



Ellora's Cave

Quickies
ANGELA KNIGHT
MERCENARIES

MERCENARIES

An Ellora's Cave publication written by

ANGELA KNIGHT

MS Reader (LIT) ISBN # 1-84360-625-9

Other available formats (no ISBNs are assigned):

Adobe (PDF), Rocketbook (RB), Mobipocket (PRC) & HTML

© Copyright ANGELA KNIGHT, 2003.

All Rights Reserved, Ellora's Cave.

Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc. USA

Ellora's Cave Ltd, UK

**This e-book may not be reproduced in whole or in part by email forwarding,
copying, fax, or any other mode of communication without author/publisher
permission.**

Edited by *Martha Punches*

Cover Art by *Darrell King*



Certain images contained within this e-book have been digitally marked by Digimarc Corp. If you purchased this e-book from a source other than Ellora's Cave or one of its known affiliates, contact legal@ellorascave.com immediately. Please note that reading this e-book without first purchasing it through legitimate means is illegal and can result in heavy fines. As always, our authors thank-you for your support and patronage.

Warning:

The following material contains strong sexual content meant for mature readers. **MERCENARIES** has been rated NC 17, erotic, by three individual reviewers. We strongly suggest storing this electronic file in a place where young readers not meant to view this ebook are unlikely to happen upon it. That said, enjoy...

CHAPTER ONE

A damp, pudgy hand clamped around Trinity Yeager's wrist, arresting her determined stride. "You're not going into that off-worlde den of depravity dressed like that! I forbid it!"

Trin shot a cold look at the man who'd grabbed her. She was wearing black shorts and a top that wouldn't incite a passion-starved trillite miner, but she wasn't surprised at his reaction. Like everybody else on Rapture's Colony, Gordon Lordshepherd was a religious zealot. "You don't have the authority to forbid me anything, Gordon."

He glowered at her, his round face petulant. She wondered where he'd gotten the sunburn she could see glowing through his thinning hair, since he rarely stepped foot outside the church's offices. "We're getting married next week, Trinity. And I don't think it's appropriate for my wife to..."

"We are *not* getting married," Trin interrupted. She was royally sick of dealing with would-be suitors who thought they could tell her what to do.

"Yes, we are." He tilted both his chins. "I've been saving my money for months. I'm going to be the high bidder."

She gritted her teeth. The colony elders intended to auction her off on her twenty-fifth birthday; a single woman, they felt, was too great a source of strife. "Well, you haven't bought me yet, so get your clammy hands off before I deck you."

Gordon clenched his free hand into a thick fist, his cold, black-pebble eyes narrowing between folds of fat. "Once we're married, you're going to learn your place."

"My place," Trin growled, "is where I say it is." She twisted her wrist until she managed to jerk free of those plump fingers. It was harder than she'd

expected. He might be pudgy, but Gordon was surprisingly strong. Her fury took on a desperate edge. "And right now, my place is in there." She whirled and strode through the door of the bar, knowing her tormenter would never set foot inside.

"You come out this minute, Trinity Yeager, or you'll be sorry!" he yelled after her, his voice spiraling into a squeal. "Trin! I'll tell the Sheriff, see if I don't!"

She turned and eyed the door, afraid he'd barrel through, wrapped in sanctimonious outrage. But she'd been right; he didn't have the guts to risk being seen going into the bar.

Shepherd's Crook, she had to get off this planet before her birthday. She could handle Gordon—though she'd probably end up sentenced to a month in jail for wifely insubordination afterward. The problem was Rapture's dozen other bachelors, several of whom were much stronger and even more mean-tempered than the colony's prissy treasurer.

But they all shared the same tone of gloating of anticipation when they talked about the auction. Apparently, her repeated refusal of every marriage proposal she'd ever received had irritated the entire lot.

The mercs were the only chance she had of avoiding the retribution of her future husband, whoever he'd turn out to be. She had to get the off-worlders to take her with them.

One way or another.

Taking a deep breath, Trin turned and surveyed the bar's dark interior. She'd never been inside; it was strictly for off-worlder use only. The elders only allowed it to exist at all because they didn't want rowdy foreigners starting brawls in local restaurants. Trin was courting a week in a prayer cell just by stepping through the door.

Her gaze was instantly attracted to a huge ruddy shaft sliding slowing between a woman's glistening vaginal lips. Trin gaped.

Oh, my Shepherd!

The three-dimensional trid globe filled with fornicating actors floated in one corner of the long room. They were showing a pornographic trid. *Right there in the bar.* Did the elders know?

Trin stared at the trid in hypnotized fascination. She'd lost her virginity in a furtive encounter with another teenager five years before, but it had been so painful and they'd come so close to getting caught, she hadn't dared try again. The penalty for fornication was a public whipping and five years in a prayer cell; it hadn't seemed worth it, not for so little pleasure.

But Shepherd's Crook, she didn't remember Jimmy's cock being that big...

Focus, Trin, she told herself sternly, dragging her eyes away from the globe. *You're not here to look at depraved trids. You're here for the only chance at freedom you'll ever have.*

"Ohhhh!" a female voice moaned from the image. "Deeeperrrr!"

Trin's cheeks flamed. Slinking to the bar, she edged her hip onto the nearest stool, trying to keep her eyes diverted from the amazing things the handsome, very naked man was doing to his partner.

"May I take your order?" the bar asked as a trid menu appeared before her eyes. She blinked at the selection, wondering what would look suitably tough to hardened mercenaries.

"I'll have a Star Mead, please," Trin decided finally, fighting for a matter-of-fact tone as she placed her palm on the bar's surface. A blue light flashed around her hand, signaling that the computer had recorded her palm print and would debit her bank.

An opening appeared in the bar's surface, and a curving bottle thrust upward, filled with something blue and faintly phosphorescent. She accepted it and took a wary sip. The cold, bitter liquid bit into her tongue and burned its way down her esophagus. Gamely, she forced herself to swallow another foaming mouthful, hoping she wouldn't get drunk on one bottle. She needed her wits about her.

“Oh, God, your cunt is so *tight* and *wet*!”

Trin shot a glance at the trid. Jimmy definitely hadn’t been that big. Or flexible. Or imaginative.

As she swallowed and looked away, she saw the mercenaries. Two of them, both male, sat at a small table rimmed in glowtubes that cast the only illumination in the room. A small forest of bottles stood between them; they must be well and truly launched.

Launched or not, though, they were built. Even the matte-black half-armor they wore couldn’t conceal the hard slabs of brawn that lay along chest and thighs and powerful arms. Trin felt a wickedly sensual interest steal through her.

Stop that! she told her stirring libido. The last thing she could afford was to mix sex into this.

As she watched, the blond threw back his head and boomed out a laugh. To Trin’s shock, she realized he wore his hair as long as a woman’s. It flowed halfway down his back in a stream of molten gold that matched the short goatee framing his mouth. Yet as she gazed at him in scandalized fascination, she realized the thick mane actually enhanced his masculinity rather than detracted from it. Otherwise, his broad, angular face and square jaw would have seemed too hard, too aggressive. As it was, he reminded her somehow of an archangel, one of the martial kind who carried swords.

Then his full mouth curled into a smile so wicked and knowing, Trin revised that conclusion. If the man looked like an angel, it was one God had kicked out of heaven. And that carnal grin made it clear why He’d had to do it.

The other mercenary sat back in his chair, drawing her attention with the way he settled into a long-legged, arrogantly male sprawl. He was as dark as his partner was blond, and his hair was cropped so ruthlessly short it stood up in a black pelt. He wasn’t anywhere near as pretty as his friend, either. His face was narrow, the bone structure a little rougher and less refined, with a long nose and thick brows that drew low over deep-set blue eyes. And his mouth made her feel

downright uneasy. The upper lip was narrow and curving, while the lower was full, sensual. He looked cruel, Trin decided warily. Yet there was an air about him, an indefinable something that made her acutely aware of being female.

“Oh, God,” the trid actress breathed, “you’re so hard, so *thiiiick*...”

Trin blinked and licked her lips. According to what Chastity had said, one of the men was the mercenary captain. She was going to have to approach them and somehow convince him to give her a chance. And she was scared to death.

Because somehow she just knew the captain wasn’t the handsome, laughing blond. It was the dark one. The cruel one.

Trin wasn’t sure what scared her more: the idea that he’d turn her down—or the thought that he just might take her on. She wasn’t at all sure she could handle him.

But he looked like he was more than capable of handling her.

CHAPTER TWO

Captain Nathan August took another sip of his Star Mead as he sprawled at his table listening to his internal com unit.

"We won't have any trouble filling the order for the 10,000 crates of rations," said the Rapture Colony broker over his computer implant. *"I've scheduled a cargo transport to make the delivery at 0800 tomorrow."*

"Sounds good," Nathan commed back, the implant transmitting his mental reply to the other man. *"We'll be looking for it."*

"God's blessings on you, Captain. And may He guide you away from the path of sin and death you now follow."

Nathan gritted his teeth and reminded himself again just how low the *Starrunner's* rations were. *"August out."* His comp disconnected. Nathan looked over at his executive officer and glowered. "Why is the only source of rations in six parsecs a planet inhabited by religious lunatics?"

Sebastian Cole grinned lazily. "Maybe God's trying to tell you something."

"Kiss my ass."

"Sorry, you're not my type." He angled his blond head toward the bar and raised a brow. "Now, *she*, on the other hand..."

Nathan followed his gaze to the little redhead colonist who perched on a barstool across the room. She was staring at them as if afraid they'd eat her.

Which wasn't a bad idea.

The black shorts and singlet she wore displayed a long, lean, lightly muscled body with the shimmering tan of someone who spent most of her time outdoors. By contrast, her breasts mounded under that tight shirt in deliciously ample handfuls. Nathan found himself wondering whether her nipples were the pretty pink of other redheads he'd enjoyed. He wouldn't mind finding out.

Normally that thought would be his cue to go seduce her, but there was something about the little colonist that kept him in his seat. Not that she wasn't pretty. Those eyes were positively striking—big and green, set off by arching brows and long lashes. The rest of her gently rounded face was just as attractive, with its pointed chin and slim, straight nose.

But what really got his attention was her deliciously erotic mouth. He'd love to watch his cock ease between those blushing lips as she slowly suckled him.

Then there was the hair—shimmering copper shot with gold highlights, all neatly coiled in an intricate arrangement on top of her head. An image flashed through Nathan's mind: the pretty colonist, lush, tanned and naked, spread out on top of that fiery mane as it spilled across his bed.

If only she didn't look so damned innocent. She had to be in her twenties, but something about her shouted *Keep off the virgin!* On any other world, he'd assume the impression was an illusion created by those big, soft eyes. However, given the zealotry of Rapture Colony, it was entirely possible Red was as untouched as she looked.

Nathan shifted uncomfortably in his seat, feeling heat spin into his groin as that thought aroused a certain predatory protectiveness, a yen to guard her from every other man while simultaneously corrupting the hell out of her himself. *Down boy*, he told himself sternly. *You don't play your kind of games with a virgin.*

Now, an experienced redheaded submissive with innocent green eyes and a taste for bondage... God, *there* was an arousing thought.

"Mmm," Sebastian commed, eying her with lecherous interest. "*Captain, mind if we invade this tight-assed colony? I see somebody I want to take prisoner.*"

Nathan grinned, not even remotely surprised his friend was thinking the same thing he was. "*She'd probably just lie there and pray the entire time you were trying to seduce her.*"

"*Not if I gagged her first.*" Sebastian dipped one lid in a lascivious wink. "*Preferably with my dick.*"

"Asshole."

"Look me in the eye and tell me you weren't imagining her hogtied, naked and begging for more."

"It's a thought," Nathan admitted. *"But she's not exactly in our weight class."*

Just then, she slid off her stool and started toward them, head up and shoulders back.

"Maybe not, boss," Sebastian commed, *"but does she know that?"*

Nathan blinked. That stiff-legged march would have made anybody else look awkward as hell, but there was a delicious little feminine sway and jiggle in every movement of the little colonist's tempting body.

Damn, she was giving him a hard-on.

Even through the fog of alcohol and lust that surrounded him, he felt a flicker of wariness. What the hell did she want, anyway?

Unless... His imagination instantly went into overdrive. Maybe she wasn't a virgin. Maybe she really was one of those women who had a thing for mercs, who craved rough, dominant sex.

And there was nothing Nathan loved more than obliging females with that particular kink. If Red turned out to be a closet submissive, he was going to have her stripped, tied up and stuffed full of cock before she had time to get the come-on out of her mouth.

It had been way, *way* too long since he'd played "rape the captive" with a pretty sub.

Red stopped beside the table and looked down at them, her green eyes wide and wary. She licked those lush lips, obviously trying to work up the guts for whatever kinky request she had in mind. Nathan felt his prick going hard and hot as a cheap blazer pistol.

"God's blessings on you," she said nervously. *"I'm Trinity Yeager."*

He nodded, trying to paste a polite, professional expression on his face—at least until he knew what she wanted. "Captain Nathan August of the

Starrunner.” He gestured at his friend, ignoring the blond’s knowing grin. “My executive officer, Sebastian Cole. What can we do for you?” And would it, please God, happen to involve cable restraints and a fantasy about vicious, well-hung mercenaries?

He probably shouldn’t have had that last mead.

“Happy to meet you. I, uh ... I was wondering ...” Breaking off, Red swallowed and tried again. “Are you...? I want...”

“Yes?” Nathan prompted, and was faintly embarrassed at the hot purr of anticipation in his own voice. He ordinarily had more subtlety.

Encouraged, she blurted, “I want to be a mercenary. I’m interested in joining your crew.”

He stared at her, stunned, his alcohol-fuzzed brain struggling to follow the abrupt conversational detour.

Sebastian roared with laughter. The hopeful smile faded from her face as she looked over at him, hurt growing in her green eyes.

“Oh, baby, I’m sorry,” the blond gasped. “I’m not laughing at *you*.”

Nathan, knowing exactly whom his friend was laughing at, kicked him viciously under the table. Sebastian only hooted louder.

When his executive officer’s howls finally subsided into wheezes, Nathan said coolly, “I’m sorry, but I’m afraid that’s out of the question.”

He expected her to instantly back down from his chill, forbidding tone. Instead she lifted her chin and squared her shoulders even more. She probably had no idea of how that movement drew male attention to her breasts. And Nathan was already far too aware of those pretty tits as it was. “I’m in good physical shape, Captain. I really am stronger than I look.”

“Oh, yeah,” Sebastian commed to Nathan. “I’ll bet she has a real tight grip.”

“If she does, you won’t be finding out.” The captain shot his second a withering glare that made him sit back in his seat, fighting to school his face into something other than a smirk.

Sebastian quelled, Nathan turned his attention to Red's hopeful face. "Whatever your physical abilities, you're not a cyborg, Ms. Yeager," he said. "The rest of the crew have nanotech enhancements that make them far stronger than a human could ever hope to be. " He hoped she hadn't noticed the slight slur in "nanotech." That last mead really had been a bad idea.

She leaned forward to rest her palms on the table. He struggled to keep his gaze from drifting to the hint of cleavage displayed by the singlet's neckline. "I realize that. I plan to get nanotech implants myself as soon as I can save the funds."

Damn, he was not in the mood for this. "Why – so you can kill people? That's what mercenaries do, Ms. Yeager. We're killers. We hire out our ships and our bodies to the highest bidder. Is that what you want?"

"And if so, can I make a bid?" Sebastian commed.

"I," Nathan told him, thoroughly out of patience, *"am going to kick your ass the minute we get back to the ship."*

"...father was a mercenary before he got religion," the girl was saying earnestly, having been unable to overhear the silent byplay without a com implant. "I've heard his stories, I know what it's like. I want that lifestyle. I want to travel to other planets, and I'm willing to fight—even kill—to help people defend themselves against aggressors..."

"Sometimes, Ms. Yeager, we *are* the aggressors." The idealism shining in those green eyes was rapidly eating away at what little patience he had left. "Look, being a merc is a violent, bloody ride that often ends in violent, bloody ways. This is a nice planet. Stay here, do whatever it is you do, raise babies, and die of old age. I assure you, you'll be much happier."

"Nice planet?" She drew herself up to what passed for her full height and glared at him, her eyes as hard as bits of Keewan jade. "You think this is a nice planet?" That curvy upper lip lifted, exposing small white teeth in a snarl. "Next week, the religious bigots who run this colony are going to auction me off to the

highest bidder, who will marry me whether I like it or not. Rapture Colony's laws will give my new husband the right to beat or even rape me whenever he wants. And if I complain, if I don't obey him in every last detail, he could kill me without having to answer too many difficult questions. Your life may be hard and violent and bloody, but so is mine. And at least you're *free!*"

"Damn," Sebastian transmitted, awed, *"there's a lot more in that fluffy package than meets the eye."*

Nathan stared at her, caught well and truly flat-footed for one of the few times in his life. The situation she was describing—assuming she wasn't exaggerating—was appalling. Yet every instinct told him he had no business exposing such a tender innocent to the life he led, no matter what her alternatives were.

It wasn't simply that she was female. Half his crew was made up of women, and they'd all demonstrated their courage and resourcefulness; he'd have no hesitation about kicking down a door with any of them. But an upbringing on a religious colony, no matter how repressive, did not equip anyone for the hard, violent life of a merc.

It was one thing to fuck the little redhead. It was another to take her into a situation that could get her crippled or killed. "If that's true..."

"It is."

"...I'm doubly sorry. But the fact is, we don't take passengers. Everybody on my ship works, and I don't have any openings." He winced and waited for Sebastian to com, *"But wouldn't you love to check out hers?"* For once, though, his executive officer remained wisely silent.

"There's got to be something," Trinity insisted, her voice rising in desperation. "Cook. I'm a good cook..."

"We don't need a cook. We eat prepackaged rations, like every other military company." He waved a hand in dismissal. "I appreciate your willingness to..."

"Any job at all, no matter how menial," she said, fiercely demanding. "Anything."

Which was when Nathan lost his temper. "I need a fuck toy," he snarled. "How's that?"

She stared at him, her soft, pink mouth curving into an O that looked entirely too dick-ready for the peace of his libido. Sebastian raised a hand as if shielding his eyes. Grimly, Nathan waited for her to explode in outrage.

"All right," she said.

"I'm sorry I can't... What?" The room revolved slowly. He *really* shouldn't have had that last mead.

"I said," Trinity told him, tilting up that little chin, "I accept your offer."

What offer? Nathan thought. *When did I make an offer?*

"Now what, genius?" Sebastian commed, his mental voice dripping sarcasm.

Inspired, Nathan added, "You'll also be required to service my executive officer." *That should make her think twice.*

"What a pal."

Her gaze slid to Sebastian. Nervousness flickered across her expressive face, but her voice was brisk when she replied, "That won't be a problem. What are you prepared to pay?"

Hmmm. Interesting that she hadn't backed down. Nathan focused on her with drunken intensity, thoroughly intrigued.

She stared back at him, a stubborn angle to her pointed chin. There was nothing at all pleading in her gaze, but he did glimpse a hint of desperation.

Was she telling the truth about the colony elders' intentions to force her into an abusive marriage? Or was she simply playing a role, trying to get free from the stultifying religious strictures of her culture?

If she was telling the truth, he had no problem with giving her transport off-world. After all, it wasn't necessary to let her actually join the crew; he could

help her land a berth on a vessel captained by one of the merchants he knew. God knew enough of them owed him favors, and it would be a safer life for her.

But he refused to be the victim of a scam. Was she lying?

There was one way to find out—one very delicious way he'd no doubt thoroughly enjoy. He felt his cock harden. "Before we make any agreements, I want a test drive," Nathan drawled, giving her his best menacing smile. If she were lying about her situation, she'd back down when they started playing hardball. "Let's see you take on the two of us first."

Red blinked rapidly, then schooled her expression and lifted one shoulder in a casual half-shrug. "Fine with me."

His cock grew even harder at her assent. He reminded it she'd probably back out.

Testing her resolve, Nathan rose from his chair; that alone had been known to make challengers back off. Not Red, though her pretty eyes widened. He started toward the door, placing his feet more carefully than he ordinarily did.

"Nate, *what the fuck do you think you're doing?*" Sebastian commed, as he and the colonist followed.

"*I'm drunk, I'm horny, and I want to see what she's made of,*" Nathan replied, hanging back to let Red move into the lead. "*And you're going to help.*"

"*You don't really mean to make this fluffy little virgin one of the crew?*" Sebastian sounded scandalized.

"*Of course not. But I am interested in finding out if she's as determined to leave Rapture Colony as she says. If she's really in trouble, she'll stick it out. Otherwise, she'll go running home to Mommy where she belongs.*"

"*So this is a test.*"

"*Exactly.*"

Sebastian eyed him. "*Sure it's not just the fit of her tight little cunt you want to investigate?*"

He grinned, watching the feminine sway of Red's pretty ass as she strode out the door. *"Well, that too. Assuming she doesn't run for home before I get around to it."*

The three of them stepped from the bar's dim confines into the bright, hard glare of the afternoon. Nathan's head instantly set up a protesting throb at the light overdose. He ignored it, intent on getting Red back to the ship and into his bed. She probably wouldn't stay there, but he suspected she'd be thoroughly entertaining while she was. In the meantime, he ordered his computer implants to sober him up for the flight.

Almost instantly, the throbbing in his temples faded as his thoughts slid into focus.

He shot another glance at Trinity's gently rolling ass and discovered he was still hot for her. Damn. He'd half-hoped alcohol had made her more appealing than she really was.

"Trinity! Trinity Yeager. Where are you going?" a man called in a grating nasal whine. Red didn't even break step. A short, fat little male scurried around Nathan to grab her by one wrist. She sent the intruder a coldly contemptuous look he flatly ignored. "I demand to know where you're going with this off-world trash!"

"None of your business, Gordon." She tried to jerk free, but he clamped down on her wrist so hard, the skin dimpled under his sausage fingers.

Nathan's temper began to steam.

"You can't leave with them!" the colonist stormed. "I forbid it!"

Before Nathan could step forward and put the fat little bastard into orbit, Trinity lifted her lip in a snarl. "You can't forbid me one crooking thing, Gordon."

"The auction..."

"Is next week!" In a surprisingly skilled move, she hooked one ankle behind his and drove a shoulder into the colonist's pudgy chest, sending him sprawling

as she danced clear. He hit the ground with an outraged *whoof*. She leaned over him, bracing both hands on her knees as he blinked up at her in shocked outrage.

"And in the meantime, do you know what I'm going to do?" Red growled, her voice low and deadly. "I'm going to *fuck* these mercenaries, Gordon. I'm going to fuck both of them! And I'm going to enjoy it—a crooking lot more than I'd ever enjoy *anything* having to do with you!"

Straightening, she whirled and stomped off toward the shuttle park.

"You...You... I'll call the sheriff!" the little man howled as they strode after her.

"Call him!" she snarled back.

"That muffled explosion you just heard," Sebastian commed, "*was the sound of our little friend blowing all her bridges to quarks.*"

"Did sound that way, didn't it?" Nathan sauntered after her, watching her long, determined strides. She'd handled that well. "*The question is, will she want to rebuild them after she finds out what she's in for?*"

CHAPTER THREE

Oh, Shepherd's Crook, Trin thought, what have I gotten myself into?

She wasn't up to this. Her knees actually shook as she walked across the landing pad toward the mercs' shuttle—a long, low-slung, predator of a craft bristling with gun ports—for the trip up to their battleship.

Battleship. She was about to sleep with men who had a battleship. *Two* men who had a battleship.

Though her thoughts skittered wildly, Trin kept her face expressionless. She knew she couldn't afford to show any of the panic she felt. Who'd want to go into battle with somebody who orbited at the thought of just sleeping with a couple of guys?

A couple of very large, very muscular, very exotic guys. One of whom was watching her like he'd like to eat her. In one big bite.

Nathan August was the scariest human being she'd ever met in her life. It had been all she could do to hang on to her wits while he'd been giving her that look of his back in the bar. His eyes were truly beautiful—a shimmering, cobalt blue—but they alternated between hot and predatory, and cold and dismissive. Either expression unnerved the crook out of her.

On the other hand, Sebastian seemed perpetually amused, though there was also a shimmer of amorous interest in his gaze whenever he looked at her.

What were they planning to do to her?

Whatever it was, the captain was eager to get started. As soon as they boarded the shuttle, August dropped into the pilot's seat and powered systems up. Trin threw herself into the nearest chair while Sebastian settled into the copilot's spot. He and August started drawling techspeak at each other; she caught one word in five.

Trin felt the restraint field pop into place just before they blasted for orbit, the Gs slamming down on her chest so hard and fast, she barely had time to gasp.

August flew the shuttle like the combat pilot he probably was—all skillful, reckless insouciance. Trin wanted to shut her eyes and pray.

The battleship *Starrunner* zoomed toward them over the curve of the planet. She was an impressive vessel, lean and sleek, designed to withstand the stresses of slipping into the alternate universe where it was possible to travel faster than light. Judging by all those weapons' ports, she could have reduced the entire planet of Rapture to chunks of rubble in about an hour and a half.

August ran the shuttle through a docking maneuver, his hands playing over the controls, creating a symphony of grav and antigrav forces that skillfully deposited the shuttle in the battleship's landing bay.

Trin's heart was still pounding from the ride when he rose from the pilot's seat and turned to give her a feral male grin. "Welcome to *The Starrunner*," he purred, in the exact same tone of menacing anticipation the devil might have used greeting a sinner in hell.

What have I gotten myself into? moaned a sane fragment of her mind. Ignoring it, she made herself give the mercenary a cool, undaunted smile. "Why, thank you, Captain August."

"Believe me," he said, his eyes dropping to her breasts, "the pleasure's all mine."

Whatever Trin had expected a battleship to be, the *Starrunner* wasn't it. The corridors were wide and bright, filled with bustling, determined people who looked more like the trids she'd seen of corporate professionals than the hardened killers she knew them to be.

Nathan's quarters were just as welcoming as the rest of the ship—a wide, curving room filled with colorful artwork and intriguing objects that were

presumably souvenirs of his travels. At one end stood an imposing cyberdesk, while the entire opposite wall was taken up by a bed that looked more than big enough for all three of them.

Trin was staring at the gently undulating gel mattress, wondering if he did this often, when Nathan drawled, "Strip." She blinked and looked at him, startled. He bared his teeth in that white wolf grin. "I said, strip. I want to see what I'm getting."

Sebastian's eyes flickered toward him with an expression of faint surprise that made her wonder if the obnoxious snap in his voice was unusual.

Unusual tone or not, though, the hot blue glitter of his eyes made it clear he'd meant every word. Trin grabbed the hem of her singlet and pulled it over her head. When she lowered it, she found both men staring at her breasts with molten anticipation. She was wearing the kind of modest white breast-band that passed for lingerie on the colony, but she still felt her face flame.

"What are you waiting for?" the mercenary demanded, his voice a low, rasping growl. "The rest of it. Double-time."

She might have gotten angry, but the hunger in his eyes seemed to melt something creamy inside her that made it difficult to manage outrage. Licking her lips, Trin opened the breast-band's seal. The cups sprang apart, baring nipples hardened to tight, pink buds.

One of the men made a low, animal sound, male and ravenous. Trin's knees went weak as her eyes flew to the captain. He was standing in an elaborately casual pose, brawny arms folded, one powerful shoulder propped against one bulkhead. But below his half-armor, his tight uniform pants bulged around the outline of a massive erection.

Beside him, his handsome second-in-command watched her with a lupine half-smile. Meeting her gaze, Sebastian wet his full lower lip with his tongue and dipped an eyelid in a wink. His cock was just as hard as August's.

Her heart in her throat, Trin reached for the seal of her shorts.

"Oh, God," Sebastian moaned into his com unit as the little colonist slid her shorts down endless tanned legs, *"she's a natural redhead."*

And she was. Her bush was as fiery as the mane on her head. Her deliciously full, up-tilted breasts bounced as she kicked her clothes aside with one slender foot. She was blushing so brightly, Nathan half expected her to grab her clothes and dive for the door.

Instead she braced her little fists on her hips and lifted that pointed chin with a cool smile that made him want to applaud. "I hope I meet with your approval."

Nathan pasted on a suitably mocking smile. "Not bad. I've had better..."

"Not lately," Sebastian commed.

"...but not bad. I don't suppose you're a virgin?" He displayed his teeth. "I like virgins."

"A little over the top, boss."

Red didn't think so; she paled. Still, she gave him that confident smile again, and her voice quavered only slightly when she said, "Sorry, I'm afraid not."

"Too bad. I was really in the mood to pop your cherry."

"Definitely over the top."

"Fuck off." He contemplated that lush little body with a bit of regret. As much as he'd love to just screw her brains out, he didn't quite buy her denial of virginity. He needed a test just uncomfortable enough to make her think twice, but which wouldn't do permanent damage to her hymen in case she did decide to back out. The loons on Rapture Colony probably attached a lot of significance to that little bit of flesh; he didn't want her to end up paying the price for her escapade.

Wicked inspiration struck. "Ever had your mouth fucked?"

She blinked at him. "Uh, no."

"Good." He gave her a toothy, deliberately menacing grin. "That'll do."

"God, I'm horny as hell, and you're trying to run her off," Sebastian complained. "What do we do when she leaves us literally high and dry?"

"Actually," Nathan drawled back, "I thought I'd fuck you up the ass."

There was a long, long silence. *"So what are we going to do until I have to shoot you?"*

Nathan turned the nasty grin on him. *"Well, first," he said, "we tie her up."*

Sebastian moved toward her like a big cat stalking something small and tasty. She instinctively backed up a pace, but before she could go any farther, his big hands snapped out and grabbed her by the waist. As she yelped in surprise, he tossed her effortlessly through the air to land onto the gel mattress with a soft plop.

"What are you doing?" Trin gasped, as the big blond merc pounced on her and flipped her onto her stomach, then grabbed her right wrist and pulled it behind her.

"Tying you up," he replied, laughter in his voice as he caught her right foot with the other hand and bent her leg until ankle met wrist.

"Why?" Frightened, she tried to kick free, only to discover she couldn't break his grip. "I agreed! I'm not going to fight!"

"We're not going to hurt you." Suddenly the humor was gone from Sebastian's voice. "It's a game. Haven't you ever heard of bondage?"

"Let her up," Nathan ordered, his tone grim.

Instantly, the blond released her, but she didn't scramble to her feet. If this was some kind of test, she was determined not to fail.

Instead, Trin rolled onto her side and looked up at the captain cautiously. He held a length of something gold and metallic. She recognized it instantly; back on the farm, she'd used the same kind of magnetic cable to hobble calves. "Some people enjoy being bound during sex," Nathan told her. "They like the sense of helplessness. But if the idea frightens you, we won't do it."

Her heart was pounding, but she lifted her chin. "I'm not afraid of you. Any game you want to play, I'll play."

He lifted a dark brow. "A rash statement. And one I'm not sure I trust." He studied her face, his gaze bright blue and probing. She fought to hide her instinctive nervousness. "If you decide at any time that we're going too far for you, say '*Starrunner*,'" he said at last. "That's your safeword. We'll end it then."

"And I'll have failed your test."

"No," Nathan said instantly. "I don't want you hurt because you're trying to prove a point. If you use the safe word, I won't hold it against you. So I expect you to use it. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly." She rolled back onto her stomach and stretched her arms back until she could grab her ankles, watching him over her shoulder. "I'm ready to play your game."

He looked down at her face for a long moment. Then his blue gaze traveled over her stretched and naked body. Heat gathered in his eyes. He smiled. "Good."

Then he reached for her.

Nathan felt his cock fill and heat as he used the restraint cable to bind Red's delicate ankles to her slender wrists. By the time he stepped back, she was bound, naked, and thoroughly helpless, and he was hard as a neutronium rod. Gazing at her delicious ass, he began stripping out of his armor.

"You know," Sebastian said, following suit, "it occurs to me – if she's never given a blow job, she's probably never had her pussy eaten either."

Nathan watched her delicate thighs flex as she twisted to watch them, fine muscle rippling all up and down her spine. Between her long, smooth legs, he could see the delicate flesh of her sex, furred in bright copper curls. He smiled slowly as he dropped his armor on the deck, imagining how his hot little virgin

would react to a male tongue flicking over creamy flesh. *"I suspect you're right,"* he commed. *"Let's expand her... horizons."*

He slid a knee on the bed and grabbed her by one slim shoulder, flipping her onto her back again. Her full breasts bounced temptingly. She watched wide-eyed as he spread her legs and settled between them. Anticipating the pleasure to come, Nathan lowered his head and inhaled, breathing deeply of the rich, salty musk of her sex.

"What are you...?" she began, as he caught her lips between two fingers and parted them. He gave her a long, slow lick, and she broke off with a gasp. As he settled down to feast in earnest, he heard Sebastian purr, "Has anybody ever told you what pretty pink nipples you have? I wonder if they're as delicious as they look..."

She whimpered. His friend laughed. "Ah. They are. Isn't this my lucky night?"

Trinity had never in her life experienced anything as hot as the feeling of two male mouths moving over her body, sucking here, biting there, while long, wet tongues teased her most delicate flesh until it was wet and aching. She moaned helplessly.

"Is her pussy as delicious as her tits, boss?" Sebastian asked between gentle, nibbling bites at one hard pink nipple. His erect cock rested against her hip as he snuggled against her side. It was long, with a slight upward bow to it, as if it could reach in deep. Nathan's wasn't quite as long, but was damn near twice as thick. She remembered that much from the moment he'd stood looking down at her after he'd stripped, tall and brawny and built for combat.

What would it feel like when he began working all that hard flesh into her tight, scarcely-used sex? Would it feel as incredible as what he was doing with that impossibly clever mouth?

Nathan's strong hands clamped over her thighs, pinning her against her impulse to writhe as he suckled her clit. The sensations he created stormed her nervous system with such savagery, she could only lie there and quiver. "What are you doing?" she groaned finally, clit and labia burning from the blazer-hot pleasure inflicted by that skillfully flickering tongue.

Sebastian lifted his head from the peaked pink nipple. "He's eating your creamy little pussy, Trin."

"Eating my...? *Ahhh!*" The Captain drew his tongue in a long wet stroke between her lips, making her shiver as pleasure snaked and burned along her nerves.

Presenting a forefinger to the opening of her cunt, Nathan began working it inside. She writhed helplessly. "Don't!"

"Oh, yes," Sebastian chuckled in her ear. "We like our victims nice and wet before we start using them." As his captain feasted, he cupped one of her breasts until the stiff nipple pointed upward. He leaned forward, the raw silk of his hair stroking over her skin, and trapped the little peak between his teeth. Gently, relentlessly, he began alternately sucking and raking it, creating delicious little pleasure zings with every hot move of his mouth.

Trin had never felt such sensations. It was all too much—too intense, too savagely arousing, too delicious. Yet bound hand and foot, there was nothing she could do to escape as the two warriors pleased her.

"You like being helpless, Trin?" Sebastian asked, twisting one of her nipples with slow, hot skill. "I hope so, because we like having you this way."

He leaned closer until he could whisper into her ear. "There's something about the look in a woman's eyes when she's all tied up and staring at your cock. You can see her wondering how it's going to feel when you slide it inside her." He palmed her other breast, then started teasing its erect, longing tip. "Meanwhile you're looking at her, trying to decide how you're going to fuck her first. 'Cause when she's bound like that, she's all yours. Any way you want her,

you can take her. Slow and sweet, or rough and hard. And God, that's soooo hot."

Ecstasy lashed through her like a whip. She could feel something huge growing inside, swelling as if it would burst wide any moment. Frightened, maddened with dazzled lust that was so much more extreme than anything she'd ever known, she lost control. "Stop! God, please stop!"

"You want us to stop, use the safe word," Nathan rumbled from between her legs. "That's what it's for."

She opened her mouth—and realized she didn't really want the mercy she was about to plead for. She snapped her teeth shut.

"Don't really want us to stop, do you?" Sebastian said, in the voice Satan might have used tempting a sinner. "Beg some more, sweetheart. Beg the nasty mercenaries not to suck your pretty pink nipples and your rock-hard clit. Beg us not to fuck you. It makes me so damn hard when you beg."

Then Nathan closed his mouth over her clit and sucked just as Sebastian again raked his teeth over her nipple. The fire exploded behind her eyes like a sun going nova.

And Trinity screamed from the sheer, terrifying glory.

She was lying limp and boneless, wrung out from the force of her first orgasm, when Nathan scooped her off the bed and deposited her on her knees beside it.

Dazed, Trin watched as he turned to a cabinet and bent, digging around until he produced an arrangement of straps. He dropped the thing over her head, and Sebastian rose to buckle it into place. Meanwhile the captain took the round ring attached to the straps and held it up to her mouth. "Open up," he ordered roughly.

She blinked at the ring. "What is it?"

"It's a spreader gag," he told her. "We use it when we want to fuck a submissive's mouth."

Submissive? She wasn't really sure what that word meant, but it sounded wicked. Kinky. Eager to experience whatever it was he meant to do to her, Trin licked her lips and obeyed. The captain inserted the ring between her jaws, forcing her lips into an O. The ring was covered in something soft and faintly minty. She swallowed around it and looked up at the two men nervously.

"What about the safeword?" Sebastian asked his captain.

Nathan grimaced. "Good point." He contemplated the problem, then returned to the cabinet. A moment later, he came back and displayed a long, violently blue object. It was shaped exactly like a male cock. "Hold onto this," he said, tucking it into one bound hand. "If you decide you want to call this off, drop it. We'll stop."

Trin clutched the artificial phallus anxiously. She didn't want this to end until she found out what was going on.

Particularly not when they were both grinning at her, wearing identical expressions of male anticipation, their flushed cocks violently hard and thrusting from muscled groins.

Trinity shivered. Things were about to get interesting.

Nathan threw a glittering look at Sebastian. "Go get the clamps."

She swallowed. *Clamps?*

Slowly, Nathan allowed the stim-clamp to close around one of Red's hard nipples. She jerked with a low, desperate moan. He looked up quickly, but the expression in her dazed green eyes was one of arousal more than pain. The clamp had a bite, but it also stimulated pleasure receptors in the nipples. He checked her hand. She still had that death grip on the dildo; she obviously had no intention of calling things off any time soon.

Testing, he reached between her wide-spread thighs as she knelt before him. She was so richly creamy, his cock jerked.

God, he burned to fuck her. He knew from his careful exploration of her deliciously tight cunt that she wasn't the virgin he'd suspected. And that made her fair game.

Assuming she didn't change her mind.

And he was beginning to suspect she wouldn't back out after all. Whenever she met his gaze, he saw a combination of innocence, awakening desire, and determined courage in those clear green eyes. That blend fascinated and aroused him until he burned to pull her beneath him and fuck her until they both detonated like a pair of plasma grenades.

When he lifted his eyes to her panting breasts again, it was just in time to see Sebastian clamp the other nipple. She jolted back against his friend, groaning behind her gag in a voice rich with female arousal.

Sebastian, holding her from behind, lowered his mouth to her ear. "Like that?"

She nodded vigorously. Unable to resist, Nathan slid a second finger into her juicy pussy. She felt so incredibly tight, just begging for his cock...

"Damn, Nathan," Sebastian commed, "*can we keep her?*"

It was an intriguing thought. He brushed his thumb over her clit and watched her twist in her bonds, her green eyes dazed with passion. He'd assumed that a young female raised on a planet of religious zealots would be as emotionally frigid and repressed as her culture. Trin had proved him deliciously wrong with a combination of reckless courage and intense natural eroticism that had caught him by surprise.

And aroused the hell out of him.

For a moment he imagined what it would be like to make her his submissive in truth. His to bind and fuck whenever he wanted... "*It's a tempting thought.*"

"Oh, yeah." His second opened the clamp and let it close again as he turned his wrist, gently twisting her nipple. "*She'd make such a sweet slave.*"

Nathan felt his cock jerk at the mental image those words conjured. *"The question is, would she really want to play the game?"*

"She certainly seems to be enjoying it at the moment."

He twisted his wrist, feeling her slick interior muscles gripping his fingers. She was so damn wet, so hot. So tight. *"But we haven't really started playing yet. Let's see what happens when we do. Fuck her mouth."*

"I thought you'd never ask." To Trin, Sebastian said, "It's time for you to discover the joys of sucking cock, Red." Grinning wickedly, he rose to his feet.

Nathan watched the little colonist's eyes widen. He gave her a nasty grin and moved back, giving his friend room.

Trinity quivered as the blond mercenary caught the back of her head in one big palm and pulled her closer to his jutting cock. Even if she'd wanted to resist, the gag's ring held her jaws open and ready. She quivered, impossibly aroused.

Then he slid the flushed head between her lips. It felt like velvet, tasted of salt and man, and taking it into her mouth made her hotter than she'd ever been in her life.

He moved in deeper. She could feel the tiny folds just after the head, then the smooth, stretched-tight skin that covered his long erection. Eagerly, she began to suck. Sebastian groaned in decadent pleasure as his hand curled into a fist in her hair. "God," he groaned, "her mouth is so hot..." He rolled his hips in short, slow thrusts, fucking her face through the gag.

Trin's gaze slid to Nathan, who watched with feral masculine interest. Reaching down with one big hand, he caressed his own tight balls as he wrapped the other around his thick, jutting cock. Slowly, he began to stroke. "Suck it, Red," he ordered in a deep growl. "Suck it hard. I want to see those cheeks hollow."

Shepard's Crook! She could feel cream pooling between her thighs. Closing her eyes, she obeyed.

Trin had heard of blow jobs back in high school—furtive whispered conversation between teenage boys, overheard with desperate interest. But she'd never performed one, and she wondered nervously how to go about it.

"Use your tongue," the captain rasped. "Lick his shaft while he fucks your mouth."

Tentatively, she rolled her tongue over the underside of Sebastian's rod. He groaned, his fist tightening in her hair. Encouraged, she angled her head, rocking it from side to side so she could caress him. With her hands bound to her ankles, there wasn't much else she could do.

"That's right," Nathan said. Though her mouth was full of Sebastian's thick shaft, she was intensely aware of the mercenary captain as he moved around behind her. He stepped in so close she felt the brush of his thighs against her back. She quivered.

Sebastian drove in a particularly deep thrust. She choked a little on his length and he moderated his thrust, murmuring a soft apology.

Nathan crouched and slid his powerful arms around her torso, one hand claiming her breast, the other slipping between her spread thighs. She closed her eyes and moaned around his second's cock as it steadily stroked in and out.

"You look hot having your mouth fucked, Red," Nathan breathed in her ear. One long finger brushed over her clit once, then circled the erect nub. Pleasure rolled over her in a dark, sweet wave. "Helpless and bound, ready to be used however we want." He slid his hand deeper between her legs, found the creaming opening of her cunt. She whimpered as he eased one finger in all the way to the knuckle. "Ahhh. And you like it, too. Don't you? Being a fuck toy for a pair of horny mercs." He reached up to the clamp that was still attached to her nipple, began opening and closing it. Every time it moved, it sent a new jolt of sensation into her nipple, unpredictably stinging or pleasurable. Shivering, she opened her legs even more and watched Sebastian's muscled belly work as he used her. Her hand was sweating around the blue phallus.

"You have no idea what we could do to you," Nathan said in a dark, menacing rumble. "I'm thinking about what it would feel like to force my thick cock between your soft pink lips, or maybe inside this juicy cunt." His finger thrust in deeper as his voice dropped again. "Listening to your arousing little whimpers. Feeling you so tight and slick and helpless while I fuck you. Even if we didn't have you tied up, you wouldn't be able to stop us from doing whatever the hell we want with you. " He slowly twisted the clamp until she gasped around Sebastian's cock. Nathan chuckled wickedly, then added another finger to the one stroking inside her cunt. "After all, we're big, nasty cyborgs, and you're soft and female and...tiiiny." He stretched the word out, packing a shipload of nasty innuendo into its two syllables. "My favorite kind of victim."

She really shouldn't find this so damn arousing—but she did. Trin closed her eyes and moaned in guilty pleasure as Nathan's long fingers went right on tormenting more cream out of her juicing pussy. She could feel a climax floating just out of reach. Concentrating ferociously on the sensations flooding her, she almost dropped the blue cock and had to fumble for it frantically.

"God, yes!" Sebastian groaned as his broad cock rode faster and faster in and out of her mouth. "Damn, boss—Red's a natural born cocksucker. Let's put a collar on her and keep her tied up and ready to use whenever we want."

She shivered. This definitely shouldn't be turning her on. Yet it was.

Oh, Shepherd's Crook, it was.

Sebastian stiffened, his back arching. "I'm coming!" he gasped. Trin felt his cock jerk in her mouth. Something bitter flooded over her tongue.

"Swallow, Red," Nathan ordered. "Swallow every last drop. Because next," he leaned closer until his whisper gusted against her ear, "it's my turn."

CHAPTER FOUR

“God, that was good.” Sebastian pulled free of the ring gag and collapsed back on the bed, panting, a sated smile on his face.

“And I want to find out just how good.” With that dark growl, Nathan stepped up to Trin and slid his thick rod right into the ring—and her open, waiting mouth.

Trinity moaned as the captain’s massive shaft slid over her tongue. She felt wanton, eager. As hot as it had been when Sebastian had fucked her this way, it was even more outrageously arousing when Nathan did it.

The gently reared virgin inside her reeled in shocked guilt as cream flooded into her cunt with every ruthless oral stroke of the big mercenary’s cock. She knew she shouldn’t feel this way, shouldn’t revel in the sheer kink of being forced to service him. Yet something inside her responded to his pose of dominance, loved the sense of being at his mercy.

Suckling him eagerly as her nipples burned and her cunt ached to be filled, she struggled to understand how he’d done this to her. God knew Rapture Colony was filled with swaggering males who wanted to bring her to heel. Yet Trinity had never found any of them even remotely arousing. In fact, their attempts to belittle her and force her into a submissive role had only infuriated her.

So why did she find it so wildly arousing when Nathan August did it?

Just then, his big hands rose to cup the sides of her face—not forcing her onto his cock, but cradling her tenderly.

Trin realized suddenly there were any number of men on Rapture Colony who’d have loved to fuck her mouth, but none of them would have supported

her head while they did it. Even dominating the hell out of her, Nathan treated her with respect.

No matter what games he might play to amuse and arouse both of them, he made her feel oddly cherished. They'd known each other only a couple of hours, yet somehow he never made her feel as if he saw her as a receptacle for his sperm, an object to be used and dominated. That was more than she could say for the men of Rapture Colony, despite their sanctimonious attitude.

Suddenly Nathan pulled free of her mouth and rocked back. The thick head of his cock brushed her cheek as she glanced up at him, questioning. He looked down at her, probing her eyes with his.

"Do you want me to come in your mouth, Trinity?" he asked in a deep rumble.

She shivered. And nodded eagerly.

His gaze flared hot. He plunged his cock inside her mouth again. Instantly, she began to tongue and suckle his hard, silken flesh, hot to taste his come. The big shaft jerked against her tongue, began to pulse salt and heat.

"Yes!" His shout was low and fierce. "Drink from me, Trin! Take me!"

On the verge of climax herself, she hungrily obeyed.

The dildo dropped from her hands, unnoticed.

For a long moment, the only sound in the room was the rasping gasps of spent breathing.

Then Nathan stepped away from her, pulling his softened cock free of Trin's mouth. As if by instinct, she tried to suck it back in again, but he reluctantly escaped.

"Nice," Nathan rasped, reaching up to unbuckle the ring gag from around her head. "Very, very nice."

And it had been. His knees were still shaking. She might be inexperienced, but she more than made up for it with enthusiasm.

As the gag fell away from her mouth, she licked her lips and worked her jaw. Nathan knew it was probably aching after the vigorous oral use she'd just received. He reached out both hands and began to massage her face at the hinge of her jaw. Trin sagged against him, her eyes closing in pleasure.

"Damn," Sebastian commed as he watched them from the bunk, "it's not just an act, boss. The girl really is a submissive. And damned if she's not one of the hottest subs it's ever been my pleasure to sample."

"Seems that way," he replied. "But I think I need one last test."

Aloud he said, "You've won your transport off-world, Trinity."

Big green eyes lifted to his and lit in relief. Then, as he watched, heat gathered in her gaze, a sweet female anticipation. "So you'll accept me as your..." She hesitated and licked her lips, "...as your fuck toy?"

"That's not necessary."

He was watching closely enough to catch the disappointment that flashed across her mobile little face. "But why not? I thought... Did I...?" She clamped her teeth shut and winced, as if she'd committed some faux pas by wanting him.

"You were incredible," Nathan assured her. "But I'd never require a woman's sexual submission as the price of helping her."

Confusion drew her brows into a frown. "But you said...."

He shrugged, suddenly uncomfortable. "I was drunk, I was horny, and I wanted to see how far you'd go. I also wondered if you were exaggerating your situation."

"I wouldn't do that!" Trin protested, indignant.

"The captain," Sebastian announced dryly, sitting up on the bed, "is not in the habit of taking anybody or anything at face value. It's a good way to get people killed."

"There are women aboard who'd be happy to take you on as an apprentice," Nathan went on. "And..."

"Note, he said, 'women,'" Sebastian interrupted, his expression amused. "We men would be too, but the captain's the jealous type."

Trinity blinked, clearly startled. Nathan felt his cheeks heat and shot his executive officer a warning glare. *"Keep it up, asshole, and you'll be walking home."* To Trin, he continued, "They'll provide you with whatever training and help you need, even after you get your nanotech implants."

Trinity took a deep breath. "Thank you, Captain. I'm grateful."

"You deserve it," he told her. "You've got the courage and intelligence it takes to succeed in this business. It won't be easy, but you can do it."

Her eyes widened, startled. "That's very flattering, but..."

"Nate's an excellent judge of character, Red," Sebastian said. "He can size up a man or a woman faster than anybody I've ever known. If he says he thinks you've got what it takes, you do." The blond's amused gaze slid to his. "Whether he's entirely objective about the assessment or not."

"Kiss my ass."

"I repeat, you're not my type."

Nathan returned his attention to Trin and hesitated, finding the next words far more difficult than he'd expected. He found his gaze sliding back to Sebastian's.

His first officer's eyes widened as sudden, knowing understanding flooded them. "All the sudden, I'm beginning to feel like a third wheel." Sebastian levered off the bed and bent to grab his uniform, boots and half armor. "It's been delicious, Red." He lifted a blond brow at Nathan as he jerked on his pants. "I get the distinct impression it'll never happen again, but it was certainly tasty while it lasted." Sealing his fly, he headed for the door, which slid open at his approach. Just before he ducked through, his boots and armor in hand, he gave Trinity a wink. "Be gentle with him."

She turned to Nathan as the door closed behind him. "What was that all about?"

Nathan shook his head. "A twenty-year friendship that has enabled him to read my fucking mind, that's what it's about." When she looked no more enlightened, he added, "Sebastian knows me far too well. Well enough to know I was about to make a proposition to you that I didn't particular want an audience for."

Trinity frowned. "What proposition?"

He rose to his feet. "I'm a dominant, Trin." Realizing she might not know what the term meant, he added, "I like to take the dominant role in sex."

She grinned. "Yeah, I'd pretty much figured that part out."

"The question is," he said, feeling his mouth going suddenly, surprisingly dry, "are you a submissive? More to the point, do you want to be *my* submissive?"

Damn, Trinity thought, staring at the mercenary captain. *He's serious*. She licked her lips. "What does that mean?"

"It means I'd like to have you as my lover. It's not a requirement of service on this ship," he added quickly. "And if my request makes you uncomfortable, I'll arrange to get you a berth with another mercenary company. But there's something between us—an intensity I've rarely experienced—a chemistry. Something. I'd like the opportunity to explore it, find out if it's real."

She looked up at him, at the hard, sculpted muscle of his big body, at the angles of his rough-hewn face and the threatening sensuality of his mouth. If wanting more of this was wrong, she didn't give a fuck. "I'd like to find out too," she said. "I don't know if I'm a...submissive or not. But I do know you arouse me. The things you do, the way you touch me. I want..." Summoning her courage, she met his hot blue gaze. "More. I want to feel your hands on me again. I want to feel your cock inside me." Trinity took a deep breath. "Please."

"God, I want that too," he told her roughly. "But...I need to know. I need to make sure what I want won't frighten you or repulse you." His eyes met hers,

suddenly fierce and very blue. "I've got one more test, Trinity. Do you want to take it?"

Her heart began to pound, not with fear but with a sudden dark excitement. "Yes. Whatever you want."

His gaze probed hers. "Are you certain? You've got to be certain, Trinity."

"I'm certain. I want you to take me, to do whatever you want to do, however you want to do it." Shepherd's Crook, it was arousing to say those words, to surrender to him like this.

A grin spread slowly across his face, hot and wicked. "Be very sure, Trinity. Because I mean to spank that pretty little ass."

Big green eyes widened. "What?"

"You heard me." Nathan felt his cock lengthen and throb at the flare of shocked arousal in those clear emerald depths. Good. She was as turned on by the idea as he was. "I want to watch those cheeks turn a pretty pink under my hand." He moved to stand over her, deliberately looming over her, over her small bound body. "Then," he growled, "I'm going to fuck you." Heat gathered in his balls as he looked down at her lush, vulnerable curves. "Hard."

She stared up at him, her eyes lingering on his cock, gone once more hard and eager. Her smile sent a bolt of lust right into his groin. "Good. I want to be fucked." Pausing, she licked her lips. "Hard."

With a rough growl of hunger, Nathan bent and scooped her into his arms, then sat down on the bed with her. Unable to resist, he inserted a finger into her tight cunt. She was even hotter than she'd been the last time he'd probed her. When he reached for the restraint cables around her wrists and ankles, his hands actually shook with need. Her present hogtied pose was not suited to what he had in mind.

When Nathan finally finished untying and retying her, Trin's wrists were bound at the small of her back, her ankles were free, and her slim little bottom was uplifted, awaiting his hand.

He brushed his fingers over the sweet, round curves, savoring the smooth skin. "Mmmm," he purred, "what a perfect pair of cheeks. I'm going to enjoy heating them up."

Trin moaned, a hot, excited sound as she squirmed over his knees, her ass flexing and lifting in blatant invitation.

Nathan paused, studying that luscious butt, anxiety suddenly coiling through his arousal. The next five minutes would determine whether she really was the submissive he suspected – the one he'd unconsciously been seeking since he'd realized how dark his own needs ran.

Damn, he hoped he didn't fuck this up.

Trinity took a deep breath as the mercenary's muscled thighs flexed under her body. His erect cock rested against her hip, long and hard and eager. To her astonishment, she could feel

She was totally at his mercy. And Shepherd's Crook, it made her hot. She burned for the thick shaft that twitched against her as if anticipating the pleasures of pounding her ass.

"Here it comes," he rasped. "Ready?"

Trinity shivered. "Ready."

Whap!

The first slap was loud, but barely even stung. It was more a hard pat than anything else.

A measured interval went by as she waited for the next spank. She squirmed against Nathan's thigh as her anticipation and arousal grew.

Whap. That one was no harder. *Whap!* The one that followed came a little faster, but with that same ruthless control.

Then he started spanking her faster, a constant patter of light slaps that didn't really hurt. *Whap, whapwhapwhap!*

Faster and faster, heat spread across her butt with each impact of Nathan's broad palm. Slowly, they started getting a little harder, then a little more harder

until she found herself squirming, as much with sheer arousal as from the gathering sting. Each time she bucked against his powerful thighs, she felt a hum of pleasure burning under her skin like a low-level electric charge. And every time Trin writhed under each hard smack, the rough hair on Nathan's thighs teased her sensitive nipples, sending another zing of pleasure through her.

Her ass was really beginning to burn now. She pictured herself draped ass-up across the mercenary's lap, bound and helpless, cheeks reddening steadily as he enjoyed paddling her butt.

Suddenly Nathan's hand paused in its rise and fall. For a moment, there was silence except for Trinity's gasps. She realized with surprise the mercenary captain was breathing just as hard. She knew it wasn't from exertion.

"Ready to beg for mercy?" Nathan asked, his voice rough with arousal.

Her ass felt hot and inflamed. So did her pussy and the tips of her aching breasts. She clenched her bound hands, feeling the rise of a reckless heat. "I can take anything you can dish out, Captain."

"Ohhhh," Nathan growled. "We'll see about that."

Trinity squirmed and bucked and screeched under the next half-dozen swats, unconsciously rubbing her satin hip against his rock-hard, aching cock. Watching her struggle in an erotic symphony of quivering female curves, Nathan couldn't remember the last time a spanking had turned him on more.

And he wasn't alone. Innocent or not, she was responding just as he'd hoped.

He was so hot, it took him a moment to realize she'd stopped yelping under his smacks.

Then she groaned. "*Starrunner!*"

Nathan froze as she voiced the safe word, ice stealing over him. "God, did I hurt you?" he demanded, examining her ass anxiously.

But though he'd paddled her thoroughly, he'd been careful. There was no sign of any bruising at all.

"I can't take it any more," she said, her voice rough with desire. "Fuck me! I'm going insane!"

He nearly melted into a puddle of relief. She wasn't hurt, just teased to the end of her endurance. "Shit! Don't do that to me! You only supposed to use the safeword if you're in distress."

She turned her head and shot him a mock glare. "Believe me, I'm in distress. In fact, I'm going to die in the next five minutes if you don't fuck my brains out. *Right now.*"

Nathan laughed in sheer relief. "As my lady commands." Scooping her into his arms, he surged to his feet, turned, and tossed her down across the bed before grabbing her delicate ankles.

Her face was flushed as red as her well-spanked ass, but her gaze was bright with laughing hunger. Lust surged high in him as he eagerly spread her long, slim thighs. Looking between them, he saw that her cunt lips were swollen from a combination of arousal and his careful spanking. Her bush, red as a fox's pelt, was damp and matted with cream. Her wrists were still bound behind her back, and the arch of her spine lifted her full breasts. They quivered with every panting breath she took, nipples hard and flushed red.

Sliding a knee onto the bed, Nathan shifted his grip to the backs of her knees, rolling her onto her shoulders and taking the pressure off her bound arms. And, in the process, angling that ripe, wet cunt up for his cock.

Almost shaking with the force of his lust, Nathan draped her calves over his shoulders and took his cock in one hand. The thick head brushed red, springy curls, then velvet lips, then began working its way into thick, clotted cream and deliciously snug flesh.

He didn't think he'd ever had anything wetter or tighter.

"Shepherd's Crook!" Trinity gasped. "You're...*ahhh!*"

Nathan echoed her cry with a long groan of his own as he arched his buttocks, forcing his way deeper into her silken heat. She clamped around him, unbelievably slick and tempting. He could feel a pulse throbbing hard in his balls.

He only hoped he could hang on long enough to make her come before he blew like a sonic grenade.

He was huge.

Arms bound under her, calves draped over Nathan's shoulders, Trinity whimpered in need as he forced still more of his cock into her cunt, filling her by relentless millimeters.

Her ass stung and burned from the spanking, but she really didn't care. She'd never felt like this before, never known such pleasure or such desire. It made her entire life up until now seem pallid and bland as milk. He fed another centimeter of cock into her, and she felt the huge, glittering wave of her gathering orgasm swell even brighter, hotter.

Finally he was all the way inside. Her legs still draped over his shoulders, Nathan came down over her, bracing his hands on the mattress. He searched her eyes. "Are you all right?" His voice was deep and strained.

"Yeah." Need clawed at her. She wanted to feel him riding her. "Shepherd's Crook, what are you waiting for? Fuck me!" She'd never said the words before today, but in the last couple of hours, she'd lost track of how many times she'd used them.

And she'd meant it each and every time.

He gave her a flashing white grin. "Don't mind if I do." The long, long shaft began sliding from her, the friction of its movement maddening and delicious.

"Oohh, that's good!"

His grin widened. "It certainly is." He reversed the stroke. Innnnn. And outtttt. And innnn. And outttt. Slowly. So slowly.

She found herself squirming, trying to hurry him, to get more of that magnificent cock. But bound and pinned under his big body, she was helpless. Nathan would use her just the way he wanted, at just the speed he wanted, and there was nothing she could do about it.

Goaded, she tossed her head on the mattress. "Please Nathan," she heard herself begging. "I can't take any more of this!"

His gaze flickered. "Want me to stop?"

"No!" It was a scream of frustration. *"I want you to fuck me faster!"*

He boomed out a laugh—and obeyed.

Nathan began pounding her as hard and fast as he'd spanked her ass earlier, shafting her in short, delicious thrusts that ground his pelvis against her clit. With every stroke, ribbons of hot pleasure snaked around her spine and jerked her tight. Her thigh muscles began to jerk and spasm.

Trin could feel the orgasm building, getting bigger and hotter and fiercer with every thrust, ready to break free. "Yes!" she gritted, half-insane with anticipation. "Yes, Nathan! More!"

He gave her exactly that, fucking harder, faster, jolting his cock in and out of her, sweat flying from his face. "God," he gasped. "You feel so damn good..."

Dazed, she looked up to meet his wild gaze. The cords and muscles of his chest stood in hard relief from effort. His cock felt like a length of fire as it shuttled in and out, his pelvis grinding against hers.

And then the fire exploded.

She screamed as it flooded her in a soundless explosion of ecstasy, pleasure whipping like a storm through her battered nervous system.

As she convulsed, she heard Nathan bellow. "Yes! God, Trinity!"

Then the heat drowned out everything else.

It was several hours later before they finally emerged from Nathan's quarters, driven out more by hunger than anything else.

He took Trin to the ship's mess and settled her into a seat she had trouble sitting in—and not just because of that spanking. Her embarrassment was mitigated by the fact that the captain's knees seemed no more steady than her own.

He'd just handed over one of those prepackaged meals and slid in beside her when Sebastian plopped down opposite them. The blond's gaze was openly assessing.

"Well, you both seem in one piece—more or less."

Nathan's smile was openly smug. "More or less."

"Uh-huh." Sebastian eyed his captain speculatively.

Obviously attempting to ignore his friend, Nathan started telling Trin about their next mission. She listened eagerly and managed to come up with some observation she thought reasonably intelligent.

He'd segued into a discussion of the politics of that particular star system when Sebastian suddenly announced, "I give it a month."

Trin frowned, unable to follow his conversational detour. "You give what a month?"

"Him." Sebastian tilted his head at his captain. "Before he begs you to put him out of his misery and marry him."

Trin stared at the blond in flabbergasted astonishment, trying to ignore the hopeful leap of her heart. "Don't be ridiculous. We've only known each other a few hours."

"And I've known him twenty years, and I've never seen him so besotted."

"Besotted?" Nathan glowered, dark brows drawing low over his blue eyes. "I am not besotted."

Sebastian smirked. "Fifty cred says you're on your knees before the month's out."

"There's no way in hell I'd make a bet like that, you insensitive bastard," Nathan growled.

The blond nodded, satisfied. "My point exactly."

"What do you mean by that crack?" Nathan growled.

"You're a hell of a captain, Captain, but sensitivity is not one of your character traits." He grinned smugly. "Like I said. Smitten."

It was a good thing Nathan didn't take the bet. He'd have lost.

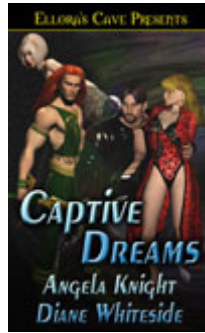
They were married a month later by a star station chaplain, soon after Trin got her nanotech implants.

That night, they celebrated their marriage with another session of bondage—except this time, Trinity tied up Nathan. He wasn't surprised when he enjoyed it as much as she did.

Meanwhile, Sebastian counted his winnings from all the fellow crewmen stupid enough to take his bet.

THE END

Also at Ellora's Cave



Captive Dreams

By Angela Knight and Diane Whiteside

Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.

www.ellorascave.com