slight nod to Wayk. A moment later, the members buried inside her swelled and lengthened, causing her to gasp in surprise. A flexing pulse started inside her as Carser's cock started to writhe within her.

Her eyes widened in surprise when Wayk's did the same and before she could ask what the hell was going on, her body arched and jerked in their

arms, a whine of confusion coming from her throat.

The shaking and spasms lasted forever. Sweat coated her skin and her companions were thrusting into her in earnest.

Wayk's hard shove pressed her onto Carser and he arched his back, thrusting into her to the hilt as he shouted, his neck cording as his body emptied into her in pulsing spurts. The same arrhythmic jerks were deep in her ass and she sighed in relief when they slipped free.

Wayk left to hit the lav and he returned to pry her off Carser. "You know, you guys are going to have to cuddle eventually."

Wayk laughed. "As soon as there is a bed big enough to handle all three of us, yes. Until then, we will take turns holding you in our arms after we make love."

Carser gave her a short kiss as he stood and then passed her on his way to the lav. Less than two minutes later, she was shoved into the lav by Wayk. "Either gel up or I will do it for you."

"I think having you do it might be fun." She laughed.

"If I do it, I might have a problem. Carser and I agreed never to press an advantage with you that the other could not join in or make up. So, if I fuck you again, he will have to have his turn the moment you leave the lav and that would mean

another gel shower."

She could imagine the endless rounds that it would take just to get out of the shuttle and as tempting as it was, that kind of time was not the best use of her personal resources.

She smirked and stepped in to the gel on her own. Her ass wasn't nearly as sore as she would have imagined. "What did you use for lube?"

"I am a medical officer. I have a number of creams and lotions at my disposal." His wicked grin was the last thing she saw as she closed her eyes to cover her face with the gel.

It heated and shattered and there his non-intervention stopped. Wayk used the vacuum to tease her and she saw the potential for solo fun in the shower when he used it on her breasts, clit and everywhere in between.

Not even her neck was impervious to the gentle suction, but she found a surprising number of erogenous zones under his determined actions she had been previously unaware of.

She was shaking and looking at him with narrowed eyes by the time he finished his *assistance*. "That was just mean."

She reached for the shirt on the floor and he stalled her. "Today you wear mine."

She stomped out of the lav with a chortling Wayk at her back.

Carser raised his eyebrow, but wisely did not

ask her what was wrong. He took the lav as soon as they left and he was out and squeaky clean in a matter of minutes.

She was wearing Wayk's tunic and working on the scans she had taken on the trip out when they took the laser cutters and went outside.

Carser stuck his head back in the shuttle and said, "You have got to see this, Zora."

Curious, she left the confines of the shuttle and stopped in shock. "She said she would work on the foundation, not the whole thing."

Stone and vines had twisted together to form a cathedral in the forest. Windows were transparent quartz and as she got closer, the vines turned out to be marble in a variety of colours.

Shisala, you did all this?

My avatar deserves a nice home. You are giving me a chance to re-join the universe at large. For that, I will give you what I can. My wealth is at your disposal, as is my surface and my atmosphere. I know you will not make choices to hurt me.

Your faith humbles me.

I do not take an avatar lightly. Your voice on my behalf is something I will treasure. The agents of chaos never understood that.

Zora and her consorts explored the building as she continued her internal conversation. *Chaos?*

The ones who came before. They tried to force me to take a male avatar and when I would not, they killed their own women to keep them from me. That act was so

heinous, I destroyed their towns and villages and shifted the surface until they were all dead or gone.

I am sorry that you had to witness that.

It was ten thousand years ago. For your kind, many generations, for my kind a short nap. It is still with me every moment of every day.

Why do you call them chaos?

An image filled her mind of energy that was a riot of violence and hunger. That race would never blend with nature. It could not. There was no empathy in that species, only desperation for more.

Zora felt queasy. That kind of energy was an anathema to her. The Oefric were one with nature, this other race defied and defiled it at every turn.

Thank you for this home. It is wonderful.

Pleasure spread through the planet and warmth ran through the flooring. *You are welcome. Thank you for agreeing to give me a voice.*

Zora laughed. *You left me little choice, but thank you for giving me a home.*

The planet did not answer. It understood that what she was referring to went far beyond a simple house. She had a place to belong and a new home in the stars. Both were priceless gifts. The men with her wanting her for herself were also beginning to sink in to her brain. Her life was turning around.

If she wasn't careful, she just might be happy.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Zora finished cooking in the pot that Wayk scavenged from one of the empty oxygen tanks on the shuttle. "I think it is ready to eat."

Carser and Wayk looked dubious. They had been using the fallen lumber to make serviceable furniture, starting with a bed.

Forest creatures were donating the bedding. Each morning, a pile of fluff was found in the doorway and it went into the collection that would eventually form their pillows.

"How soon until the first of the colony ships arrive?" She scooped the stew out with a wooden ladle with a plate made of the same.

"Over a week. Why?" Wayk was pushing the vegetables around suspiciously.

"It will be the end of naked day." She snorted and they rolled their eyes. "Eat. Everything is completely edible, even if the food tastes strange. I am just delighted that Shisala didn't make a fuss when you took out the bunny things."

If she didn't need to go out of the house, she didn't bother getting dressed and that proved very convenient for her consorts. She had a feeling that Shisala was manipulating her normally shy tendencies to accelerate the intimacy between them, but aside from cooking, Zora found it fairly comfortable to run around without a stitch on.

One day of fat splatters healed quickly, but it was a lesson learned.

She dug in to her stew and raised her eyebrows. It wasn't half-bad. "Well, this isn't horrible."

They had been waiting for her to have the first bite. With enthusiasm and comments of surprise, Carser and Wayk dug in to their meals. They cleaned the pot out with seconds and looked disappointed when it was gone.

"I told you I knew how to cook." She crossed her arms under her breasts and made faces at them both.

"Yes, and Wayk will be able to do some kitchen plumbing as soon as the colony ships get here."

"And what will you be doing when they get here?" She raised one eyebrow at Carser's smug face.

"Running the colony, pet." He stuck out his chest proudly and she laughed. "I was voted to be in charge."

"If they could see you now, they might reconsider." She sprinted from the table and out

the door.

She used her lead to grab some of the dwindling snow, but was too late. A panther with its claws in tackled her and rolled her into the meadow. "Cheater!"

A bear behind him roared and swatted him away and then two huge cats were wrestling in the snow while Zora got to her feet. She brushed the snow off and smiled at the emerging grasses. Spring was coming to Pakrik and it was coming fast. Shisala wanted to put a good face on for when the colonists arrived.

The panthers were just one example of the forms that she had seen from her companions. The tricks that they did in bed were something else entirely. Being a shapeshifter meant that they could shift anything to any size. They had even confessed their copying of certain traits of various races. The Wyoran prehensile penis was her favourite, like having a hot warm sex toy working for her satisfaction and she didn't have to do anything.

She was wistful as she watched them shift from form to form, wrestling in the snow. When the colonists arrived, this kind of frivolity would be few and far between. Carser's appointment would make him a serious asset to the colony and that meant he would not be as available as he was right now.

Wayk would be able to stay with her, but he would have his own assignments as well. Life would change and nights in the big bed might be all they had for the first few months.

A noise in the sky and she looked up, a shuttle was approaching at top speed and the sonic boom shook the atmosphere.

"Carser, I thought they wouldn't be here for a week." She felt Shisala take over her body and she could see the golden glow coming from her own eyes. "*Chaos has returned. Run!*"

The newcomers tumbled out of the shuttle with heavy weapons and a strange gleam in their eyes. Through her talent and Shisala's eyes, Zora saw the same jagged energy that the planet had shown her earlier.

Despite their objections, Zora convinced her consorts to take their shuttle and hide it in the trees. The low altitude was more than she could manage with the planet popping in and out of control.

As avatar, she was in her home and ready to face whatever came. *You should have run.*

I never run from a fight. Hiding will only make this worse.

Fine, but I am calling help for you. They will join your consorts to help you, but there is little I can do against their energy.

I know. You will be with me, but this is mine now. My home, my world and my duty to protect it. Just one request, can you bring spring faster?

I will do what I can.

Zora waited. She pulled her chair to face the double doors and waited.

When the creatures burst into her home, their *wrongness* made her gag. They skidded to a halt at her calm demeanour. "Avatar, you are coming with us."

She stood and walked toward them. "What is your kind called?"

The leader blinked and shifted, his tusks jutting out over his upper lip in a particularly unappealing manner. "Queirk. We are Queirk."

Calmly, she walked in the circle of creatures pieced together from her nightmares. She could feel Carser and Wayk in the trees.

The huge shuttle was squatting next to the cliff face that protected her home. The snow was melting rapidly and Zora fought a smile. Whether this worked out or not, it was a good plan.

Her steps were steady and the tunic she wore fluttered in the warm breeze. The scent coming from the males around her was overpowering, so she welcomed each fresh breath she could gather.

Technology was welded to their flesh in strange and unusual places. The faintest odour of rot wafted with every step. "What do you want here?"

They didn't answer her, merely kept marching along to their shuttle. Outside, a fat, bloated, wheezing male sat recumbent in a chair. "You are the avatar?"

"I am. Who are you?" She stood with her arms loosely at her sides, her feet dug into the loam of the landing site.

"Urugar, King of the Queirk. We have come to reclaim our planet before the Alliance can lay their greedy palms on it. With you under our control, there won't be a problem."

She chuckled. "You have never met a Terran woman before, have you?"

CHAPTER NINE

The dozen males around her bristled with hostility. Urugar frowned in confusion. "I don't understand. What does your origin have to do with it?"

Zora looked up and saw the water beginning to run down the cliff face. She stifled a smile as Shisala started to generate heat on the rock beneath. A small cloud of mist was forming and with every trickle of water, it grew.

Shisala, can you get the men to wait until the fog is thick enough before they attack?

You are a devious avatar. Yes, I can. The entire area will be shrouded in five minutes. Keep them talking.

Hold the fog into a bank and when I say go, let it go.

"Well, when I was nagged into applying to the Volunteer project, I simply had a job rearranging furniture. It was very trendy and paid well, but it wasn't a true talent." She smiled and looked at the men who had holstered their weapons under her passive actions.

"So, I went and answered their questions, filled out the forms, rearranged the orders in the manner that would make finishing them easiest and handed it in. Before I had gotten halfway down the block, one of the representatives was out of the centre and chasing me down the street. It was amazing. Many had never seen an alien anywhere in person, let alone a Tival sprinting down the road after a woman.

"Representative Kelmin was friendly and he explained what I was and how I could best use my talent by joining the Alliance."

Urugar scowled. "What does this have to do with you being the avatar?"

"I am getting to that. Don't rush the story." She scowled at him.

"Where was I? Right, so I went through all of the medicals and was given a clean bill of health and then I left my home for the stars. I was trained at the Citadel to gauge a planet's health and the usefulness of creatures simply by looking at them.

"When I arrived here on Pakrik, I was able to see that everything that was on the surface was essential with a few minor exceptions. I was also able to determine that the Oefric would not cause a huge disruption in the ecosystem with their hunting and subsistence farming lifestyle."

He snarled and fought his way to his feet. "What does that mean?"

Now, let the fog go now.

"It means that I know you have no place here. The ground will not yield to you, the crops will not grow for you and minerals will shatter at your touch. The Queirk have no place here and it is time that you finally get the ass kicking you deserve."

The roiling fog bank was approaching silently and covering their shuttle. "I am the avatar of Shisala and I tell you to *get off my world!*"

She went silent and stepped to one side as the world turned grey and white. The shouting was tremendous and she used her ability to see their chaotic representations to dodge the hands of her would-be attackers.

She eased herself out of the circle of flailing males and made a run for the energy signatures of her consorts and the animals of Pakrik.

They charged past her and the confusion of the Queirk turned to cries of pain. Snarls and roars marked the spot of the melee and as she watched through her talent, she saw the flickers of chaotic energy go out. One dim flare was all that was left and Zora could feel Shisala start the wind to clear the smog.

Huge cats were next to bears and wolves. Bloody fangs were everywhere and a few animals had smoking wounds, but all were on their feet.

Zora turned and headed back toward the carnage. "Stuff them in the ship and send it into

space on automatic. Alert the Alliance warship and get inside. It is going to rain to wash the traces of these...beasts away."

The animals of Shisala came and nuzzled her with their bloody heads and the energy of the planet came through, healed their pain and the wounds left by the blasters. Carser and Wayk were last in line. She stroked their flesh and it knit under her touch.

I told you there were benefits of being my avatar. Well done by the way. I did not think you would be able to get away.

She smiled. *Never underestimate the power of a Terran. Mind you, I am still a restricted species so I could have just clubbed them with that. If they killed me, the wrath of the Alliance and some Nyal territories would have rained down on them.*

Really? That's wonderful.

Zora smiled at the delight in the planet's thoughts. Shisala thought it was nice that if anyone injured or killed her that they would be punished by the outlying civilizations. Shaking her head, she continued to pour energy into Carser and Wayk.

Their injuries faded to nothing and she swayed a little. The smell of death was around her, the final invader died just as her two started to heave the bodies into the ship. She didn't want those bodies on her soil.

Wayk slipped inside and programmed the

shuttle. By the time he leapt from the doorway, Carser had loaded every body and weapons into the compartment.

Wayk sealed the door and they backed away as the shuttle rose with a wobble.

“Come along, lads. We now have an outdoor shower.” Zora led the way to the water splashing down the cliff face and she stripped off her bloodstained tunic to stand under the pounding, icy water.

She squeaked as the water rinsed the blood from her limbs and she turned a funny shade of pale blue. She hopped out of the way as Carser crowded her, feet slipping on the stone so that she skidded to the grass on one side of the waterfall.

Wayk was standing next to Carser and scrubbing his shoulders in the pounding water. She had to admit that they made a very pretty picture.

Thick slabs of muscle made her fingers curl. The tight buttocks flexed as they turned and when they exited one at a time, the glittering of the drops of water caught in the curls surrounding their cocks.

Carser shook his head and body as if he was still in a fur-clad form and Wayk followed suit. Their hair stuck out at adorable angles until they combed their fingers through it. She bemoaned the loss of the scruffy look, but she didn't have time to pursue it as they surged toward her in one coordinated

move.

She was up and flipped over Carser's bent knee in a moment. He held her with her hands to the centre of her back and brought his hand down hard on her ass.

"What was that for?" She yelped as he smacked her again.

He punctuated each word with a slap. "You. Are. Never. To. Risk. Yourself. Again."

When he was done, she was stood up and Wayk held her by her arms. She sniffled pathetically. "I just wanted them to leave."

"That is not your decision. We are a team and all decisions need to be made by the whole team. Not just you because you are the avatar."

Wayk leaned down and spoke in her ear. "It took all of our willpower to not charge the group when they marched you out of the house. It was only Shisala coming to our minds that kept us waiting for your signal."

"It worked, didn't it?"

Wayk sighed, turned her and flipped her over his shoulder. He walked back to the house and she was fighting because she had a horrible idea what was coming next.

He sat in the chair that she had vacated when the Queirk came in and draped her over his lap.

She looked up to see Carser scowling at her with a set to his jaw that she knew meant he was

determined.

The first smack on her ass heated the skin that Carser had warmed. The second made her squirm and yelp again.

Carser was moving out of her range of vision. She didn't have to wonder where he went as another smack struck her and two fingers slid into her embarrassingly wet channel. Wayk kept his strikes slow and steady, culminating in her hovering on the edge of orgasm. "You do not have the right to risk yourself."

Her ass was on fire and her channel was clenching around Carser's fingers. "Fine, I won't risk myself again."

Wayk sighed and Carser twisted his fingers inside her. "Why don't we believe you?"

"I promise! I won't risk myself like that again unless I have discussed my plan with you first."

Wayk's smacks ceased and Carser's fingers were withdrawn.

Flushed with her ass throbbing, Zora was set back on her feet and she fought the urge to wail. "Why did you do that?"

"Because we both wanted to throttle you and this was the compromise." Wayk gave her a kiss on the nose. "This was to show you that we will not stand by passively because you are the avatar. You are ours and we can and will protect you, even from your own impulses if need be."

"That sucks. I won't be able to sit or sleep tonight."

He winked and rubbed his knuckles across her breasts. "You promise?"

"Nothing for you. You got me in this condition. Carser may have started it, but you finished it, so I blame you." She carefully made her way to the fire and threw some lumber into the coals.

Her delicate waddling turned her back on Wayk complaining to Carser about the execution of their joint plan. "Why should I suffer for your idea?"

She called back, "You guys can sort that out, but Carser is the only one getting sex tonight."

The tremendous thud as they started slapping each other around made her smile. Perhaps she wouldn't be the only sore one tonight.

CHAPTER TEN

The week went by in a blinding rush and when the beacon announced the arrival of the first colony ships, they were in the shuttle and on their way to the official landing site in a matter of minutes.

Zora was fully dressed for the occasion. Her men were wearing their own tunics, trousers and boots as well. "No more naked day."

Carser looked back at her in the passenger seat. "We will arrange it as often as possible, Zora."

Wayk concurred, "Don't think that just because there are witnesses, we won't take advantage of you whenever possible."

"That is part comfort, part threat." She grumped.

He grinned. "I know." The mischievous Wayk was back and he was excited to see his people again.

The drop ships were on their way down. Zora could see them through the view screen. "Wow. That is a lot of people. I will miss it just being us

three.”

Carser comforted her as he set the shuttle down in a safe spot. “Don’t worry. They will make up for it with assistance with food and plumbing.”

“Ah. Plumbing. I am looking forward to running water.” She released her harness and sashayed toward the door. An arm pulled her back.

“You do not go out until we have checked the area first,” Wayk muttered in her ear.

“Fine. You know, you folks are being rather paranoid for people who only saw one attack on me.” She was in full grumpy mode.

“Yes, silly us for not wanting you to rush into an unknown situation.” Carser gave Wayk a look that indicated that their mate was insane.

She simmered, the bear in her temperament near the surface. She followed them out into the bright light of morning as the drop ships thudded to the surface of Pakrik. It took an hour for all twelve of the ships to strike the surface and Carser and Wayk started to simmer with anticipation.

They are excited to see their people again, Zora. They are and will always be yours.

But I want the silence, the privacy and the lack of clothing again.

Think of it this way, they will have access to clothing for you that is more suited to your station. Ship suits are not flattering.

They never have been. They are designed for practicality.

They are still ugly. I want my avatar more gracefully attired.

Don't you dare mention this to the Oefric elders.

I will mention what I please, avatar. I will outline your needs and they will fulfill them or they will haul their colony off my surface.

Zora closed her eyes. Her stubbornness seemed to be rubbing off on her planet.

"What's wrong, Zora?" Carser stood at her side.

"Shisala is going to make some demands. Feel free to cover my mouth and drag me away if I turn gold and start to dictate."

He chuckled and wrapped an arm around her waist. "It will be fine. The elders are bringing some supplies with you in mind. That includes textiles."

Zora felt the wave of smugness from Shisala. "Don't humour her."

He laughed outright. "I will do whatever it takes to keep you happy and healthy and considering that Shisala is embedded in all of us, it means pleasing her when it will not embarrass or insult you."

"That is too logical."

Wayk nudged her with his arm. "And our little bear is back. I wondered where you were hiding."

She gave him an evil look and he laughed.

The drop ships started opening. The first few

looked around in confusion and when Carser called out, relief filled their faces.

“Let’s go down and meet our new neighbours.” Carser dragged her along and she was forced to be social.

Three hours of smiling and introducing herself later, Zora was exhausted. She sat on the pile of logs that her Oefric had prepared for the colonists. The landing elders were slowly leading their folks out of chaos.

Basic shelters were being set up, a foundry was in the early stages of assembly and a stockpile of supplies was being inventoried as they were unloaded. Everyone knew what to do and where to do it.

Carser and Wayk were hauling and unloading with the others. Occasionally, they would stop and speak to the elders who were casting nervous looks toward Zora on the woodpile.

After what seemed to be the ninth time, Carser called Wayk over and they brought the elders to her.

She jumped to her feet and in that instant, Shasila took over.

Elder Winx was a male of distinction. He bowed low as she extended her hand.

“Hello, Elder. Welcome to my world. I have heard that it is named Pakrik and I have no reason to want it

changed."

"Thank you for the welcome, Shisala. General Carser and Captain Wayk speak very highly of you."

Elder Vikar was a woman of middle age. Her black hair was woven with silver. "Thank you for your gracious hospitality. We request that you tell us where we may begin planting."

"Do you have a map?"

"We do."

"Shall we look at it? Oh, by the way, this forest here has been cleared of all wildlife. You may take the trees for fuel and shelter if you wish it."

Winx brightened. "That was my next question."

"I have fields where you can begin a replacement planting with fast-growing species that will fulfill your needs. I can also keep you apprised of any deadfalls of hardwoods for furniture making."

The quiet elder, Greenal, grinned at that. "You are making us welcome. Thank you very much."

"Has General Carser mentioned the needs of my avatar?"

Vikar smiled. "A seamstress is already working on something simple based on your old ship suits. She was too shy to approach you directly."

"There is no need to be shy. Neither I nor my avatar will interfere in your colony unless you endanger the balance of the system around you."

"We understand."

"I also know that a certain amount of pollution is unavoidable, but as long as you take my recommendations to mitigate it, no sudden lava flows will erupt under your village."

Her threat shifted their expressions for a moment.

She smiled and forced more power into her eyes. *"Do not worry. I will give fair warning. I want life to thrive here, but I don't want it done at the expense of the planet itself. In return, I will offer you healing provided by my avatar, using the waters of life."*

Greenal asked, "What kind of healing?"

"Anything from minor ailments to broken bones and deadly viruses. No creature dies on my world unless I will it."

Zora was suddenly back in control. "Pardon. She was being a little dramatic."

Carser and Wayk each supported her as her knees buckled. The elders were looking at her in surprise.

"Hello, I am Zora and I will be your avatar today." She stifled the yelp as both of her men pinched her ass. "Shall we have a look at that map?"

They headed to the makeshift council hall and the map of the area was splayed on a series of crates.

Zora pinpointed the areas for planting, those she had put aside for re-forestation and the best

areas to drill for water in the basin of the colony, including the appropriate area for a sewage treatment swamp that would allow natural bacteria to rework the waste into a harmless substance.

She started yawning as they showed her plans for the city they had planned for twenty years down the road. "I apologise. Channelling Shisala is tiring. Do you require anything else? I can have quarry locations for you tomorrow."

They blinked in surprise. Vikar smiled. "Thank you, the planet is being most generous, considering that we overlooked her on the first scans."

"No one could have found her if she didn't want to be found. It was my blood that woke her in the first place, or you would be here and someone would be running into her at a later date." She smiled and stifled a yawn again.

You are sleepy. Go and rest. Staying up isn't good for the baby.

Zora's ass hit the floor with a thud. *What?*

The elders were hovering in concern. Vikar helped her to her feet. "Are you all right?"

"I am fine. I just got some information that surprised me."

The woman smiled. "Your pregnancy?"

Zora felt her mouth open in an unflattering way. "How could you know that?"

"We are Oefric. Our sense of smell is the keenest of our gifts. I carried your ship suit to the seamstress and your scent has changed from there to here." She smiled and patted Zora on the shoulder.

Zora suddenly felt a flare of suspicion. She whirled to see her men by the opening to the council hall. "You!"

She stalked toward them and to everyone's amusement, the general and captain began backing away. "You knew!"

"We weren't sure. I don't carry that test in my med kit. We were just guessing based on scent." Wayk stumbled and ended up on his ass.

She stopped in front of him and glared at her general who was hiding behind his friend. "Why didn't you mention your suspicion?"

"Well, it is very early days. If your cycle resumed it would miscarry and we wouldn't want to upset you." Wayk was trying to be logical but she wasn't in the mood.

Zora started stalking away and Carser tried to stop her. She paused. "What?"

"Where are you going?"

"I am walking home. Shisala can heal just about anything, I am pretty sure this baby is fine right where it is." She waved him off and started the long hike home.

The colonists she passed gave her a wide berth

as she stomped toward her house, muttering the whole way.

There were no wolves this time, but two bears came galloping up to her and she snarled at them.

Wayk nudged her into getting on Carser's back. Still grumbling, she settled astride him and together they went home.

She might not be letting either of them into her bed that night. At least they were together. Her mad would fade, it always did, but for now, she couldn't believe that they had kept this from her.

She really hoped it was a little girl. She needed someone on her side.

CHAPTER EPILOGUE

“Here they come.”

Their triad stood and watched the shuttle drop to the landing strip. Carser and Wayk were both fidgeting. It wasn't every day that their parents arrived on their new home world.

There was a crowd of Oefric waiting for loved ones to arrive. The town had done wonders in the last three months and it was time to fill the empty homes.

Her men were wearing their uniforms. Not the Oefric uniforms they used to wear, but the livery of the consorts of the avatar. Zora was wearing a matching gown that fell softly to the ground in swaying folds.

The shuttle finished its landing rituals and the door opened to disgorge a stream of eager colonists.

Wayk went on the alert as he spotted his parents and family. A moment later, Carser did the same.

As a group, they walked toward the incoming

crowd and when their families saw them, there was an incoming rush that left Zora standing back and waiting.

Wayk recovered first. "Zora, this is my mother, Ahna, my father, Rikart, my sisters, Ren, Vish and Tala."

Zora shook each hand in turn, smiling as she met each one. "I see where you get your looks, Wayk."

His mother gave her a funny look, but she smiled. "I hear that you are the avatar of this planet. Does that mean I have no chance of grandchildren?"

The question was blunt. "I am currently pregnant, Ahna. Shisala loves the idea of babies and there is no doubt that if your son is willing, there will be children."

She turned to get a quick distraction. "Carser, introductions?"

He looked up in surprise and flushed. "Mother, Father, this is Zora, the avatar of Shisala, and my mate. Zora, this is Yilia and Morhart."

"Pleased to meet you." She extended her hand and Yilia's nostrils flared.

"You are pregnant?"

Zora scowled from Carser to Wayk. "Yes. About three months."

"You are not happy about it?" Yilia looked concerned.

"I am very happy about it, just not happy to be the last to know." She was back to being grumpy and fought it back.

Yilia and Ahna stood near each other. "We have another question, Zora."

"By all means, ask anything you wish."

Ahna looked at her, curious. "Why do you call our sons' by their last names?"

Carser and Wayk looked surprised and it was all Zora needed. Her black mood shattered and she started laughing. She laughed so hard, the flowers bloomed and animals mated all over the world.

Two men had become the centre of her universe and she didn't even know their first names.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Carser's first name is Borhart and Wayk's first name is Vin. I thought it funny that she used their last names as soon as I realised I had never written their first names. It was halfway through the book at that point and I just kept going with the silent joke.

Sue me. I thought it was funny.

Thanks for joining the Terran Times.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Viola Grace was born in Manitoba, Canada where she still resides today. She really likes it there. She has no pets and can barely keep sea monkeys alive for a reasonable amount of time. Her line of day job tends to be analytical which leaves her mind hopping to weave stories. No co-worker is safe from her character analysis. In keeping with busy hands are happy hands, her hobbies have included cross-stitch, needlepoint, quilting, costuming, cake decorating, baking, cooking, metal work, beading, sculpting, painting, doll making, henna tattoos, chain mail, and a few others that have been forgotten. It is quite often that these hobbies make their way into her tales.

Viola's fetishes include boots and corsetry, and her greatest weakness is her uncontrollable blush. Her writing actively pursues the Happily Ever After that so rarely occurs in nature. It is an admirable thing and something that we should all strive for. To find one that we truly like, as well as love.