

On Corridian Wings 2: Teche

Steve Boisman

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Chapter 1

"I'll see you skewered, you traitorous Seth bastard!"

With General Een's threat still resonating in his thoughts, Chief of Police Pos Teche gazed speculatively into the night sky, the slits of his pupils wide against the darkness. The trio of crescent moons that graced the Velosian heavens were particularly striking this evening; hanging like crystal ornaments above the ice-capped mountains.

Below the moons were dozens of moving lights; Een's fighters flying in formation about the capital. Something nasty was brewing.

The threat by General Een earlier in the day was real enough. He and Teche had been at loggerheads for the past five years. Conflict between military and civil authorities was a fact of life in any occupied territory but Een was a particularly vicious individual. His history of rancorous discord with the civilian establishment was legendary.

Teche's predecessor had disappeared and rumors persisted that he'd been butchered and served as an entrée at one of His Highness Muss's banquets.

His Highness, Dantilus Muss. Now there's a bastard of a completely different order.

Teche brought a cup of steaming Solaran caff to his lips. He tasted the air above the dark liquid with his snakelike tongue before taking a sip. He thrilled at the heady aroma, the blend of subtle flavors stimulating his mouth, sending waves of pleasure directly to his spinal column.

He closed his eyes in illicit bliss. Solaran caff was illegal on Velos. Teche considered confiscated contraband to be the only perk of his pressured and unrewarding job. As Chief of Police of Los, Teche had few opportunities for personal enjoyment. He couldn't remember the last time he'd actually laughed out loud.

From down below came a tentative rap on his ground floor door. Teche's momentary pleasure was replaced by high alertness. No one ever called at this late hour.

He went quickly down the stairs to the ground floor of his villa, his short tail giving him the swaying gait characteristic of Rigellians. No slave to fashion, Teche did not leave his twin cocks open to the air but wore a traditional kilt of fine iridescent silk, a gift from his dead father.

Being from the minority Seth clan, he was shorter than the average Rigellian, making him much less imposing to the slightly built Velosians. The locals actually felt safe talking to him. He was, therefore, more effective in controlling the conquered populace. Many problems and misunderstandings were caught in the early stages. As a result, the continent under his benevolent control had the least number of incidents of civil disobedience on the whole planet. This record made him unpopular with the military, which used any excuse to commit genocide, a task they relished and had so efficiently completed around Terek, the planet's capital.

He opened the front door to find two young Velosian women, Jiss and Joss, waiting impatiently on his doorstep. They wore the unofficial uniform of the younger Velosian generation, matching short red tunics, which showed off their trim and busty figures.

Teche was never sure which was Jiss and which was Joss. He had a notion that Jiss had the slightly larger breasts and slightly darker complexion.

"Greetings, sisters," he said in his best Velosian, his eyes darting warily up and down the street. He lived in a well-lit suburb, which was generally empty at this time of night. He saw no evidence of watchers and stood aside and held the door open for the petite Velosians to enter.

"Greetings, Lord Teche," Jiss said and forced a smile, her large almond eyes twinkling in the hall light.

He ushered them into his study and invited them to sit. The two women did as he bid, leaning back carefully on the couch, crossing their shapely legs and letting the short tunics ride up their smooth thighs.

Teche considered his unexpected but welcome visitors. He couldn't help but admire their slim, lithe bodies. Particularly their delightfully large and shapely breasts swelling out of the tunics' tight bodices. The young women curled their long arms into their laps, the elongated fingers of each hand clasped tightly in nervous anticipation.

They were such graceful creatures, he mused, unlike us clumsy reptiles. The Velosian body was well suited to their original arboreal lives harvesting Visser. The delicate, hard to reach seed was used in the manufacture of the universally famous spice, the planet's most famous export; after sex slaves that was. Unfortunately Jiss and Joss were prime candidates for that lamentable trade and he only hoped the fact that they worked for him would offer some protection.

"Your father is safe?"

"Yes," Joss said. "We thank you for your help, Lord Teche."

Teche frowned with embarrassment at their use of the compulsory title that all enslaved people across the galaxy used to address their Rigellian masters. "It gave me pleasure to help, truly."

Teche had intervened in the arrest of their father, set upon by a drunken squad from the Rigellian army garrison intent on plundering his jewelry shop. Had Teche not rescued the old man by claiming jurisdiction and 'arresting' him on a fictitious misdemeanor, the women seated before him would be orphans.

The old Velosian was now in hiding after Teche had dropped the 'charges' and assisted him to flee into the agricultural districts. It was this last action in particular that had evoked Een's wrath.

The next morning Teche had found the hatchlings rummaging through the wreckage of their home. It had been such a pitiful sight he'd asked them what they intended to do now.

Deep in shock, Jiss had looked up at him with a most sorrowful expression and said simply, "Stick, stick," the local slang for the red light district. Teche figured they wouldn't last long there before being picked up by a slaver. Then they'd have no future at all.

Two hours later he'd secured the hatchlings employment in the clerical section at the Police/Army Liaison Department so at least they had an income and could live in the government compound. Their police department work permits would hopefully deter slavers from stealing them and the military from raping them.

"We have come to say goodbye."

Teche raised his eyebrow ridge. "Has there been trouble in the compound?" He expected the worst and his eyes quickly scanned their bodies looking for evidence of violence, but saw none.

"They plan to kill you, Lord Teche."

"They?"

"Governor Bloss and General Een," Joss explained. "Jiss found a note from the governor in the general's correspondence tray."

This act of espionage confirmed that there was an active resistance movement on Velos and many if not all of the locals, including these two beautiful creatures, were involved.

Een had accused him of helping the Velosian underground movement in its long drawn out and entirely futile resistance to the occupation. It looked like Een was right, this time. He had, inadvertently, planted spies in the very heart of the continental government.

Jiss stood up and, reaching deep inside the front of her tunic, withdrew a piece of rolled paper. She smiled coquettishly as she handed it to him. "My only hiding place," she explained.

"Ingenious." Teche nodded approvingly as he unfolded the paper. His tongue flicked out and he tasted the scent of her pussy juice. She was horny and his twin cocks immediately rose, tenting his kilt uncomfortably.

The paper she'd hidden next to her pussy was a brief memo from the governor boldly ordering Teche's arrest and execution for 'undisclosed' traitorous acts. The date of his arrest was set for two days hence.

This was not completely unexpected. Teche had known his time was running out on Velos but hadn't realized that his interventions to protect the helpless Velosians would have such a fatal consequence.

Teche looked up from the message. The hatchlings were watching him closely, their large eyes sad and fearful as they anxiously stroked each other's arms. The Velosians were a very tactile breed, and, in their society, touch conveyed a whole raft of emotions. They are actually concerned for me, he thought, staring into those gorgeous eyes. Joss was rhythmically stroking her sister's upper arm, drawing his gaze to the swell of her sister's breast.

Since the death of his bed-wife, Teche had not indulged his sex drive at all. Her long illness had precluded sex and with her death the celibate habit continued. Depression had settled on him like an old friend and, as old friends often do, overstayed the welcome. He couldn't shake his melancholy and had settled into a comfortable gloominess that was only assuaged when he made life for Een or Bloss difficult.

However, during the last few days he'd sensed a stirring within him, a call to something he couldn't identify, culminating in his reckless rescue of the twins' father. And now, the surprising attentions of the two sisters drew from him years of repressed lust. It seemed his whole body had come alive.

Was it a sign? Change was upon him and it seemed his profound depression was coming to an end. Perhaps the time was right for a resurgence of spirit and he owed it to, of all people, those two mean bastards Bloss and Een.

With a coquettish curve on her lips, Joss's fingers strayed to caress her sister's nipple and both of Teche's cocks jerked involuntarily with lust. His tongue flicked the air, tasting the scent of their arousal.

Jiss saw his reaction and immediately went to her knees in front of him. She reached under the hem of his kilt and grasped his fore cock. He hissed in unexpected pleasure. Joss joined her sister on the floor and, lifting his kilt above her head, took his posterior cock into her warm mouth.

Teche raised his eyes to the ceiling and closed them in bliss. He reached down and placed his hands on the heads of the two Velosians, encouraging them to take his cocks as far as they could into their throats. They complied enthusiastically. The slurping sounds they made caused them to momentarily disengage their mouths from his cocks and emit high-pitched giggles.

He reached down and drew Jiss to her feet, and kissing her. She responded agreeably, opening her wide mouth to allow his forked tongue to enter and wrestle with her own thick flat version. She was able to adeptly wrap it around his thin saurian organ and squeeze it delightfully. Teche was near exploding but he wanted to be inside their warm wet pussies when he did.

He withdrew his tongue and held Jiss's face in his hands. Her large eyes were languid with lust and he sighed with pleasure. He reached down and picked Joss up off her knees and deposited her onto the couch.

Teche stripped off his kilt, looking down at Joss. She unbuttoned her tunic and peeled it off, revealing firm, round breasts, the dark nipples erect and inviting. Jiss had done likewise and he carefully positioned her face down on her sister's body so that their breasts pressed together and their pussies aligned. Holding Joss's legs wide apart he positioned himself between them and drove his rampant cocks into both their waiting pussies.

They both grunted at the onslaught of his thick cocks, and then, as he began to move rhythmically inside them, they moaned deliciously. Teche luxuriated in the feel of their slick pussies clenching his shafts as he drove toward climax. The sisters held each other tightly as they came on waves of pleasure. When he came, Teche bellowed so loudly that lights came on in houses across the street.

Finally his cocks ceased their frenzied pulsing that emptied his balls into the wombs of the two sisters. He withdrew his cocks. He was still erect and could have continued for ages yet, but he wanted to relax and savor his first orgasm in two years. Jiss and Joss came to him, hugging him and stroking him with what he took to be deep and true affection.

"You must come with us," Joss said finally, her voice drowsy with satiation.

"Yes, Lord. Come with us to the hills. We will protect you."

"I wish I could, my darlings. But I will only bring more vengeance down on your people. Een would hunt me down and you will die because of it. I cannot do that to you."

They lowered their eyes in sadness. Teche had never been so touched in all his life. He hugged them both to his scaly hide.

"What will you do, Lord?" It was Joss, tears streaming from her dinner plate eyes. "Will we ever see you again?"

"I do not know, my darlings."

His comcam buzzed and the two women jumped at the sound. He smiled at them, wishing that he didn't have to send them away. "You should go. Go quickly and be with your people." He quickly pulled on his kilt, and as he went to the communicator panel on his desk, the two women reluctantly dressed out of shot of the comcam.

It was Pert Caed, Chief Advisor to His Highness, Dantilus Muss. The old man had been a friend of Teche's father and his wizened face was pale, his forehead creased in apprehension. Caed was of the same minority clan as Teche and his rise to power was testimony to his strength of personality and tenacity. "Pos. Are you alone?"

Teche nodded. "Yes, old friend."

"I need you here. There has been an assassination attempt on His Highness and you are the only one I can trust to investigate it."

So that explained the increased aerial activity. Someone had tried to kill the tyrant and the military had mobilized in case it was a general uprising. "Of course I'll come."

"It's madness here," Caed continued. "The palace guard has gone insane. Hundreds are dead already."

"Are you safe?"

Caed nodded. "I have my own personal guard. Now, I've sent a flier for you. It should be there within the hour. Drop everything. Nothing overrides this."

There was a loud knocking at the front door. Teche immediately guessed it was one of Een's notorious murder squads taking advantage of the uprising. Events such as these made a perfect cover to get rid of pests, especially one Velosian-sympathizing police chief.

"I understand, but there are local considerations. Een has..."

"I've talked to that bastard already. He knows it is by Muss's orders that you are needed."

The impatient knocking continued. The news obviously hadn't reached the marines at his door. Or maybe Een had ignored Caed's order thinking that getting rid of Teche was worth the risk of Muss's temporary displeasure.

Teche looked to the girls who cowered in the corner, their fingers stroking each other frantically. "I have some things to attend to. Tell your flier to meet me at a place called Massacre Beach. It's on all the maps. I'll be there in one hour."

The knocking was getting very impatient so that even Caed heard it. "If Een has you harmed I'll impale him myself."

"Massacre Beach, old friend."

"I'll arrange it. I really need you, Pos."

"You can expect me."

The comcam shut down. "I'm going to take you to safety," he said to the twins. "But it will be risky. OK?" The two women nodded fearfully. "Good. We'll take my humveh to the beach. It's parked on the roof."

As they raced up the stairs the murder squad's impatience became too much and the door flew in under the combined weight of three marines. Teche heard them curse as they found the ground floor empty.

Teche sent the girls on ahead while he waited on the landing. As the marines appeared he fired twice over their heads, sending them diving for cover behind various pieces of furniture. Then he bounded up the stairs three at a time and joined the girls up on the roof.

They were crouching behind his personal humveh. He slammed the balcony door behind him and locked it.

"Get in!" he called as he activated his keycard and the doors of the humveh swung open.

Teche jumped into the driver's seat, initiating the lift mechanism as he did so. Seconds later the marines crashed through the splintering door. Firing wildly, beams from their laser pistols sizzled the air as Teche launched the vehicle into a steep dive between the adjoining buildings. His startled neighbors stared openmouthed out their windows as he sped off down an alley toward the southern coast.

Teche laughed out loud. He was exultant. He'd never felt so alive. Change was certainly in the air and he loved the thrill of it. The depression that he'd worn like a cloak was dropping off him like the annual shedding of scales. He felt reborn and though he may not have a long time left, he decided that he was going to enjoy it.

He looked at the twins who were wide-eyed and white with abject terror. "Come on, girls," he said cheerfully and patted Joss reassuringly on the knee. "My flying isn't that bad, surely?"

Chapter 2

Mira found the Solaran Ambassador Geena Triskelion reclining on her bunk viewing a holo-book on Corris, the home planet of Lars Dax.

Ten centimeters above her virtually naked body was the projected image of two Corridians making love in the air, their wings beating in counterpoint, both performers grunting and squealing in turn as each thrust of the massive cock ploughed into the willing cunt.

Mira noted that Geena's right hand had been inside her wrap, her fingers busy rubbing her clit.

Geena looked up and smiled. "I find space travel so boring," she said, flicking a switch with her left hand, and the projected image dissolved. "So I decided to learn as much as I could about Lars and his kind." She withdrew her right hand from between her legs and licked her fingers provocatively. "If we are going to help find his younger sister then a little knowledge is going to be useful."

Mira sat heavily on the edge of Geena's bed. Her pussy was aching from lack of attention and the piece of erotica she'd just witnessed brought back arousing memories of when she had first made love to Lars.

She'd found Lars in the Hairy Knobb, a Bawdy Town brothel while he searched for a lead to his sister's whereabouts. At first he'd been a convenient way to get to Velos. How could she have known that meeting him would change the course of her whole life?

As would meeting Geena Triskelion, former prisoner of Rigellion warlord Dantilus Muss. Mira considered the beautiful Solaran closely. Clothed in a see-through wrap Geena was tall with a slim waist and heavy breasts. She possessed long lustrous dark hair but her most beautiful feature was her skin, which seemed to glow with its

own radiance. Mira was transported from one erotic memory to another; the first time she'd kissed Geena in the palace of that bastard Muss.

Geena blushed under the scrutiny. She held Mira's gaze for a few moments before smiling and licking her lower lip in a most seductive manner. A pulse of desire radiated out from Mira's pussy and warmed her whole body. Her mouth became dry and she licked her lips accordingly.

Geena casually opened her legs so that the thin material of the wrap opened, revealing her nakedness, and swung around so she sat beside Mira, their naked thighs touching.

"Tell me. Is his cock as big as its outline appears inside his flight suit?"

Mira laughed and tried to drag her eyes from the puffy lips of Geena's shaven pussy that were wet with inner dew.

"Watching Corridians make love is quite arousing," Geena continued as she trailed her fingers across her cleavage and found a nipple that jumped into rigidity at the touch. She held out her hand and Mira accepted it.

"I have decided, since my recent experiences in captivity, that I have been missing out on a universe of sexual pleasure. I think it's time that I explored its potential." She smiled. "Though the incident with Muss was traumatizing in some respects it has given me license to actively consider new experiences. Making love with you that first time was something amazing, so special. I'd never touched a woman that way before and never been touched in return. You were divine."

Mira's face flushed red. "I enjoyed you just as much," she responded awkwardly.

"I feel so alive, like I've been reborn into another body and I want to try everything I can... even our intrepid Corridian captain."

"You want Lars?" Mira asked incredulously. When she'd first met Geena, the Solaran Ambassador had been a sexual chauvinist, only interested in heterosexual contact between humans. The thought of touching anyone from another species was abhorrent to her. Being ploughed by Muss's twin cocks and making love to Mira seemed to have opened up a Pandora's box of sensual desire.

A flash of jealousy crossed Mira's mind and she marveled at how powerful the unusual emotion was. Though she had seen firsthand the effect it had on others, it was a completely new experience for her. She'd never cared enough for anyone to be susceptible and now, in a matter of days, she was part of a sensual triangle that made her vulnerable.

She'd first realized how much she cared for Lars when she'd left him to enter Muss's palace. Despite her life as a Solaran spy, she'd felt alone for the first time. Now that she was with Lars again, her feelings for him were once more threatened, this time by a woman she liked and respected.

She was confused also by her own feelings. Was she hurt that Geena wanted Lars or was she afraid that Lars would want Geena? She couldn't separate the two.

"Does that cause a problem for us?" Geena asked carefully. She moved so that she faced Mira square on and looked her in the eye. "I can see that he loves you," Geena continued, drawing Mira into her arms.

"It's complicated," Mira mumbled.

"And that you love him in return." Geena gave her a squeeze.

"As I said, it's complicated."

"How do you feel about me desiring him so much that my pussy weeps in frustration?"

"I don't know, to be honest." Then she smiled. "Except that I know exactly how you feel."

Geena laughed and kissed her softly on the cheek. "I sense there is something standing between you two."

"It's very complicated."

She kissed her again. "I saw it the first minute I saw the two of you together at Muss's banquet. And I was so jealous. Mira, I love you too."

Mira didn't know what to say. "Geena... I..."

Geena smiled. "I know you don't love me..."

"Geena..."

"You love Lars, don't you?"

"Well, yes. Yes, I do."

Geena shook her head. "And the problem is?"

"Lars thinks I love you," Mira admitted.

"Ah." Geena nodded. "That I do understand."

Mira held Geena tightly, laying her head on her shoulder. Geena was a beautiful sexual being and her closeness made her pussy moisten and weep. Mira had never been loved before and now someone did.

Mira impulsively kissed her on the mouth. "What can I do?" she asked when at last she released her.

"He loves you then, for him to be jealous of me. No?"

"I don't know now. I thought he did but now I'm not so sure." And she couldn't be sure until she made love with him again and read his thoughts.

Of all the minds she had ever read, Lars had the purest, most honorable thoughts. His feelings were transparent and true. That made his avoidance of her all the harder to bear. She craved knowing him, feeling him close to her. Not just in mind but body as well.

"He's ignored me since we got away from Velos. That was two days ago."

"Have you argued?"

"No. Since Velos he's just been very distant." Mira couldn't bring herself to tell Geena anything at all about the true reasons Lars was treating her so circumspectly. That he blamed her for delaying his search for his sister. That he believed it had all been an elaborate plot to kill Muss.

"You'll have to tell me one day how you ended up in Muss's palace."

Mira shook her head. "That is *really* complicated," she said.

She couldn't tell Geena that she was a Solaran Secret Service agent whose mission had been to infiltrate the Rigellian warlord's palace. Geena's decision to kill Muss and Mira's decision to help her escape had hopelessly compromised that mission.

It had only been through Lars' timely appearance and decisive actions that the two of them had survived.

Geena kissed her, her tongue forcing Mira's lips apart and entering her warm mouth. Mira's tongue responded and her hands snaked inside the ambassador's robe to fondle a heavy breast. The kiss lasted a long time as tongues and consciences wrestled.

Finally Geena broke the kiss. "Do you think Lars will share you with me?"

Mira's jaw dropped at the prospect and her body warmed to the idea. How wonderful could the three of them be together?

"I hope so," Mira whispered as she succumbed to Geena's questing fingers. She first stroked her breast through her tunic, played with her ringed nipples for a moment and then went further down to her thighs which parted automatically as if craving her touch.

Geena dropped to the floor. Kneeling between Mira's legs, she seemingly ignored her pussy. Instead, she gave Mira's inner thigh the briefest of butterfly kisses. Then another gentle, dry brush of her lips. Mira shuddered. Geena's breath was hot on her inner thighs and she squirmed in anticipation. Another kiss. Geena's lips parted and her tongue made electric contact with her velvety skin. Mira almost cried out as Geena's tongue began sliding its way inexorably toward the centre of her sex.

With a deep moan she threw her head back and propped herself on her elbows as Geena's tongue lapped at her outer pussy lips, circling in on her engorging clit. When her tongue touched that sensitive bud Mira shuddered in sudden climax, her pussy oozing love juice.

Geena lapped up her juices with gusto and looked up from between Mira's trembling legs. "You taste divine," she announced.

Geena smiled wickedly as she held her long forefinger to her lips. Her tongue snaked out to wet the manicured nail. With delectable slowness she traced it around the outside of Mira's pussy lips. Her tongue returned to Mira's clit and sent a shiver of electricity through her taut body.

Geena pushed her finger gently into Mira's gaping pussy and quickly found the rough patch on the upper surface. She gently pressed it and Mira shuddered as a wave of sheer pleasure swept through her.

Her body trembling, Mira collapsed onto the bed. As Geena gently rubbed that special spot she came with such intensity that her mind seemed to explode. She came again almost instantly as Geena maintained that pressure and then again as she sucked Mira's throbbing clit into her mouth.

Mira reached down and pushed Geena's head away and begged her to stop; her clit was so sensitive.

She lay panting in exhaustion before releasing Geena. She had never before felt so unconditionally loved. Sex in the past had always been like a job, a necessary task, a means to an end. Now, since meeting Lars and Geena it had become an end in itself.

"Your turn," Mira said, pulling Geena up onto the bed with a laugh. She pushed her legs apart and dove between them.

Geena's pussy was shaved and tasted wonderfully sweet. In Mira's experience every woman tasted different, some sweet and some bitter, depending upon their physiology and diet. Geena was a wonderful blend of vanilla with honey.

Mira teased Geena's pussy with long strokes of her tongue, starting at the base of her pussy and going up one side to stop just short of the hardening clit and then down the other side. Honey was freely flowing out of Geena's pussy and Mira lapped it up with gusto. She inserted her tongue as far inside the other woman's pussy as she could. Geena gasped and pushed her hands through Mira's hair.

Mira wet her finger and traced it around the puckered circle of Geena's sphinc. Geena's sharp intake of breath led her on to a more daring penetration and Geena, who had never had anything in her spinc save Muss's second cock, cried out. "Yes! Yes!"

Mira inserted her finger slowly, massaging the delicate skin. When she brought her tongue to bear on Geena's clit the Solaran Ambassador arched her back and threw back her head, screaming in orgasm.

As she came her mind opened up and Mira understood that, despite her previous prudishness, Geena was genuine in her desire to share Mira with Lars without a hint of possessiveness. The prospect was filling her mind with a host of lurid fantasies.

She felt humbled that Geena felt so much for her. She was also glad that Geena was mature enough to realise that her feelings were part of her awakening sensual spirit. That her traumatic experiences were a key unlocking a universe of sensual potential which she was eager to explore. Sharing her with Lars was part of that experiment.

Geena opened her eyes and studied her for a moment. After her breathing returned to normal, she whispered, "Go to him."

Mira nodded and kissed her lover on the lips.

* * *

Mira found Lars exercising in the *Mjolnir's* cargo hold, the largest open space on the starship. She stood in the hatchway watching the ship's captain in awe. She thought she'd never tire of watching him fly.

Lars was doing circuits of the hold, his great white wings beating casually, keeping him an even six meters off the floor. He was naked to the waist. She thought she'd never tire of that sight as well. She studied his muscular form; the wide shoulders, the well-defined pectoral muscles that molded his chest and the powerful shoulder structures that supported his glorious wings. Her eyes took in his powerful legs and thighs and the outline of his cock through the thin material of his flight suit.

Mira had nicknamed him Pegasus, the winged horse from the mythology of the old Terran Empire. She gave him the name because his cock by rights should have belonged to a horse.

Her pussy, still swollen from Geena's tongue, dewed up at the thought of that horse cock ploughing into her pussy, spreading her labial lips and sliding up her slick canal. They'd not made love since he'd agreed to let her stay on board and had made a point of keeping his distance.

Probation, he'd called it. It was sheer hell.

Mira took a deep breath. His pheromones filled the hold. His exercise was releasing more and more with each beat of his wings. They were playing havoc with her own equilibrium, sending her hormones crazy and making her horny as hell!

She reached down to the juncture of her thighs and rubbed her sex through the thin material of her tunic. Her juices were flowing and her clit was buzzing with arousal.

She wished things were better between them. She wanted him to fuck her, and fuck her right now.

But that possibility seemed remote. She knew he was still irritated with her, blaming her for delaying his search for his sister. At best he believed it had been a simple mistake, at worst he suspected it had been part of an elaborate plot to kill Muss. The truth was she had deliberately misled him by telling him that Elenii was on Velos. That deception would get her thrown out the airlock if he found out.

As a Solaran Confederation spy she practiced deception as if it was an art form, but she'd never lied to someone she cared about. In all her life she'd never cared for anyone and no one had really cared for her, not as an individual -- as a willing body, certainly, but never as a person. Lars was the exception.

Mira was an expert in deceit yet this Corridian had the ability to see through her lies. How he did it she didn't know. She would have to find out if she was to secure and maintain his trust. But the only way she had of finding out was by bringing him to orgasm so she could read his mind.

Lars was different from every man she'd ever met. His mind was pure and clear. He had no hidden agenda concerning her. He was attracted to her for her sake alone.

He was confused and mystified by her but he cared for her nonetheless and she regretted ever using her talent against him. In that room at the Hairy Knobb on Elysium, when she'd first read the mind of this beautiful Corridian, she had fallen in love with his integrity and honor.

He'd given her the most powerful orgasm she'd ever felt. The experience had left her numb, but she'd read enough from his mind to gain the necessary information about his sister. Mira had used that information to trick him into taking her to Velos so she could infiltrate the harem of the warlord Dantilus Muss. She'd led Lars to believe she'd met his sister Elenii in the cells of a Rigellian slave ship. Instead she'd made the story up and it wasn't until she'd had one of Dantilus Muss's cocks spurting down her throat that she'd learnt that Elenii was actually on Karacos.

She bit her lip as she considered the magnitude of her deception. To use something so important to him as a tool to manipulate him was the lowest she'd ever stooped. She hated herself for it.

Things had only become worse when Mira had compounded her crime by lying to him once again to convince him to put himself and his beloved crew in danger to rescue both herself and Geena.

Mira knew that the only way to redeem herself and regain some self-respect was to commit herself to helping him rescue his sister. So, now they were on their way to Karacos to rescue Elenii.

Because Lars' ship was, thanks to Mira and Geena, being hunted by the whole Rigellian Navy they had to first stop at an outlaw planet called Havensafe so that they could organize anonymous transport to Karacos.

Lars noticed her standing in the hatchway and completed two more laps of the hold to wind down. He pulled himself up so that he hovered a meter off the floor in front of her. His great wings beat slowly, sending a steady draft of his scent washing over her. She almost swooned with its effect. Her pussy ached for him.

She met his dark eyes and gave him a delicate smile. "Space travel must be a terrible trial for you, not being able to fly wherever you want."

His eyes didn't leave hers. She felt incredibly vulnerable under that steady gaze and the gentle susurration of his wings as he hovered in front of her. "You have experienced flight," he said finally, referring to his dramatic rescue of Geena and herself. "You know the exhilaration."

Mira, no stranger to life threatening situations, had been terrified when they'd plummeted from the battlements. She'd clung to his neck as she stared down into the abyss.

"The air is my home," he continued.

"I wish I could fly."

She saw his eyes travel to her cleavage. She was wearing one of Lidj's revealing outfits; a short skirt that emphasized her shapely legs and slim hips and a flimsy top she knew exposed the generous swell of her breasts. Her pussy became liquid fire under his gaze and she licked her lips in anticipation.

"You lack certain pieces of essential equipment," he said, his voice thick and husky.

She lowered her eyes and saw his cock move inside his flight suit. She imagined it engorging with hot blood. Desire washed over her, leaving her sex pulsing and her mouth dry. "Then I'll need assistance."

Mira slowly trailed her hand from where it sat on her hip to the juncture of her thighs. She watched his eyes follow her fingers as they slowly caressed the bare skin of her upper thigh and disappeared between her legs, pressing her skirt against her pussy. "I've missed you," she whispered.

The beating of his wings slowed and he dropped softly to the floor. Furling those great wings he stepped closer to her so that his cock touched her thigh through his suit. Grasping her by the shoulders, he pulled her to him.

She tilted her head back to allow him to kiss her. Instead there came an embarrassed cough from the hatchway.

She opened her eyes to see Gyas Talon, the blue Altairan navigator, standing there, his eyes fixed to the floor.

"Talon?" Lars asked.

"We have a problem."

"What is it?"

“A torpedo. That last Rigellian cruiser we evaded must have launched it when we dropped into null space... It was locked onto us and was drawn into our envelope... a one in a million shot.”

Lars released her and went to his navigator. “... and?”

“It’s right behind us.”

Chapter 3

Pert Caed, Chief Advisor to His Highness Dantilus Muss, sat down heavily.

The old Seth wheezed and rubbed his clawed hand over his faded forehead. A scale fell into the lap of his kilt. He picked it up with a trembling hand and studied it as if it held the secret of eternal life.

Teche remembered him as a good friend of his father. Caed too had been a warrior and the young Teche had idolized him. Though his mind was as sharp as ever, it saddened Teche to see his mentor age and wither in body.

"Muss is furious," Caed sighed. "Inconsolable."

"I don't know how you put up with him," Teche said. Caed had assured him the room was shielded so they could speak freely; otherwise he would not put them both at risk by being so frank.

"His Highness is like a child. In fact, he is a child. I've handled him since he was a hatchling so I know how bad he can be. He hasn't changed. Incapable of learning even the simplest lessons, he rules by instinct. He is worse than a hatchling. He is an animal."

Teche had not seen his friend so disillusioned before. "That you have survived so long is testimony to your skill, old friend."

"Well, be that as it may. If Muss dies my life won't be worth a chirrup wing. The warlord who replaces him will kill anyone associated with his regime. It's always the same. The purges that follow a change of leadership, however attained, are simply awful."

Teche recalled the death of his father and shuddered deep within at the thought of how his father had met his end. Publicly impaled. The only good thing about Muss was that he'd returned the compliment when he took over. "You rescued me from the last two regime changes."

"If only I could have done the same for your father, but he was unreachable, I'm afraid. But that was then and this is now. You must find out who did this, Pos. For both our sakes. It will get you out of Een's reach, for a while anyway."

"For that I am thankful."

Caed looked over to Teche's companions and raised his eyeridge. Teche followed his gaze to Jiss and Joss, who sat perched on the window ledge. They were looking out at the valley below the palace. When it had come time to leave them at Massacre Beach they'd decided not to let him go. They loved their Lord Teche, they said, and besides, they were having the time of their lives.

"My assistants," he explained.

Caed shrugged. "I hope you and your *assistants* will be able to sort this out. It really is a mess."

"What can you tell me?"

"The attack on His Highness happened during a banquet. I wasn't here. I've been negotiating a trade deal with Karacos. Apparently the Solaran Ambassador he'd kidnapped without my knowledge and her human slave got him alone and stabbed him."

Teche was astounded. "He kidnapped a Solaran?"

"Destroyed her ship as well. He had some fool notion that he was going to use her as a bargaining chip in the Belkin negotiation. The fool! The Solarans wouldn't have caved in even if he had a hundred ambassadors ready to be impaled."

"They are a tough race."

Caed nodded. "A Corridian, Lars Dax, then enabled their escape by jumping off the roof, would you believe. There was an air battle and a flier was destroyed by an unseen ship." Caed passed his hand over his brow and another scale fell to the floor. "Anyway, Muss's personal guard have killed those on duty that night on suspicion alone. Greve, his retainer, was gutted and spiked in the banquet hall as a threat to all the guests to tell what they knew. They knew nothing, apparently. Poor bastards. If only I had been here I may have saved them."

"I didn't think Solarans had slaves."

"They don't. This one was Muss's. He'd assigned her to the ambassador."

"Curious. Who is this Dax character?"

Caed shrugged tiredly. "Good question. He suddenly appeared from nowhere and Muss made some grandiose announcement that he was his new Chief Star Pilot. Twenty minutes later he was helping the assailants to escape. A curious chain of events."

Curious indeed. "I'll need authority to ask questions and detain witnesses."

The old advisor handed Teche a disk. "This is your authority to go and ask whoever you want whatever you want. It is Muss's grand seal which will open every door on the planet."

"How much time do I have?"

"Velos is under martial law. You can guess as well as I can the atrocities being committed by the military. The quicker you come up with an answer, the quicker the bloodshed stops."

Teche's face creased with a grim smile. "Then I'm glad I'm not under any pressure to perform," he said sarcastically.

"You know the bastards in uniform as well as I. Muss is beside himself. There's no telling what he'll do if he succumbs to rumor. Do your best, Pos. That's all I ask."

"I will. I promise. I will begin with this Dax fellow. A Corridian, you say? He'll be easy to track. I'll start with him."

Caed nodded and wearily climbed to his feet. "I'll tell His Highness you have begun your investigation. Give me a progress report tomorrow night."

Teche hugged his mentor at the door and watched him shuffle down the corridor. Behind him, he heard one of the girls giggle. After closing the door he went and stood beside them. Far below at the head of the valley was the golden glow of the city lights of Terek. It was a clear night and the lights of dozens of fliers flitted about like a swarm of chirrups forming a formidable curtain of protection around the palace.

But was the threat from within or without? That was the question.

As Teche planned his investigation Joss knelt beside him and ran her fingers along the length of his thigh. His cocks rose immediately. Jiss giggled as she stood beside him and started massaging his naked shoulders. He closed his eyes and luxuriated in their attentions.

Joss then took him by the hand and led him to the bed. Turning to face him, she undid the belt that supported his kilt. She pushed him forcefully until his thick legs hit the side of the mattress. With a surprised grunt he fell backwards.

He looked up at her with growing anticipation as she fondled her breasts. With a whoop she jumped onto the bed beside him. Bending, she kissed him hard on the mouth and then transferred her lips to the hard nipples on his scaly chest.

Jiss joined them on the bed, delicately caressing his balls and cocks with her long dainty fingers. His cocks leapt to attention and she lowered her mouth on his posterior organ.

Meanwhile, Joss stood up on the bed, shed her tunic and then lowered her sex onto his flickering tongue. He had never eaten Velosian pussy before and the taste was as heady as Solaran caff. He lapped enthusiastically at her delicate pussy lips, prying them open with his fingers so his tongue could delve more deeply within her. She groaned and lowered herself still further so that she was literally sitting on his face.

Jiss took his cock deep in her throat and with her tapering fingers stroked his fore cock from its base to its head in long languorous strokes. His cocks pulsed with pleasure.

Jiss quickly disrobed and climbed onto his lap, pushing his posterior cock into her willing slit with ease. As she rose and fell on his cock she grasped his fore cock and stroked it forcefully.

Teche's pleasure was building and his hips began to buck beneath Jiss, sending his cock deeper inside her. Jiss lifted herself off and then lowered herself again so that this time both his cocks entered her pussy and spinc. She squealed in delight and rode him frantically, rubbing her full breasts and squeezing her prominent nipples.

Joss was quickly coming to climax as she rode his probing tongue and sucking lips. Teche was consumed with waves of sensation from his cocks to his tongue and when he came, his muffled cries sent shivers up Joss's already quivering body.

Both women cried out in orgasm together. After their shuddering had ceased they crawled off him, sated and sleepy, and lay on either side of his panting body.

"We have a big job ahead of us," he sighed. "I'll need your help tomorrow."

Joss replied for both of them. "Anything, Lord Teche."

Chapter 4

The bridge was silent as the crew of *Mjolnir* watched the fluorescent blip on the edge of the sensor screen. It appeared benign, but that insignificant tiny green dot spelled their doom.

Lars and his regular crew, Talon, Acron, Neelan and Lidj, stood shoulder to shoulder with Mira and Geena in the now very cramped control room.

Standing next to Lars, Mira felt the heat emanating from his body. Her head swam with the effect of his scent, her pussy still throbbing with desire. It was all she could do not to reach out and touch him.

"See? It's right at the edge of our null space envelope." Talon's voice was apologetic, as if it had been his fault. His blue hued skin, usually bright, had paled in shame. "It just snuck in. I'm sorry."

"Not your fault," Lars said, his voice hushed and unemotional. "How did you detect it?"

"I noticed a faint anomaly in the envelope's power consumption, hardly anything, and when I checked, there it was. That's at full magnification due to null space field distortion."

Lars gripped Talon by the shoulder. "It would have been virtually impossible to see. Good work."

Mira was impressed by the concern Lars showed for his navigator's feelings. It was only one of his qualities that made him a great leader.

"What does it mean?" Geena asked.

"Talon's attention to detail has given us a chance at life," Lars said quietly.

"While we are in null space," Draeg Acron, the three-armed ship's engineer explained, "we are safe. The torpedo can be considered inactive and will maintain its

distance from us. As soon as we drop into normal space, however, it will close in on us and hit us as it is designed to do." He took a deep breath. "And those things rarely miss."

"Can't we do something?" Geena asked, her voice edged with concern. Mira recalled that she'd been blown out of space by one of Muss's battle cruisers only weeks before and the memory must be fresh in her mind.

Acron shrugged. "We'll use the normal countermeasures, launch our own torpedoes and use our laser cannon."

"Will that be enough?"

"I guess we'll find out soon enough."

"That doesn't sound very encouraging," Mira said.

"I think we all need a cup of strong caff to help us think," Lidj, the young Sirian cook, said. "I'll get some."

"This is an unusual situation," Talon said quietly as he watched her leave. "I've not encountered this type of problem before, though I've heard of it happening."

"And the results?" Lars asked quietly.

"Not encouraging. In past instances I'd say the targeted vehicle was not aware that a torpedo had been captured in their envelope and so they could not react in time when they dropped into normal space."

Lars nodded. "So, now that we know it is there, what do we do about it? Once we enter normal space, how long before impact?"

"One minute, plus or minus five seconds," Talon reported grimly.

"Torpedoes are not very easy to hit," Acron said. "They are small and they are quick, but there may be something we can do."

"What are you suggesting?"

"Because we don't have a point defense system, I'm thinking that if we set up a curtain of, say, ball bearings between us and the torpedo, as soon as we exit null space the torpedo will run into a mass of material. Given its velocity, with any luck, we'll shred it."

"Do we have enough ball bearings?" Talon asked.

"No. But we do have garbage and stuff we can shove out the hold, anything will do. At the velocity the torpedo is traveling it will vaporize even if it hits anything larger than a fist."

"How can we eject so much in time?"

"That's the problem. We have to get the stuff outside the ship first."

"While we are still in null space?"

"That's right."

"The problem is getting the curtain far enough away from the ship to avoid the blast effects."

Mira watched the exchange, amazed at their calm demeanor. They were professionals calmly discussing their ultimate fate as if they were choosing an engine part or a meal from a menu. Geena's face, on the other hand, was etched with anxiety.

"Do we have any proximity mines?" Lars asked suddenly.

"A few, why?" Acron frowned.

"And how is the expresser field functioning?" Lars asked. Mira could sense a rising optimism in his voice.

Acron nodded thoughtfully. "I see what you mean. But it's a big risk. The torpedo is over fifteen kilometers away..."

"What are you talking about?" Geena asked.

Acron, who'd taken a shine to the Solaran Ambassador, smiled. "When we drop into null space we are exiting normal space by effectively collapsing into a singularity." He demonstrated by cupping both hands and bringing them down into a small ball. "The null space generators create a powerful collapsar field, what we call the envelope. Inside that envelope nothing can exist as a discrete entity and, of course, nothing functions. Effectively inside the singularity we are all crushed together. Only the expressor force field that surrounds the ship allows it to maintain its integrity as a separate entity, function, and allows us to live inside... otherwise we'd die."

"I'm not sure I understand," Geena said.

"The expressor field creates a small bubble inside our envelope that keeps us alive."

"But how does this help?" Mira asked. She was only dimly aware of how null space physics worked and her rising trepidation at the thought of being vaporized made her want them to cut to the chase.

"To prevent us from materializing inside a star or planet when we exit null space, we first project a small finger of the expressor field into normal space... like dipping a toe in the water to see how cold it is... though in this case we are worried about how hot or solid space is. If we are going to materialize inside a star, then the field is repelled and we stay safe inside null space and choose new co-ordinates."

"So what are we going to do?"

Acron took a deep breath. "Lars' idea may just work. I've not heard of it done before but it is technically possible, I think. I'll have to jury-rig the generator to try and give us the range... It will be tight..."

"Now what are you talking about?" Geena was becoming impatient. Mira wanted to say to her to relax but realized she was just as anxious.

"We are going to extend that finger of the expressor field *back* toward the torpedo," Lars said. "I am going to fly out there with a proximity mine, place it next to the torpedo and return."

"It's a thirty kilometer round trip," Talon said quietly.

"I've flown further," Lars said confidently. Once, as a youngster, he'd flown five hundred kilometers to collect medicine for his grandfather. But that was years ago when he was young and foolhardy. He recalled how exhausted he'd been and how he couldn't move his wings for a week.

"Don't you have an EVA jet pack or something?" Mira asked, not liking the idea of Lars flying out into null space.

Acron shook his head. "Not standard issue in this class of ship, I'm afraid. Remind me to buy one when we get to our next port. We do have a problem, though.

The amount of air we can pump into the expressor field is limited. You won't have much air pressure to fly in."

Acron gave Lars an appraising glance; sizing up his wings, making some mental calculations. "The best I'll be able to do, given that the expressor field will need to be four meters in diameter, is give you only a twentieth of an atmosphere pressure, and that's if I'm lucky. I'll have to bleed all the reserve tanks."

"Obviously you'll need an air source to breathe," offered Epirus Neelan, the ship's medic. Neelan was from Tau Ceti and her forked tongue leant her voice a sensual quality. Mira studied the beautiful Cetian and was impressed by her professionalism as well. Lars had attracted the very best people, and in turn, had earned their respect and utmost devotion.

"Caff, anyone?" Lidj Tibur, the ever horny Sirian, returned to the bridge and offered a tray of steaming hot caff to the assembled crew. Her entrance reduced the tension in the air as she often did with her youthful enthusiasm and contagious positivism.

They drank their caff in silence as Acron and Talon performed calculations that would either give them a real chance at life or condemn them to a fiery death.

Chapter 5

Teche began his investigation first thing by flying one of Muss's security humvehs down the wide verdant valley to the capital. The mountains were cast in brilliant early morning light. Not for the first time he regretted that his race had ever found the planet of Velos and destroyed its peace and serenity.

His check of spaceport records showed that an unidentified spacecraft had landed two days before the assassination attempt. But the record was distorted, ostensibly a computer error. Teche was willing to bet it was an unauthorized landing and that it would be the mysterious Corridian's vessel.

Dock Master Chunn was both nervous and arrogant when confronted by the kilted Seth. He snorted haughtily when Teche showed his disk of authority, but his clawed hands gripped and rubbed themselves in anxiety. Reports of the atrocities in the palace would have reached him and chilled him all the way to his cold-blooded testicles.

"So, Dock Master Chunn. What can you tell me of winged Corridians?"

Chunn's tongue licked his lips furtively as he weighed his options. Teche let him sweat for a moment longer then put him out of his misery.

"I want the truth. You don't know how much I already know. So, I'll make it plain to you. The first lie you tell me will cost you a ball. The second lie will cost the other one and I'll take each cock and then your hands with each succeeding lie. Is that clear?"

Chunn nodded resignedly. "He is Lars Dax. He is captain of *Mjolnir*, a Solaran vessel. He said he was a trader, a slaver. He wanted to know who he should contact so he could sell a slave to the palace."

"He asked that specifically? That he wanted to sell a slave to the palace?"

Chunn nodded.

"And you thought it not strange? This specific request?"

"Slavers always want to sell directly to the palace. They pay the best."

"I see. And to whom did you refer him?"

"Neala Ghotti, he has the palace concession."

"Where can I find this Ghotti?"

"The Orion's Horn. It's a pussy house. You can't miss him. He's an albino dwarf."

Teche already knew of the appearance of the planet's most famous slave merchant. "Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?"

Chunn nodded. "Dax delayed his departure. And then his ship took off without him."

"How do you know he wasn't on board?"

"He left the port by palace humveh and didn't return that way. In every case, ship's crew must report in when they return from the city for a customs check. He did not. Then the ship took off without authorization. A very unsafe action, several of my ground crew were close by and could've been injured..."

"Yes, yes," Teche said impatiently. All this tallied with the reports of a ship destroying a palace fighter, no doubt as they made an aerial rendezvous with a winged Dax and the two humans he had rescued. "Anything else you want to tell me?"

"He was asking everyone he met had they seen this other Corridian. Elenii, he called her. He was showing her holo-portrait all over town. That's all I know."

Teche considered the sweating dock master. "I'll be back," he announced ominously. "Pray that I don't find that you have lied, or forgotten anything important."

Chunn shook his scaled head vigorously. "No, there's nothing else."

"We'll see. I need security vision of the Corridian and his crew."

"Yes, sir."

Outside the spaceport gate Teche parked the humveh and gave instructions to Jiss and Joss, giving them one of his authority disks and the security holograms of Lars

Dax and his crew that Dock Master Chunn had provided. Then he let them out telling them he would meet them at this same spot in two hours.

While Jiss and Joss scoured the shops and eating houses of Terek, tracking the movements of Dax and his crew, Teche went to the Orion's Horn to find Neala Ghotti. He wasn't there but he managed to extract his address from a nervous bartender.

Ghotti lived in a luxury seaside villa twenty minutes out of town. But the diminutive bird had already flown. His front door had been opened by the tall Velosian housekeeper named Vier. Teche guessed the beautiful woman to be in her thirties. He was very surprised that Ghotti had left her behind.

"How is it you did not leave with your master?"

"I am not a slave," she replied defiantly.

"I apologize for any offense," he said. "Where did you hide?"

She motioned to a small cupboard in the entryway. Teche was impressed by her audacity. The cupboard was tiny and in full view. For her to hide in such a place would have required great nerve.

The attractive Velosian was slightly older than his new assistants but had a much lighter olive complexion. His recent sexual experiences had changed his perspective and now every second thought was sexual in nature. He couldn't help but stare at her curvy breasts and deep cleavage.

His body was alive with sensation and, more pressingly, the desire *for* sensation. He felt as if he were a hatchling again wanting to fuck anything that moved.

Vier smiled at his attentive gaze and quite freely took Teche to a small room at the back of the villa and opened a safe that lay beneath the floorboards.

"The little devil was in a great hurry to leave." She smiled as she stood back from the cache. "He left this behind."

The safe contained hundreds of data disks. Teche extracted the first one and, as if she'd read his mind, Vier handed him a palm-com. At first glance the disk seemed to be a record of financial transactions.

Teche smiled and thanked Vier for her co-operation. This was literally a treasure trove for a police investigator. This little lot would probably expose a host of crimes and indiscretions. Ghotti must have been in mind numbing terror to leave this cache behind.

On impulse Teche initiated a search on the words Corridian, Lars Dax and Elenii and was surprised at the number of files that contained those three words. Sweeping his tail to one side he sat down to read through the entries.

Vier disappeared for a moment and returned with a hot steaming cup of caff. "Thank you," Teche said absently as she put the cup on the table beside him.

He couldn't help but taste the air with his tongue and noted her arousal. Her pussy juices were flowing. Teche marveled at his newfound alertness. Since his bedwife had died he never tasted the air for pussy, and now, after Joss and Jiss had awakened his lustful side, he was doing it continually.

He looked up at Vier. She stood before him, her eyes locked onto his tenting kilt as she traced her long elegant fingers around the outline of her swelling breasts.

He wondered at her arousal and recalled that Joss had said, as she fucked him that morning, that the pussy juice of Velosians was a powerful stimulant to all other Velosians in the immediate vicinity.

I must be covered in the stuff, he thought. He sat back and pulled his kilt aside, exposing his rampant cocks.

Vier smiled provocatively, and hoisting her simple tunic above her waist, she straddled his legs. Gently separating the lips of her wet pussy she lowered herself onto his cocks so that she was impaled in both pussy and spinc.

She gasped as she flattened herself against him, his cocks imbedded to the limit. Then she started a frenzied rotation of her hips, grinding down on him with lusty desperation. The feeling was incredible and Teche put the disk down so he could reach up and expose her bobbing breasts and fondle them, rolling the hard erect nipples with his stubby clawed fingers.

She cried out in sudden orgasm and her clenching pussy squeezed his fore cock and suddenly he erupted, sending his cum gushing into both her holes. Vier collapsed onto him, her panting body slick with sweat.

"Forgive me, Lord," she muttered into his neck.

"No," he said and kissed her cheek. "Thank you, Vier."

She smiled sadly. "I must leave now," she said. "I only returned for my belongings."

"I understand. Thank you for showing me these."

"I do not think he will come back. He was very scared. I heard his men say 'Havensafe.' They said that Muss was dead and that all would die."

Teche nodded in understanding, imagining the panic Ghotti would have felt at the thought of the slave he sold Muss being involved in the assassination attempt. He knew that retribution would be swift and complete. No wonder he fled in such a hurry.

"Muss lives still. But many will die regardless. Go in peace." He looked around the room noting the rich furniture and ornaments. "Take what you can," he suggested. "Call it back pay."

She smiled as she climbed off his lap, his cum trickling down her thighs. "I will do as you suggest, Lord. You are very kind."

"It is you who are kind."

"Be warned, Lord. There will be some of the little devil's men who have remained. They may search for the disks."

Teche thanked her for her concern. It had occurred to him that Ghotti might have left the disks here thinking them to be safe and intending to send his minions to pick them up later. If he'd been caught by the military he might have thought to use these records as insurance to effect his release.

Teche decided he should not tempt fate and leave immediately.

While he waited for Vier to collect her belongings and some mementos he read through the results of his search on the disks.

There were forty entries that mentioned Corridian, and one each for Dax and Elenii. It seemed that Ghotti had a thriving trade in the winged Corridians.

A buyer identified by the letter Q from the planet K paid enormous amounts of money for the slaves, who were mostly female. The shipment dates covered the previous two years.

Elenii had been sold to Q for a million clits six months before; an extraordinary sum for a slave. The entry for Dax, only a few days old, indicated a payment for a human slave... the same one that assisted the ambassador in her attempt on Muss's life.

Teche considered the implications of this discovery. Clearly the attempt on Muss had been a well-planned and intricate scheme devised off world by a Corridian and a human, obviously a Solaran plot to destabilize the Rigellian Hegemony before the crucial Belkin negotiations.

The ambassador's involvement was probably incidental since no one knew of her kidnapping. The fact that the conspirators adapted and involved her in the plot so very easily indicated that they were intelligent and flexible individuals.

Muss was right to be fearful of what this group might yet do.

Vier had finished collecting her few belongings and he escorted her to his humveh. "Where can I take you?" he offered.

"It is not necessary. I haven't far to travel," she said.

He scanned the narrow lane that led to Ghotti's villa but saw no threat. "Then keep safe, Vier."

"And you, Lord."

Forty minutes later he found Jiss and Joss standing where he'd left them outside the spaceport security gates. Propped up against a post beside them was a disheveled Altairan, his blue skin washed out and pale.

"Who is this?" Teche asked as he climbed out of the humveh.

"Urith Cavell," Joss said, leading him over to the fragrant Altairan, who had clearly been drinking for a considerable time. "He actually met Lars Dax."

"Cavell has been in hiding," Jiss offered, no mistaking the humour she found in the Altairan's predicament.

"And why is that?"

Jiss looked at Teche with dewy dinner plate eyes. Teche guessed she could smell Vier's pussy juice on him. "He is head of the slave managers at the palace. As soon as he heard about the attack on His Highness, he fled like the coward he is."

"Is this true?" he asked.

The Altairan gave a shameful nod.

"Well, Slave Master. Tell me the truth and I'll see you are treated fairly. Will that do you?"

The Altairan raised his bloodshot eyes to the Rigellian. "Yes, Lord."

"Good. Then let's get out of the sun and you can tell me all about it."

He led them into the nearest bar, the ubiquitous Spaceport Bar found on every planet in the galaxy. Inside, on a bar top, danced a trio of naked Pleideans who were gyrating provocatively with a writhing three headed serpent-like creature Teche could not identify. The dancers were allowing the creature to enter their gaping pussies to the beat of a primitive drum.

Teche took them to a booth, sat Cavell between himself and Joss, and ordered four cinnamon cinders. Jiss sat beside Teche, immediately dropping her hands into his lap to massage his cocks. Teche steeped his fingers in front of his face and tried to concentrate on the Altairan.

"Well, Slave Master, tell me your story."

Cavell told how he was accosted by a great winged Corridian and shown a holo-portrait of a beautiful female Corridian. He said that he was surprised that Dax thought she was on Velos and was clearly devastated to learn that there had never been any Corridian slaves in the last twenty cycles.

"And what did he do?"

"He got very angry. Said it had all been a waste of time. That someone called Mira had used him." Cavell reached for his cinder but Teche closed his clawed hand over it first.

"Anything else?"

The Altairan shrugged. "He said, 'Karacos must be it!' and then he left."

Karacos! Was this the mysterious K in Ghotti's records? Teche took his hand off the drink, allowing the Altairan to pick it up with trembling fingers.

Jiss's movements in his lap had elicited two solid erections and Teche dropped his hand beneath the table. He found her legs open and her pussy sopping wet.

He gave Cavell a withering glare. "I will say in my report you fully and freely cooperated with me. You may return to the palace in a day or two after things have settled down."

"Oh, thank you, Lord."

"Now make yourself scarce."

Cavell took a last swig of his drink and fled the table. Joss wriggled over to Teche. Her hand was already between her legs and for an hour, as they watched the writhing dancers on stage, they fucked each other senseless.

After Jiss wiped his cock and her pussy dry of his seed Teche tried to piece together what the blazes was going on and then how to explain it so Muss would believe it.

Chapter 6

"I've tried to keep away from you," Lars said firmly. He was checking the proximity mine, an ugly black sphere bristling with small porcupine-like sensors. Mira watched the muscles in his wrists flex as he held the device and checked its control panel.

"I know," she replied, breathing in his scent. Her head swam with its raw sensual energy. "And it hurts me so."

"I wanted to avoid this happening."

"Why?" she asked. "Do I displease you?"

"You know that's not true."

She looked into his eyes, pleading to know. "Then why?"

"I don't want to come between you and Geena."

"Lars, I have feelings for her," she admitted. "A deep friendship certainly. A special friendship. But I don't love her in the way you mean. I have greater needs than any woman can satisfy."

She noted the relieved expression that flashed across his face. For the first time in days she might have a second chance.

"Have you told her?"

"She knows my feelings for you."

"Have you," he began and stopped. "Have you..."

"What?"

"Made love while on this ship?"

Mira thought about lying but his ability to see through her deceptions was just too uncanny to risk. Her pussy warmed uncontrollably as she remembered the taste of the tall Solaran Ambassador. "Yes."

He released her. "Then it is no wonder she still loves you."

In panic at the loss of his touch Mira reached out and grasped his arms. "Yes. She loves me but she knows I don't love her."

"Yet you have sex?"

"It's complicated. She needs me but she knows I need you more!"

Mira was surprised at the sound of her own words. She had never said such things before to a male of any species and meant them. Not like this. She felt so happy just to be in the same room as this beautiful male and when he was gone the emptiness within her was all but unbearable. She'd never felt such a deep and relentless wanting. It was as if they'd become one, and losing him, even for a moment, was as painful as losing a limb.

His face softened at her words and bending his head he claimed her mouth with his. She surrendered herself to him. The kiss went on for an eternity as his tongue explored her mouth until she forced it back and followed it with her own into the warm cavern of his mouth.

As their tongues wrestled, lust overtook her. Her wet pussy throbbed with desire. She reached down to find his cock pushing against his flight suit as if it were a wild thing wanting release. She searched for the belt mechanism. When she found it she pulled it open and in a rush pushed the cloth down over his thin hips, releasing that wonderful horse cock.

It felt so warm and heavy in her hand and she marveled at how hard it was. Yet the texture of the skin was so soft. She couldn't help herself. She dropped to her knees and swallowed the massive head in one go, taking it to the back of her throat till she almost gagged. She had it only halfway in and she longed to take it all, to feel the head of the thing halfway down her throat.

She loved sucking it, the feel of the soft skin over the hard shaft and that pulsing head, how hot it was and slippery with his juice. He held her head in his hands, caressing her neck with his fingers, touching her ear lobes, sending her crazy.

He moaned as she took another inch of his cock down her throat. She could feel the muscles in his buttocks tense. His thighs were as hard as iron as her fingers dug into his flesh.

She drew her head slowly away, drawing her tongue along his shaft, before plunging down once again. Another inch deeper this time and she could feel his ball sac bobbing on her chin. His hands in her hair stopped moving. She knew he was close, that he would erupt any moment, but she wanted him as deep as he could be.

She withdrew him again, took a breath, luxuriated in his male scent and willed her throat to relax and then slowly, oh so slowly, she worked her mouth down his length until her nose was buried in his groin. His balls pressed tight against her chin and his cock head was as far down her throat as it would go.

His hands clenched around her head as he erupted, sending a flood of his hot essence cascading down her throat. Mira could feel his cock pulsing inside her mouth and with each pulse another glut of hot lava slid down her gullet.

As his cock spat another load of cum into her throat his mind opened up to her like a flower does to the sun and she couldn't help but receive his thoughts. They exploded in her head as his cock exploded into her throat but she shut her conscious mind to them, wanting this moment to be what it was meant to be, just undiluted pleasure.

"Come," he said and hoisted her up onto a cargo container.

He spread her legs apart and peeled the tunic back up her thighs so it was almost at her waist. As usual, she wore nothing underneath and his fingers reached in and delicately folded her swollen labial lips apart, exposing her wetness within.

He licked her inner thighs, slowly making his way upwards. Mira threw back her head in pure joy as ripples of pleasure pulsed through her body. She was on the edge of reason when his tongue found her pussy lips and prized them further apart and tasted her juices. A moan escaped her mouth and she bit down on her lips to hold the coming scream within for just a few more moments.

Her whole body tensed, her muscles pulling on her bones so that she seemed to want to break herself apart. He lapped at her sweet honey and then, only after he had drunk his fill, did his tongue reach up to her engorged clit and lightly stroke it.

Her body exploded in an outburst of pure carnal energy and then, as his tongue continued to stroke her centre, wave after wave of pleasure rippled through her straining body until finally on a crescendo of sensation she screamed.

A minute passed as she held his head away from her pussy. Her breathing returned to normal as the waves of pleasure subsided. She looked down between her legs to see him gazing up at her with an expression of pure lust.

"Your pussy lips are still pulsing," he whispered hoarsely. "But I want to fuck you."

"Oh, fuck me," she replied. "Again and again and again."

He grasped her firmly by the hips and drew her to him so she slid from her seat on the cargo container directly onto his erect and throbbing cock. Her slit was so lathered with his saliva and her cum juice that his monstrous cock slid right in until she was quickly and so completely impaled on his length.

His penetration had happened so suddenly it took her breath away. She could feel it pressing against the neck of her womb. She put her arms around his neck and kissed him. Their lips locked together, their tongues writhed.

And then she felt it. He unfurled his great wings and in strong, easy beats, they lifted off the floor. With each downward thrust of his wings his hips moved forward in counterpoint, driving his cock deeper inside and then on the upthrust his cock retreated. Each thrust and withdrawal sent renewed waves of pleasure through her body. Her body tensed as he lifted her inexorably toward yet another climax.

Mira opened her eyes and saw that they were at the top of the hold, twenty meters in the air. His hips rocked back and forward vigorously. Such was his control that with each beat of his wings they rose and fell not even a mere centimeter yet his cock pounded into her with relentless energy.

She reached behind him to touch those rhythmically beating wings and felt the delicate frond-like alula. He shivered immediately and, within her, his cock throbbed.

Her climax approaching, she let go of his neck and gripped his face between her hands. She looked into those deep dark eyes so that he could make no mistake.

"I love you!" she screamed. Then she lost coherent thought as her body was rocked by explosions of sensation erupting from all points in her body and she came on a roller coaster of love.

In a moment's space between orgasms, Mira was aware of his climax and the pulsing of his cock. Overriding the physical sensations, his thoughts were so clear. His mind was open and honest and the dominant thought, though not unexpected, was devastating.

The thought killed her inside and her orgasm subsided with a suddenness that left her empty as if she'd fallen into a dark abyss. She clung to his neck as she'd done once before and she cried.

I could love her, his mind said in frank soul-destroying honesty. *If only I could trust her.*

"Why do you cry?"

She blinked away her tears and closed her stinging eyes. "I am worried about what you're about to do," she mumbled the half lie.

He wiped a tear from her cheek. "I'll be fine," he said as he lowered them both to the deck. "I best finish getting ready."

Mira wiped away the rest of the tears. "What can I do to help?"

"Whatever Acron says. But everything will be fine, believe me."

"Now it is you who lie," she whispered. "I'm afraid you'll die."

"No," he said definitely. "We have a universe to explore together. Nothing will get in the way of that."

She tried to smile.

* * *

Two hours later all preparations had been completed. Acron had adjusted the expressor field, created an air distribution pump and Talon had rigged a monitoring station in the hold. Before them the gray loading dock hatch stood twenty meters by twenty meters. It was closed at the moment, but soon it would open and they would see their destiny.

"Now," Acron said to the assembled crew. "When I open the loading dock hatch don't be surprised by what you'll see."

"What will it look like?" Lidi asked impatiently.

"Wait and see. Now, the expressor field will maintain our integrity after I open the hatch, so our air will not rush out or anything."

"So why did you make us wear environmental suits?" Geena asked nervously.

"If the generator overloads, we may experience some distortions to the field, so I wanted everyone to have some safety gear, okay?"

"Just asking."

"Ready, Lars?"

Lars unfurled his great white wings and nodded. Strapped to his chest were the proximity mine and his oxygen cylinder.

"Extending the expressor field now. Lars, it will precede you by two meters. So when I say stop, you must stop immediately. At no point let the expressor field or the mine actually touch the torpedo, otherwise it will be drawn inside our field, will reactivate and shoot down our throats."

Lars nodded again after adjusting the air cylinder. He had elected not to wear a full pressure suit in order to give him maximum mobility. "I'm ready," he said.

"Air vent open and pump activated. Opening hatch now." Acron pressed the main door control and the wide loading dock hatch opened.

The sight that greeted the crew was like nothing they had ever seen. A gray swirling mass like a wall of mercury filled the space outside the loading dock. There was a short tunnel of clear space four meters in diameter at its center and at the end of

that short tunnel, as if it was just a few meters outside the hold, was the blunt nose of the silver white torpedo.

Collectively the crew gasped.

"What you see is an illusion," Acron explained. "The torpedo is actually 15.5 kilometers away. Remember, from the perspective of normal space, we are a singularity. Everything is crunched up together. As Lars approaches the torpedo, it will seem to move away from him. That's what he'll see, but from our perspective, even though the expressor field is activated, it will seem he has moved very little."

"That doesn't make any sense," Geena said.

"If you think about it," Talon replied, his voice very serious, "null space itself doesn't make any sense, but it works and it gets us around the galaxy."

Lars unfurled his wings, left the deck and, as the crew held their breath, propelled himself into the tunnel. They watched in silence as his great wings beat downward, sweeping back, propelling him... nowhere.

It seemed to them that he'd not moved at all, that despite the great sweep of his wings he wasn't moving one centimeter. They could feel the draft from his powerful wings on their faces but without any reference points in the swirling tunnel they could not see any progress at all.

"He isn't moving," Geena said.

"He is," Talon said, watching the monitor closely. "He's fifteen meters away already."

"He'll find it hard going," Acron said. "I can only pump a small amount of air in at a time. As he gets further away the air will thin considerably. At the end of it the air will be so thin it will be like flying in a vacuum. That's why I had you don the environmental suits."

"I see," Geena said, guessing the truth. "You'll be bleeding the ship of its air?"

"That's right, but only at the end of the trip, when Lars will need it most."

"One hundred and fifty meters," Talon said.

* * *

Lars could feel the air thinning. His lungs screamed for oxygen and with increasing frequency he drew long breaths from his air cylinder. He was, Talon reported through the comlink, now over ten kilometers from the ship. He was tiring, his shoulders aching. For the last ten minutes he realized he had to beat his wings faster to maintain any speed at all. Not that he was in a hurry except to get the whole ordeal over and done with.

The damn torpedo was still dead in front of his face. The temptation to reach out and touch it was surprisingly strong, but to do so would be futile -- it was still five and a half kilometers away.

He had to concentrate fiercely to stay in the middle of the tunnel. He'd already strayed off course once and his wingtip had broken the mercurial surface tension of the tunnel's wall. The coldness of null space had chilled his whole body.

He'd asked Acron what would happen if he pushed outside the tunnel and the engineer wasn't sure. Acron hadn't been aware of it being tried before, not officially anyway. He told Lars that the surface tension was enough to keep small molecules inside, so the air was safe, but any macro breakage of the tunnel had unpredictable results and he had simply asked him not to get off course and crash through the tunnel wall.

His shoulders were screaming now. Talon advised him his forward speed had dropped by ninety percent in the last twenty minutes despite him increasing his effort. He was tiring too quickly and he decided to slow down and be patient.

Twenty minutes later he was only another five hundred meters closer to the torpedo. Sweat poured out of his body and he was dead tired. It felt like his wings were meeting no resistance at all and he found it difficult to keep his balance. His natural instincts that maintained balance in flight had no resistance to work on. Instead of providing lift to defeat gravity he had to alter his wing movements to generate enough thrust to produce forward propulsion. In the thinning air that was becoming ever more difficult.

Unexpectedly his left wing struck the side of the tunnel. A jolt of pain shot up his wing and stabbed into the center of his brain.

He lost balance and his right wing swept through the wall. He grunted in pain. He pulled in both wings and coasted. Risking a glance to his right he saw that the tip of his wing was missing. Great gobs of blood were spurting into the air.

He heard Mira scream.

"Lars!" Talon called. "Are you all right?"

"No," Lars replied through gritted teeth. "How much further?"

"Another two kilometers. You're coasting now, straying off center, you need to yaw left ten degrees."

How do I do that? When I have no thrust?

"Lars, you're drifting!"

"I know, give me a second."

Lars partly unfurled his wings and imagined he was back home on Corris, beginning a steep dive through the mountain passes to catch a straying Corrisite. Instinctively he shaped his wings to veer to the left. With little air to act on his wings it would take time for his action to take effect.

He was approaching the side of the tunnel. He straightened out but knew that momentum would carry him into the wall. He braced himself for the searing pain. He had to maintain this profile to ensure he turned back toward the center of the tunnel, otherwise he'd crash through completely and that would mean certain death.

Once he was on an even keel he could think about slowing down.

"Lars," Talon called. "You need to slow down now."

The leading edge of his remaining wing tip grazed the edge of the tunnel. Hot pain coursed through his wing. He couldn't help but cry out in pain.

His momentum gradually cleared him of the edge of the tunnel. With great effort he willed himself to clear his mind of the pain.

In a couple of minutes he'd be close to the center of the tunnel where he should be. Then he could begin flaring out his wings and reversing his wing beats.

* * *

Mira could hardly watch. A fine red mist, a curtain of blood from Lars' injured wings, covered the space between him and the ship. She felt sick. Tears streamed down her face. She wanted to call to him, to tell him to come back. That they'd trust themselves to the ship's usual defenses. Nothing was worth destroying his beautiful body.

Each time Lars groaned in pain she sobbed in sympathy. Geena wrapped an arm about her. Lidj and Neelan both stood holding each other, each racked with uncontrollable sobs.

Lars' labored breathing echoed coldly through the cargo bay as he struggled to move his wings and slow down his progress toward the torpedo.

"Five hundred meters, Lars. Slow down some more please."

"How fast is he traveling?" Acron asked. "Put on your helmets everyone. That's the last of the air."

"A half meter per minute, but the air is so thin it's not slowing him down. At this rate he'll still be moving when he reaches the torpedo."

"If that happens we're all dead," Acron muttered.

* * *

Lars timed his arrival perfectly. His tortured thoughts told him it was more luck than good management that had brought him to a halt ten meters from the torpedo.

He was exhausted. His throat was dry, and each intake of oxygen rich air from the cylinder was like razor blades in his lungs. He took a few minutes to catch his breath and examine the damage to his wings.

It sickened him to see the tips of both wings missing. The bloodied edges were black as if they had been burnt off. The wounds were partially closed but the vigorous activity of flying had broken any seal his coagulated blood made and they were now weeping a pale stream of pink colored plasma.

The ends of his wings were numb but his whole wing ached as if he'd flown a thousand kilometers. He glanced back to the ship. It seemed that the crew were only a few meters behind him and he blinked at the illusion.

Mira gave him a hesitant wave and he smiled at her.

"All's well," he whispered to her tiredly. "I'll be back soon."

He turned back to the torpedo. He carefully activated the timer on the proximity mine and attached the extendable rod Acron had fashioned from inert material. With trembling fingers he pushed the mine through the end of the tunnel. The silvery surface tension rippled as the mine went through.

Now that it was in null space the mine was inactive but would return to its lethal state as soon as they dropped into normal space. Being within five meters of the torpedo it would detonate immediately.

"Is it in place?" he asked Talon. He hardly recognized his voice. It sounded like an old man.

"It's holding steady," Acron called. "Come on home."

Lars pushed the release mechanism and retracted the rod. With great effort, careful to maintain his balance, Lars spun around his own axis and tentatively beat his wings. Hot spears of pain shot through his tensed body.

The air was so thin that he had virtually nothing to push against. He had to slow his wing beats so that he didn't lose his balance. It was difficult to establish a regular beat and in twenty minutes of little progress he was tired, so tired.

His head swam. It seemed that the hold of *Mjolnir* was tantalizingly close. So close he felt he could reach out and touch Mira's face.

Why is she crying? he wondered, looking closely at her tear-streaked face. Ambassador Triskelion was standing close behind her, her arms tight around her shoulders. Lidj and Neelan were hugging too, their faces ashen.

What had happened?

His shoulders ached and his head swam.

He could hear Talon's distant voice. He couldn't hear distinctly... something about the wall. What wall? Talon's voice was high-pitched, panicky. He'd have to mention it to him. Tell him to keep his grip. Everything was going to be fine.

Mira's scream jolted him back into consciousness. Then the pain hit him. He had veered into the wall of the tunnel again. His right wing screamed in pain. The end of it was numb, a dead weight that seemed to drag on his shoulders, making it harder to work. In his peripheral vision he could see his blood being whipped up into a fine mist.

He tucked his wing into his side and then realized he was heading directly toward the mercurial wall of the tunnel.

So, that's what Talon was screaming about.

He half extended his wing again and compensated with the other and righted his course. The air was thicker now; he could feel some resistance to his movements and felt the welcome thrust that each beat of his wings provided.

But each beat of his wings was still so hard to complete. "How far?" he heard a stranger's raspy voice ask and realized it was his own.

"Six kilometers to go," Talon replied.

His wings felt like dead weight. He tried to correct his direction but just couldn't get it right. His left wing grazed the tunnel wall.

"Don't think I can make it," he heard that raspy stranger whisper. Who was that? he wondered.

"You can make it," Mira pleaded. "Come to me."

"Mira?" He loved Mira. She was so beautiful. And what she did to him every time he looked in her bright eyes. She made his blood race and his feathers bristle. She felt so soft and firm in his arms. She was a mystery though. Who was she really?

"Keep him talking," Talon said.

Who was he talking to?

"Come to me, Lars. You can make it."

Mira's voice sounded so distant, so far away.

"Keep flying," she ordered. "Damn it! Keep flapping those big beautiful wings."

He realized he'd stopped flying. He could no longer feel the breeze on his face. Somewhere, in the still functioning part of his brain, he realized that the air was thick enough to slow him down to a dead stop. Exactly the reverse of the problem he'd faced as he'd approached the torpedo.

He moved his wings. They were so heavy. So hard to beat that enemy inertia. He needed to build up speed because that made flying easier.

"Get closer to him," Talon instructed.

Lars opened his eyes. Mira seemed to fill his whole universe. Those green eyes glistening with tears. They were like beacons, glowing in the swarming darkness, green lights leading the way.

* * *

"Get ready," Talon warned. "He's almost here."

Lars was moving his bloodied wings in a slow desultory fashion. Automatically, as if he were asleep. From Mira's perspective he seemed to be only semiconscious. His eyes were barely open. Drops of blood covered his face and dripped from his lips where he'd bitten his tongue in pain.

She tried not to see his blood-splattered wings, those beautiful feathers blackened at the ends. The tips burned off by the searing coldness of null space. Globules of blood seemed to fill the void behind him.

As Acron retracted the expessor field behind Lars, the increasing air pressure forced his blood out of the tunnel into the hold. Puddles of red plasma dotted with globs of coagulated blood pooled on the hold's floor.

She wanted to reach out and hold his face in her hands. She wanted to kiss him. She leaned forward.

"Come to me, Lars," Mira whispered into the comlink. "Come to me."

Lars showed no sign of hearing her. She stepped closer so that his face filled her vision.

"Hold her," Talon shouted.

Geena grabbed her by the shoulders and wrenched her back into the hold. She'd almost taken a step into the tunnel. Another and she would have broken the surface tension of the tunnel and lost her foot.

She kept her eyes on his. He was blinking slowly as if the light was too bright. His wings beat ever so slowly now. He was drifting to the left again.

"Lars!" she screamed.

His eyes jolted open and he smiled. "Mira," he whispered and his eyes began to close.

"Lars! Wake up!"

His wings moved slowly again and somehow he righted his course. His body must be flying automatically now, by instinct.

"Out of the way," Acron said. He and the rest of the crew readied themselves to catch him once he broke through.

In the thickened air his speed was slow but he was moving steadily. Suddenly, he was through the expressor field and back inside the hold of the ship. The ship's artificial gravity instantly took hold and he careened into Acron and Talon and the trio fell heavily to the deck.

Mira cried out as a misty cloud of red splattered onto her face.

"Lars!" she screamed.

Chapter 7

Teche finished his cinder and smacked his lips with satisfaction. He'd come up with a course of action and he always felt better when he had a plan.

It was an audacious and risky scheme to be sure and one that was contrary to his personality and character. His life so far could be characterized as treading the safe path; where he did everything by the book, kept his claws clean and did everything expected of him. What he was planning seemed like running blindfolded through a bog filled with quicksand.

But this was the *new* Teche; the risk taker.

He put his arms about the shoulders of Jiss and Joss and held them close. "Tell me. Are you enjoying your new careers as investigators?"

They both giggled and Jiss answered. "Oh yes, Lord. We are."

"Then I am promoting you both. You are now official police detectives. When we get back to the palace I want you to process your credentials on the database and I will sign them."

They both squealed in delight and kissed him on each cheek. "But what about General Een and Governor Bloss?" Joss asked.

"With any luck they won't be a problem. For the time being we are under the protection of His Highness. Nothing can hurt us while we have his authority. But the next few weeks may prove very interesting. Are you both willing to come along for the ride, no matter where it takes us?"

"Oh yes, Lord," they said in unison.

He hugged them to him. "That's my girls." He grinned. He'd never felt happier in all his life.

"Now we have to track the Corridian's ship to see where it came from. I also want to see what we can find out about slave raids on Corris. I want to find out who 'Q' on Karacos is. If I get you to a communications centre at the palace, do you think you can find those things out for me?"

Both women nodded enthusiastically. "We are very good researchers," Jiss asserted. "We know where to look for things."

"And where did you learn this skill?"

"Our father taught us. He believed an education was the most important thing one can get."

"He was a wise man, your father. I think he and my father would have liked each other."

"Like we like you, Lord?" Joss asked, a cheeky grin on her face.

"No, not like us. Come on, let's get back to the palace and you can astound me with your research skills."

With one girl under each arm Teche swaggered out of the Spaceport Bar and into the bright sunshine. The green sky of Velos was clear and hauntingly beautiful.

The first thing that struck him was how empty the street was. The bustling crowd of shoppers was strangely missing. There was no humveh traffic, even the shop fronts had closed. It was only mid afternoon; far too early to close up.

His body tensed. Behind him the door of the Spaceport Bar slammed shut. They were trapped.

"Girls," he whispered through clenched jaw. "I want you to slowly back up and go to the street to the left and follow it through to the end. I'll get the humveh and meet you there."

"What is it, Lord?"

"Ambush. Pretend I've given you instructions and you are going up the street. Okay?"

"Yes, Lord."

They went through a short charade and he gave the hatchlings further instructions about what to do if something happened to him -- how to contact Caed to arrange their return to their father. He scanned the doorways and rooftops but could see nothing suspicious. Perhaps they hadn't had time to set up yet.

Jiss and Joss nodded, a combination of determination and anger across their faces. No fear, he noted. How strange.

He watched them for a moment as they walked casually up the deserted street. He turned and walked briskly toward his humveh. He dropped his hand to his belt and rested it near his holstered laser pistol.

Down the main street the security gates of the spaceport were closed, confirming that this was a military operation. General Een was behind it, he was sure.

Acutely aware of his twin hearts beating strongly and the adrenaline coursing through his body, Teche felt strangely detached from the immediacy of his peril. He was highly aroused, though not afraid. He wondered at the pleasure this arousal gave him. He'd never felt so alive. Every nerve fiber in every inch of his body was tingling with anticipation. His tongue flicked the quiet air and his eyes scanned the streets around him with intense concentration.

He was ten meters from his vehicle when, to his left, a nondescript black humveh appeared above a building in contravention of local traffic laws. It rapidly approached him and suddenly dropped to the street, quietly settling on its repulser field. The driver had positioned it between Teche and his own vehicle, blocking any chance of a quick escape.

The humveh doors swung open and six large Rigellians climbed out, laser pistols in hand. They fanned out in a semi circle in front of him. They did not look military, Teche thought. They held their weapons unsafely, waving them around in a typically gangster fashion; full of bravado rather than skill.

These were Ghotti's men.

The leader of the group waved his free hand behind him and another Rigellian climbed out of the humveh, dragging behind him a limp Velosian. Vier.

The beautiful Velosian was naked, her body covered in welts and scratches, one long slim arm hanging limp, the exposed broken bones showing white against her olive skin.

Teche's heart sank. He could act decisively when only he was at risk, but now this poor delicate creature was suffering because of him.

The gangster held Vier with clawed fingers as thick as her waist. With a malicious grin he held up her good arm, gripping it by the elbow, his immense claws holding it either side of the delicate joint.

The threat was obvious.

One of the thugs who had been ransacking his humveh walked casually to his boss and reported his failure to find anything.

"The disks, you Seth bastard." The racial slur was not a surprise to Teche, who over the years had heard it a lot from the underworld. It had long lost any power over him.

Teche held up his arms and turned around once to show that apart from his kilt and utility belt he had nothing concealed. "I don't know what you are talking about."

The leader nodded to the tough holding Vier and the bastard started to bend his claws. Vier groaned.

"Wait!"

A self-satisfied grin crossed the leader's face. "Where are the disks?"

"They are important so I hid them."

"Take us to them."

This was his chance. The six Rigellians were scanning the streets around them, uneasy at the quietness, only the leader watching him. Teche took a step toward the leader who raised his pistol. "Drop your weapon first, Seth."

Teche nodded and took his hand to his holster. At that moment two laser blasts sizzled the air beside him. The leader toppled to the ground, his head a steaming bloody mist. The one holding Vier crumpled to the ground also, his head splattered

against the roof of the humveh. Vier dropped like a rag doll and lay unmoving on the road.

Teche drew his weapon and fired, taking out the nearest thug who fell with a satisfying grunt. The other four took cover behind their humveh while Teche sprinted to Vier and, scooping her up, dashed to his own vehicle.

The air suddenly erupted as laser fire came from all directions. Not all of it was aimed at the gangsters. A laser bolt sliced through his kilt, branding his thigh as he made it to the humveh. The thug who had searched it had conveniently left the doors open.

As he powered up the vehicle laser bursts hit the windscreen and paneling, but the security vehicle was armored and none of the deadly blasts penetrated.

Teche lifted off and drew fire from the buildings surrounding the street. The accuracy of the shots suggested the military and as he gained altitude he saw a squad of armed men in civilian clothes surround the remaining gangsters and, with chilling military precision, finish them off.

Vier was moaning softly in the seat beside him. She was in bad shape and needed immediate medical attention. He maneuvered the humveh around so he could get to the pickup point for Jiss and Joss. And there they were, bolting up the street, zigging and zagging, avoiding laser fire from a squad of Rigellians who were in hot pursuit.

Then, to Teche's surprise, both Jiss and Joss, while still running at full speed, turned sideways as one and fired their laser rifles. Two of their pursuers fell. The others hastily returned fire.

Teche swooped down behind the pursuers who, suddenly finding a humveh at the back of their heads, dropped to the pavement. Up ahead Jiss and Joss swerved around a corner and Teche followed.

He overtook them and dropped to the ground in front. Five seconds later they were in the back seats, panting and huffing. Teche took off and, taking an indirect route, headed for the palace and safety.

Teche looked behind him and winked at the girls as they stowed the military rifles on the shelf behind their seats. "Thank you for your timely sharp shooting," he said but they were not listening.

They were now leaning over Vier, cooing and keening over her torn and broken flesh. Their long fingers began caressing their compatriot and the pained expression on Vier's face softened and relaxed.

Teche checked his rear vision. Finding no pursuers he felt relaxed enough to let out a long satisfied sigh. His hearts had stopped their wild beating and now, as they flew swiftly to safety, he considered what the last ten minutes meant.

His forehead creased as he pondered the sudden turn of events. Ghotti's men chasing his disks he could understand. Even their brutality to a defenseless female was well within the scope of their typical thuggish behavior. He quietly congratulated himself on his prescience to call Caed and request one of his trusted servants to collect the disks before he went to pick up the girls. But a clandestine military operation to kill him, instigated by Een? That was a surprise.

How badly did Een want him dead? Sanctioning a full-scale military assassination was a drastic thing to do. Surely the irritation he caused the general by insisting on the rule of law was not enough to require such a response.

Or was it something else, something he was not aware of, that could get them killed?

With that unsettling question worming through his mind he accelerated to the palace. He had to find out what else was on those disks and figure out how to save all their lives.

Chapter 8

Mira woke with a start. She looked up from where her head had fallen onto her arm and considered Lars. He was still unconscious. His ashen face contorted in a tight grimace reflecting the agony he must be in.

Neelan was fussing over an intravenous drip. In the corner of the cramped sick bay the monitors glowed green as they analyzed his condition. Intermittently Neelan referred to a Corridian medical text. Her face was grim as she tried to make sense of Lars' strange physiology.

"How is he?"

"I've given him something for possible infection and I have initiated cell replacement therapy. It's touch and go. Sometimes those therapies don't take..." Her voice trailed away.

"What is it?"

"If cell necrosis takes hold I'll have to do something radical."

"What does that mean?"

"He has sustained a great deal of damage to the structure of his feathers. Very serious rachis, barb and barbule damage. That in itself isn't so bad... he can always grow new feathers. The real damage was done to the flesh and muscle structure of his wing. After the initial damage and blood loss, the circulatory system to his wings progressively shut down. It's a natural body reaction in Corridians... something akin to shock. However, restricting the blood supply to the periphery system means the outer cells die. If blood isn't restored quickly the cells continue to die. His muscles were deprived of blood for several hours. The human equivalent is called gangrene."

Mira blanched at the thought. "You mean he could lose his wings?"

Neelan nodded slowly.

"You can't let that happen."

Neelan's face drained of colour.

"I'm sorry." Mira knew the last thing the doctor wanted to do was to amputate her captain's wings, but to save his life she would be left with no choice. But would it be a life Lars would want?

She forced herself to examine his wings, so raw and bloody, the edges of the wounds black. She wanted him wings or no wings, but would he appreciate that? Would she make enough of a difference to him to make him want to live?

She resolved to make sure she did.

"I'll try," Neelan said. "But I am not an expert in Corridian anatomy."

Mira had an idea. "Should we take him home to Corris?"

Neelan nodded emphatically. "Yes. That would be a very good idea. Suggest it to Talon and say I agree whole-heartedly. It is in the captain's best interests."

Mira ran to the bridge.

"How is he?" Acron asked.

"Very bad." She looked from Acron to Talon. "Neelan wants us to take him directly to Corris. Doctors there will know how best to treat his wings. She is afraid cell necrosis will force her to amputate them."

Both men gasped in horror.

"Then Corris it is," Talon said huskily. "I didn't realize it would be so bad for him. I think we should drop out of null space as close to Corris as we can without causing too much of a problem for the locals. Then it's just a short hop to the planet itself."

Acron shook his head. "Not a good idea. I agree we have to make two jumps, but the torpedo will be able to send a null space tracking signal back to its mother ship. For that reason we don't want to draw them too close to Corris."

Talon nodded. "Good point. How about we drop out say two days away from Corris. That presents a pretty big search area for the Rigellians."

"Remember, we may sustain some blast damage from the torpedo when the mine goes off."

Mira shook her head. "We don't have two days."

"A day then."

Mira realized that there was a balance to be made between the medical imperative and the probability of Lars being caught by the Rigellians. She nodded to Talon. "A day at the max."

"I'll set the co-ordinates. And then we'll see some fireworks."

* * *

The return to normal space is a remarkably dramatic event. Since null space is, as its name suggests, empty and devoid of anything except spacecraft in transit, the view outside the ship is black, a deeper black than can be imagined. The transition from singularity to normal existence floods the view screen with stars and planets, which seem to leap out of the darkness.

The principle of conservation of momentum dictated that *Moljnir* would re-enter normal space at the same velocity as it entered. Since Talon had been evading a number of Rigellian cruisers when they had fled Velos, the ship was traveling at quite a clip.

The pre-drop preparations had been careful and meticulous. The standard countermeasures were pre-programmed, checked and rechecked and then checked again.

The torpedo was a small object traveling at a thousand kilometers an hour relative to *Mjolnir* and the lasers and anti-torpedoes they would launch at it would have less than a minute to find their mark. In normal circumstances if a torpedo got this close the target was destroyed.

Their greatest hope was the proximity mine Lars had placed in front of the torpedo. They needed it to detonate one hundred thousandth of a second after reentering normal space.

All the crew, except Neelan, who was tending Lars, were gathered on the bridge to watch their fate. They all wore pressure suits in case the hull was breached by debris

from the torpedo and in the soft lighting of the bridge they presented an odd assortment of shapes and sizes.

Mira could not imagine that the sacrifice Lars had made could possibly fail, but the grim expressions on Acron and Talon's faces told her that they were far from safe.

"Are we ready?" Talon asked quietly. "I've got the viewer focused on where the torpedo will appear."

Mira could not detect any fear in his voice, just a hint of resignation. He, Acron and Lars had done all they could; their fate was in the hands of their preparations.

Lidj reached out and grasped her hand and Acron's as well. On the other side, Geena clutched Acron's arm and placed her free hand on Talon's shoulder. Mira completed the chain by placing her hand on Talon's other shoulder and gave him an encouraging smile.

"Here goes," he said and pressed the expressor field initiation button. This sent the finger of their envelope out to test the region of real space into which they were about to drop to ensure there was no planet or star in their path. Once the navigation computer gave the go-ahead the ship would follow and drop into normal space.

"Brace yourselves."

Mira gripped his shoulder and squeezed Lidj's fingers as a star field jumped out of the darkness and was immediately lost in a blossoming incandescence. Mira shielded her eyes from the intense explosion.

"Hold on," Acron shouted as the ship rocked as their own torpedoes left the ship and the laser cannon commenced a steady stream of firing.

Smaller explosions erupted as the lasers picked out pieces of debris and destroyed them before they reached the ship.

"Lars did it!" Talon announced.

The crew erupted into shouts of joy as they realized they would be spared.

The ship rocked again. "Uh oh," Acron said.

"What is it?" Geena asked.

"Something hit us," he said, checking the damage control panel. "Nothing serious, the hull wasn't breached. Looks like we lost a laser cannon though. I'll probably have to get out there."

"Make it quick," Talon warned. "I don't want to hang around too long."

"Twenty minutes."

Talon switched the screen to look forward. In the far distance was a small yellow planet with an attendant moon.

"Where's that?"

"TG609. A mining colony. I chose it in case we were damaged and needed rescue. I'll break convention and not call them to explain the explosion. We'll leave them guessing."

"Congratulations," Mira told him. "You saved our lives today."

"No, I didn't," he replied, dragging a blue hand over his face. "Lars did it."

Mira nodded and gave his shoulder a reassuring squeeze. "I'll get back and see how he is."

"Lars did a marvelous thing," Geena said as they made their way back to sickbay. "He's a very special person."

"That he is."

Geena stopped and gave Mira a hug. "I can see why you love him so much."

Mira felt tears welling up in her eyes when suddenly an alarm sounded, breaking the moment. "What now?"

They ran back to the bridge and found Talon slumped in his control chair, staring angrily at the control panels. "What's happened?"

"Just what we didn't need." He motioned toward the main view screen and stabbed a button. A gigantic spacecraft filled the screen before them.

"Who is it?"

"It's an old Solaran battle cruiser. No identifying markings. A pirate by the look of it."

"And bristling with weapons," Acron said as he entered. He was covered in oil and grease after performing some repairs. "Look at the damn thing. It's like a porcupine!"

"Hello there!" a cheery voice filled the bridge. "I'm Captain Light and I'm here to rob you."

Mira bristled and her stomach dropped. She'd know that voice anywhere.

Talon bristled. "We'll see you in hell first!"

The pirate laughed. "Admirable reply but you may have noticed you are so badly outgunned that it would be utterly futile for you to resist."

"Bastard!" Talon spat.

"Now, now. It's nothing personal, but I will either rob you or destroy you. It's your choice."

"Listen, we are on the same side. That torpedo that we just destroyed will soon be followed by a Rigellian cruiser. If you don't want to be caught too then you better light out of here!"

"Nice try."

"I'm doing you a favor."

The pirate laughed without humor. "Like I said. It's your choice."

"I'll think about it," Talon responded angrily.

"You have sixty seconds."

Talon closed the communication channel and re-activated the weapons systems, selecting the pirate vessel as the target.

"Let me talk to him," Geena said. "As an ambassador I'll offer him a pardon to let us go."

"No," Mira said. "He won't go for that. Let me talk to him."

"Why?"

"I know him."

"You do?"

"We went to school together."

Chapter 9

"Are you sure about this?" Caed looked at his young protégé. His ashen expression indicated he feared they were treading on unsafe ground.

"As much as I can be," Teche replied. "There is much more to learn, but you needed evidence quickly that this was an off world plot to stop the senseless killing. Here it is."

"How much will you tell Muss?"

"As much as he needs to know. There are pieces of the puzzle I don't yet understand. I'll ask for his permission to continue the investigation."

"And about the attacks today?"

"Ghotti's men. That I do know. Any reports from the local police?"

Caed shook his head. "There were no reports of any disturbance *at all*. Apparently there *was* no gun battle."

Teche nodded. He'd expected as much. "It was a military operation, no doubt about it. To shutdown the spaceport and cordon off the streets requires senior authority. We do have the rifles that the girls confiscated. They have been busy tracing the serial numbers, but no luck yet. They'll probably have been reported stolen anyway. Stolen from Een's barracks, I bet."

Caed took a deep breath and rose unsteadily to his feet. "We'd better go. Muss doesn't like to be kept waiting."

Caed, Teche and the girls walked purposefully but slowly down the labyrinthine corridors of the palace. The corridors were lined with armed troops, a measure of Muss's newfound paranoia.

The two girls carried hundreds of documents copied from the disks Teche had recovered from Ghotti's villa. As Teche had suspected, they were worth their weight in gold.

The room was heavily guarded with at least twenty marines lining the wall and they were searched no less than three times before they were allowed in. His Highness Muss was in his war room, sitting on his golden throne at the head of a long table. His scales were pale and his wild eyes bloodshot. Teche noted that the warlord wore a high-necked robe to hide the bandages that covered the wound at his neck.

Teche stiffened. Standing on Muss's right hand side was General Een. This was unexpected.

Caed bowed and Teche followed suit. Jiss and Joss curtsied right down to the floor. Teche wondered where they had studied court etiquette. He resolved to have a deep conversation with them, in between sex, that is, and discover their true histories.

"Well?" Muss demanded.

Teche took a deep breath. He knew Muss was a capricious and vicious individual. Anything could set him off into a frenzy of violence. Teche knew that whatever he said next could either save them or cost them their lives.

"Your Highness," he began, his voice deep and confident though his guts churned with anxiety. "It was a highly organized and flawlessly executed assassination attempt from off world."

Muss reacted to that with a relieved expression and relaxation of his shoulders. He sank back into his throne. "How can you be sure that there were no Velos connections?" Muss's voice was a raspy whisper.

"My investigation continues, Your Highness, but it seems that Lars Dax and this slave, Natu Gelasia, came from Elysium together, and connived their way into the palace by duping the well known slaver, Ghotti, and your slave recruiter, Urith Cavell. Their stories were plausible and your people followed normal routine. I don't suspect any ill intent by your local people. From my understanding of the facts so far, the attack on you by the Solaran Ambassador was at the instigation of Dax and the slave."

"The Solaran will pay for this," Muss muttered. "I want those three apprehended. I want them all skewered in the middle of my banquet room and I want them gutted and served for dessert!" Muss dissolved in a fit of agonised coughing. "Caed, I want them captured. Do you hear?"

"Yes, Your Highness."

"Where are they?" This question was addressed to Een, who was shifting his weight from one claw to the other in agitation.

"Our Navy is tracking every lead, Your Highness."

"That means you have no idea, do you?"

"There is a possibility that we destroyed them as they made the jump to null space."

"Don't give me possibilities. I want their bodies!"

"Yes, Your Highness."

Teche was enjoying the general's discomfiture. "I may have some leads, Your Highness."

Een cast a withering glare in his direction.

Muss leaned forward in his throne. "Yes, Teche?"

"Your Highness, I've discovered the behaviour of Dax to be very odd. He appears to have been in search of a Corridian female, showing everyone about the city holo-portraits of her. He and the slave had come directly from Elysium, where my counterpart in Bawdy Town reports that he'd been doing the same thing. He and the slave destroyed a detail of local Gaffi militia sent to capture him. Further research by my investigators uncovered an intriguing fact. Over the last several years Corris has been raided by slavers and female Corridians of breeding age have been captured."

"What has this to do with the attempt on His Highness's life?" Een blustered. "This is a waste of time!"

"If I may continue, Your Highness?"

Muss nodded, his scaly face contorting into a frown.

"I have evidence that these stolen Corridians were also handled by Ghotti."

Een went to bluster again but Muss silenced him with a wave of a clawed hand and leant further forward. "Go on."

"I was attacked by Ghotti's men while investigating in Terek."

Een laughed. "What nonsense is this? There were no attacks in Terek today."

"A witness was tortured by Ghotti's thugs. If I had not spirited the evidence out ahead of the attack, we might not know about the Corridian connection." Teche fixed Een with a steady glare. "There were other forces involved in the attack, unidentified at the time, but my investigations will uncover their identity."

"Rubbish!" Een exploded. "This Seth bastard is delusional!"

"We recovered assault rifles, Your Highness. The serial numbers indicate they were from General Een's garrison."

Muss turned to the general. "Is this true?"

"Stolen rifles mean nothing!"

Teche smiled. That confirmed for him that they did come from Een's garrison without even checking the serial numbers.

"This other group, though they wore civilian clothes, were clearly military."

"Een?" Muss's full attention was now on his general who filled his chest out and pointed a trembling arm at Teche.

"This traitor is talking rubbish! He's trying to save himself!"

"What are you saying?" Muss asked, sitting back in his throne.

"I was awaiting the right time, Your Highness," Een said, stepping forward. He nodded toward the marine commander. "Arrest that traitor!"

The marines pounced on Teche, pinning his arms and throwing him to the floor. He looked up to see Jiss and Joss being treated similarly, their flimsy tunics being torn, exposing their lovely bodies to the amused eyes of the Rigellians groping them.

"Your Highness!" Caed shouted. "I protest!"

"This Seth bastard is a traitor!" Een repeated.

Muss considered Een with squinting eyes. His tongue slithered out of his mouth and licked his bottom lip, a sign of amusement. "How so, General?"

“He interfered with the arrest of a Velosian terrorist and sent spies into my office. He’s a Velosian sympathizer -- look,” he shouted, spittle spraying from his lips, and pointed at Jiss and Joss who were still struggling under the weight of two bulky marines. “He employs these two dangerous Velosian spies...”

Muss held up his hands to silence the general and fixed Teche with his bloodied eyes.

“Well, Teche? What do you have to say?”

Chapter 10

Mira settled herself in the co-pilot's chair, took a deep breath and flicked on the communicator.

"Jack Darkness," she said confidently, using the nickname she had coined for him all those years ago. The pirate didn't respond straight away and the silence hung expectantly over the bridge.

"Now there's a blast from the past," the pirate said eventually. "Long time no see."

"It has been a long time," Mira replied simply.

"Of all the star systems in all the galaxy, you had to wander into mine."

"Yours?"

"Well, I like to call it mine. Home is where you hang your enemies, as they say."

"Jack. We don't have much time. We have a seriously injured man on board. He has to be taken to his home planet for specialist treatment. Let us save his life." She paused but there was no reply. "For old time's sake."

"Now there's an interesting concept."

"We don't have anything to deal with," she admitted. "We have no cargo, no wealth. Just a seriously injured man and a Rigellian cruiser chasing us."

"I must admit, your ship is not worth much even in scrap. Where did you steal it from?"

"Jack, that's not important. We need to get him home."

"Your ship sustained damage?"

"Yes, but..."

"But nothing. While your crew effect repairs, you will be my guest."

"No!" Talon shouted. "That is not going to happen."

Mira made a decision. She flicked off the communications channel and placed her hand on his shoulder. "It's all right, Talon. If anything happens, I'll meet you on Havensafe. Is that clear? Your duty is with Lars and his sister. You have to promise me that you will not waste time on me."

Talon shook his head. "No. Lars will not forgive me."

"Promise me," she insisted.

"She's right," Acron said. "We have to get Lars home. But if something goes wrong, depend upon this. We *will* come for you."

Talon nodded reluctantly.

"Thank you for that." She flicked the communications back on. "Jack, come and get me."

"With pleasure. I'll have a shuttle at your top hatch in five minutes."

"I don't like this," Talon said grimly. "He won't give you back."

"Whatever happens, happens. Get Lars to Corris. I'll survive. I always do. Now, I want to see Lars before I go."

Talon met her eyes. "I won't forget this."

Down in sickbay Mira touched Lars' cheek. His face was hot. He was burning up. Perspiration rested on his forehead like raindrops on a leaf. She brushed the drops away with a small square of cloth. She kissed his lips and then placed her mouth close to his ear. "I shall see you again," she whispered. "That I promise. I love you and in that I don't lie."

"It's here," Talon said over the intercom.

Geena, Lidj and Acron waited for her at the ladder that led to the top hatch.

"Take Lars home," she said to Acron. "Then I'll see you at Havensafe."

"We will meet again," he assured her with a grim smile.

Lidj kissed her on the mouth. "Be careful."

"I will. Look after Geena for me."

"I promise."

Geena kissed her as well and held her tightly as if she wouldn't let her go. "You don't have to do this. Let me negotiate. It's what I do."

"No. Trust me. It won't work on him. He is beyond negotiation."

"You are a brave woman," Geena whispered. "That's why I love you. Be careful."

Mira's eyes began to tear up. "Look after Lars for me."

"Trust me. I'll ensure Lars is safe."

"Thank you."

She fought back the tears as she climbed the ladder, opened the hatch and climbed through the short connecting tunnel to the pirate shuttle. It was a fully automated ship and the five-minute flight allowed Mira to collect herself and recall her short liaison with Jack Light.

They had both been recruited to the Solaran Intelligence Service from the Canberra Crèche where, as orphans, they were helpless wards of the state. They had been classmates for five years, competing vigorously in physical education and spy craft and had alternated their ownership of the coveted 'Top of the Class' crown.

He'd always been an obnoxious bastard, but incredibly popular and he'd fucked every female in the school, teachers included. He'd set his sights on Mira a number of times and she'd finally succumbed, out of boredom and a desire to see what the fuss was all about.

Jackson Light was easily the most attractive boy she'd ever met and that helped. He was good in the sack as well and the half dozen times she'd made him cum she learned all there was to know about him including his deepest fears.

Surprisingly she was the one he feared the most. He respected her natural abilities to the level of jealousy and hatred without ever knowing of her psionic talent. His deceit and bad treatment of another girl led her to dump him and set him up for a public fall. She could only imagine what he thought of her now.

The shuttle came to a soft docking and as the hatch slid open Mira took the square of cloth from her pocket and breathed in Lars' scent. It filled her with a warm glow and she hoped her sacrifice would be as successful as his.

At the bottom of the ramp stood a tall well-built man, dark both in hair and skin. His loose fitting shirt was semitransparent and within she could clearly see his deeply muscled chest and well-defined pectorals.

His face was characterized by a well-defined jaw line, thin cruel lips with laughter lines radiating from the corners to the dimples which seemed to have been carved into his face with a sharp knife. His deeply hooded black eyes shone with a malevolence she remembered all too well. He was devilishly handsome and he knew it. And for Mira that destroyed the illusion completely.

He held out his arms as he came up the ramp to greet her.

"Mira, my love," he said and swept her into his arms. "God, how I've missed you. I feel reborn just holding you."

Could this be the same Jack Light she had rejected so publicly and with such severity that he'd been the butt of jokes for months? He held her tightly in his strong arms, crushing her ribs, and she fought for breath fearing she'd have to fight him to be released.

"Come," he said when he released her and grabbed her hand like an excited schoolboy eager to show off his collection of spiders. "I'll show you my ship."

Mira was swept along bright wide corridors past numerous uniformed crew and shown large cafeterias, conference rooms, and dining areas with gigantic view screens showing the yellow planet Jack called his own.

The ship was so different from the cramped quarters of the utilitarian *Mjolnir* it took her breath away. Jack's ship was luxurious in comparison.

"So, what have you been doing with yourself?" he asked when he led her into a spacious cabin with a large round bed in the center.

"The usual," she replied. "And you?"

He shrugged unconvincingly. "The same. Like it?"

"What?"

"Your cabin."

"I'm not staying, Jack. I'm on a mission. We have to go."

His face fell. "Oh, a mission. I thought you were hitchhiking." He strode immediately to an intercom board mounted on the wall. "Bridge. Cancel that destruct order."

"Aye aye, sir."

"Jack! You weren't!"

"It's what I do," he replied blandly. "I'm a ruthless pirate raiding every ship I can, creating havoc on the Rigellian side of the border. Simple as that."

"Does that include murder?"

"Orders, my dear. Simple orders."

She considered him closely but his expression was impenetrably blank. Would he have destroyed *Mjolnir* without a qualm? The obnoxious, conceited and arrogant boy from school could have. And, after all, the child is father to the man.

She hoped it was simply an act. Otherwise he'd be impossible to deal with.

"I'll dictate a report for Bik Rende," she said in her efficient professional voice. "And I'd appreciate it if you'd transmit it to him after I go."

"Bik is still your handler?" He smiled insincerely. "Does he still have a thing for you?" Mira's steady gaze received a cold laugh. "I'll arrange it, but after dinner. What would you think of my hospitality if I didn't offer you a meal?"

"Jack, I'm on a mission. I don't have the time. Besides, there is a Rigellian cruiser due at any moment."

He gave a dramatic sigh. "You haven't changed, have you? Always wound too tight. Dinner can be served in a matter of moments."

"I'm not hungry."

An alarm sounded. Jack scowled at the interruption.

"Captain, bridge here."

"Go ahead."

"B Class Rigellian cruiser has just dropped in."

"B Class? I'm impressed, Mira. You attract the best of company. Bridge, initiate a crash drop. Get us out of here."

"Aye aye, sir."

"Jack! I have to get back!"

"Not today, my love. Not today."

Chapter 11

Geena was in the bridge as the massive Rigellian cruiser dropped into normal space. The sight brought back vivid memories of when her consular ship had been attacked. The ugly craft filled the screen, jet black in color, its convoluted surface bristling with gun emplacements and torpedo tubes.

Alarms sounded and Talon reacted quickly. Recognizing they were outgunned and outclassed he dropped into null space immediately.

"Mira!" Geena called forlornly. The sudden emptiness she felt inside was palpable. She clutched her breast and fought back tears.

"I'm sorry," Talon said. "We just can't win in a set piece battle with one of those."

"I understand."

"The good thing is the torpedo they launched didn't get sucked into our envelope this time. So we are free and clear."

Geena recovered her composure. "That's something. How long to Corris?"

"Eighteen hours."

"Let's hope that Lars can hang on."

In her capacity as a Solaran diplomat Geena then composed a null space communication to the Corris High Council requesting permission to enter their space. They accepted and she negotiated their landing co-ordinates. She'd requested a medical facility but the Corridian Home Secretary had been adamant that they fly here, to the central park of Lars' home town.

The town was now a smoking and blackened ruin. It had been almost completely destroyed. Collapsed buildings exhibited scorch marks from blaster fire and teams of builders were busy making repairs where they could.

They were met by a small delegation of Corridian officials and a medical team. This was her first experience with the Corridian hierarchy and they were an impressive lot. A balanced mixture of male and female, young and old. Their wings, she noted, came in all the colors of the rainbow.

Geena gave the traditional Corridian greeting, a short bow and elaborate hand movements about the top of the head, and introduced herself as a friend of Lars. She introduced Talon as *Mjolnir's* acting captain.

"We thank you for bringing our brother back to us," the Home Secretary said after the formalities were over.

"He needs specialist care we cannot provide," Geena explained.

"We will return for him," Talon said. "He is our captain and it pains us to not be able to help him. He saved our lives."

"We understand. Young Lars was ever the idealist."

"We help him search for Elenii. We believe she is held by the Rigellians on..."

The Home Secretary held up his hand and silenced Talon. "Do not speak your destination."

Talon nodded. "I understand."

The Home Secretary motioned toward the devastated town.

"What has happened here?" Geena asked.

"Rigellian pirates," the Home Secretary said. "They have stolen more of our people."

"When? For what purpose?"

"Two days ago. Slavery, or worse."

"What do you mean?"

"They are taking young females and males of a certain bloodline."

Geena guessed it was Lars' bloodline. This was the reason the Home Secretary wanted them to bring Lars here, his hometown. The Corridians wanted to show the ambassador what was happening firsthand in the hope she would assist them in their appeal to the Solaran Confederation for help.

"Why do you think they want this bloodline?"

"Only the Rigellians can give you the definitive answer to that."

The medical team carried Lars out on a medical hover stretcher. Geena motioned them to pause while the crew had a last moment with their captain.

Neelan and Lidj were crying. Acron and Talon stood silent and grim faced. Geena stared down at the unconscious Corridian, absorbing his beauty, his strength. He was an uncommon man and her heart wept to see him like this, his face sweaty and contorted in pain. The usual painkillers didn't seem to work with his physiology and even though he was unconscious she could see spasms sweep across his face.

Her heart hardened into a deep resolve to teach those Rigellian bastards a lesson. She motioned the bearers to place him in the humveh.

"Home Secretary, if I can have access to your diplomatic channel I will send an appeal to the Confederation for increased protection of Corris."

"I thank you, Ambassador," the old Corridian said and the delegation took their leave.

Geena turned to Talon. "Well, Captain," she said. "What's our next step?"

Talon looked at her balefully. The burden of command had clearly been something he had never wished. "*The captain* has a plan," he said.

* * *

Geena awoke to find a note on her com-link. An invitation from Lidj to a strategy meeting in her cabin to discuss Lars' plan.

They had left Corris as soon as she'd placed her appeal to the Solaran Confederacy headquarters on Earth. Not that her voice held much weight, but after stabbing Muss in the neck she hoped she still held a little cache with the Council.

After the trauma of the last few days Geena had desperately needed sleep and she had retired to her cabin leaving the crew arguing in hushed tones. They were exhausted as well but Lidj told her they were determined to follow Lars' instructions; as much as they didn't feel in the mood, they would do their best.

Exactly what the plan was she wouldn't elaborate, nor would Acron or Talon when she asked. It was a mystery but she'd been too tired to inquire any further. Now was her chance to find out.

Geena buzzed Lidj Tibur's door. "Come in," Lidj called from inside and the door slid aside, revealing the strangest of sights.

Lidj was standing naked in the centre of her cabin. The Sirian's pink skin was flushed and bright. The reason for that was clear. In front of her stood Talon, his bright blue cock sliding into one her three vaginas. Her three pussies were arrayed symmetrically about her slim waist and as he thrust deeply into her he fondled her ample breasts, also three in number.

On her right hip was Acron who gripped her firmly in his strong arms while his third arm fed an impossibly long blood red cock into her dripping second pussy. Lidj herself was busy playing with the engorged nub of her third vagina.

The most bizarre sight of all was Neelan, who was syringing a pink liquid from a gland under Lidj's right arm and squirting the liquid into a beaker before switching to the left armpit, which she stimulated with the tip of the syringe.

From deep in her amply endowed chest Lidj groaned in orgasm as both her crew mates were embedded to the hilts of their respective cocks.

Geena stood rooted to the spot, staring open mouthed at the bizarre tableau set before her. Lidj sighed in contentment and opened her eyes. "Hi, Geena," she said happily. "Come, join in."

"Where do I fit?" she replied and watched Neelan squirt another syringe full of liquid into the beaker. "But what are you doing first?"

"This is the captain's plan," Talon grunted.

Neelan's split tongue flicked out as she explained. "During sexual activity Lidj secretes a hormone which when mixed with some essences and perfumes makes a much sought after aphrodisiac called Gasper. We are going to make some and sell it. That's our cover story when we get to Havensafe."

Geena nodded in understanding. She'd heard the stories about the Sirian's sexual proclivities but had thought it a myth; now that she had seen it for herself she believed it. The Sirians, it was said, were bred especially by the old Terran Empire to produce the aphrodisiac.

Whenever she was close to the young Sirian she'd noticed a delightful scent emanating from her skin but hadn't noticed if it turned her on more than she was naturally anyway.

"How much do we have?" Lidj asked breathlessly.

"A liter and a half," Neelan reported in a husky, whispery voice.

"How long have you been at it?" Geena asked incredulously.

"Three hours," Lidj said. "I left a message on your wall when I realized you were asleep. I wasn't sure if you'd be interested."

Geena was not surprised at Lidj's reluctance. Before her experience on Velos, where for the first time she'd felt the intrusion of an alien cock inside her, Geena had been a prudish sexual chauvinist. Prior to her kidnapping she would not have had sex with a non-human even if her life depended on it. But now, after being pummeled by His Highness Muss's dual cocks, it seems she had become a sexual libertine.

The dramatic turn in her attitude surprised even her as she'd tried to explain to Mira. Now was a time to put her newfound sexual freedom to the test.

Lidj shuddered as Acron withdrew his fifteen-inch rapier from her pussy and then slid it back. Talon was thrusting his more normally sized cock so that it was a blue blur between their taut bodies. Lidj closed her eyes as she approached another climax.

Geena's pussy had turned to hot syrup at the scene and the pheromones from four different breeds were driving her crazy. Her hands quickly found their way beneath her tunic and began to massage her pulsing mound. She found a space between Acron and Talon and started kissing Lidj while she fought with Acron over which breast they could fondle.

Lidj moaned in pleasure and Neelan giggled. "That's the way, Lidj, pump it out."

"For Lars," Lidj gasped. "And for Elenii!"

"For Lars!" they shouted in unison.

Geena felt someone's fingers begin caressing her sopping wet slit and her wanton sex virtually sucked the fingers within.

"Aren't you getting the least bit horny, Epirus?" Acron asked the doctor who, though she was a very sexy creature, had not fucked anyone on board in the six months they'd been shipmates.

"I'm very, very horny," Neelan replied. "But I can only mate once a year. You boys better be ready for that."

"But you can have sex, surely," Acron persisted.

"Sadly, no. My vaginal lips seal up and my mouth membranes are far too delicate to suck your beautiful cocks. So I can only watch and be horny."

Geena was fascinated. "What about your clit?"

"Sealed away too. But don't frown so. It is how we are. It is like you wishing you had three pussies like Lidj, or..."

"... or like Acron wishing he had two cocks like a Rigellian," Geena offered.

"Exactly, you can't fret about something that is just not you."

"Be happy with what you have, you mean?" Geena asked.

"Oh yes, precisely. When it is my mating time I have to have sex continually, an orgasm every hour for a month. If I don't, I break out in blotches and my slit itches so much it drives me mad."

Acron and Talon were immediately interested. "How long must we wait for this wondrous occurrence?" Acron asked.

Talon laughed. "I'm more than prepared to help you through this difficult time."

Neelan's oval face creased with an enigmatic smile. "Thank you. I will need all of you when it happens and it happens spontaneously. I only have an hour's notice. There are tests, but I prefer the excitement of not knowing when it will strike."

"What do you call this mating time?" Lidj muttered, still riding the waves of physical sensation as Acron and Talon slowly but rhythmically fucked two of her slits.

"It is called the Time of F'nor. We have certain rituals that conservative members of my breed follow, but I don't. I just fuck."

"Glad to hear it," said Talon.

"This has got me so horny," Geena said. "I need to cum!"

"Oh, sorry, Geena," Lidge said and removed her fingers from inside Geena's pussy to start rubbing her clit directly. Geena groaned with satisfaction and kissed her.

Neelan squirted another syringe into the beaker. "Lidge, you are one horny Sirian."

"I can't ever get enough," Lidge gasped as another orgasm struck.

"Then we will be a good pair when F'nor strikes."

"When will we have enough?" Geena mumbled around Lidge's tongue.

"As soon as Gyas and Draeg have their climax," Lidge grunted.

"We need to finalize our plans for Havensafe," Geena mumbled.

"We won't have a plan if we don't have enough Gasper," Talon said as he increased his thrusting.

"Fair enough, but we should be as quick as we can. Speed it up," Geena chided.

"I'm trying," Lidge groaned in sudden orgasm as Geena pushed her fingers even further up her third cunt. "I'm doing the best that I can."

Chapter 12

Teche shrugged off the marines who had pinned his arms. "Evidence, Your Highness?"

Muss looked at the general. "Well, Een?"

Een pointed to Jiss and Joss, who had ceased struggling and, wide-eyed, were listening to the proceedings. "These are spies for the Velosian resistance movement. They were holo-taped stealing documents from my communications room one week after they were placed there by Teche."

Teche nodded. "They came to me with evidence of a plot against my life."

Muss chuckled. "So, they are your spies, Teche?"

Teche smiled mischievously as if he had been Muss's cheeky son caught performing some childish prank. "We all have spies, Your Highness."

"And who was behind this plot on your life?"

"Governor Bloss ordered General Een to have me executed. Without your authority, I might add."

"That's a serious charge. Een, is this true?"

"I have the document," Teche said over the top of Een's blustered response. "And the general has the holo-tape of my spies taking it. The evidence is irrefutable. An attempt to kill me was made as I left my house to fulfill my duty in the investigation of your attempted assassination."

"This sympathizer has been interfering with the pacification of that continent ever since he took over," Een countered. "Just last week he prevented a terrorist from being taken and then released him so he could rejoin his confederates in the hills."

"I prevented the killing of a shop owner by a drunken band from Een's garrison. He was innocent of any offense and I released him. They burned down his shop and

without a home I believe he returned to his family in the country. The attack is on holo-tape, which is included in my weekly situation report to Your Highness." Teche rounded on Een. "More importantly, I believe the attack on me and my assistants today was perpetrated by Een. It is only through luck that Ghotti's thugs got involved that my assistants and I rescued a witness. We are now able to bring you vital information essential for the apprehension of Lars Dax, the slave and the Solaran Ambassador."

"This is nonsense, Your Highness!" Een blustered.

"Enough! Een, you are interfering with an investigation into my attempted assassination. Your petty turf war is of no interest to me. Now shut up!"

"Your Highness?" Teche ventured.

"What now?" Muss said irritably. Teche knew the warlord was at the end of his tether.

"I have something else that will interest you."

"Go on."

Teche motioned to Jiss and Joss who were still lying under the heels of beefy marines. Muss nodded and the marines let them up.

"Your Highness. Ghotti's thugs were after a set of data disks Ghotti had stored to use as protection for himself. It was from that data that I learned of his role in the Corridian kidnappings."

Muss leant forward again. "Go on."

Jiss straightened her tunic and with a smile handed Teche a sheaf of documents.

Teche winked at her before facing Muss. "They provide records indicating that someone has been taking a cut of the taxes meant for Your Highness." He handed the documents to Muss who flicked through them but clearly could not decipher them. "Ghotti was the paymaster of an official in your administration whose task was to falsify tax records. The amounts involved are on the order of ten million clits per month."

Muss's jaw dropped in astonishment.

"Ghotti was, in turn, paid by someone who represented someone else."

"Someone else? Who!"

"Governor Bloss, Your Highness."

"I'll have that bastard skewered! Ten million a month?" Muss sat back, clearly staggered by the magnitude of the theft.

"The evidence is quite clear, Your Highness. Just prior to coming to report to you about my investigation into the assassination attempt I had your guard arrest the tax official and I instructed your accounting division to freeze all bank accounts associated with the plot so they could seize the funds in question."

"Excellent, Teche. Excellent. But wait. You said there was another party involved with ex-governor Bloss."

"Yes, Your Highness." Teche's eyes drifted toward a sweating General Een who had begun to back out of the room. "General Een," Teche announced with great pleasure.

Een made a break for it, shielded by two of his marines, but the guard loyal to Muss quickly overpowered his soldiers, leaving it to Teche to block Een's path to the door. Teche smiled. "It's over, you bastard."

Een's demeanor collapsed. He faced public impaling and gutting and would, in all probability, suffer the ultimate shame; to be sliced and diced and served at a banquet. He managed to summon some residual anger and stared at Teche, his eyes burning red. "I'll see you in hell."

Teche nodded. "You probably will."

Een was led away without any further fuss, a broken spirit.

Teche returned to Muss. "Your Highness, as I was saying. With regards to your assassination attempt, I believe this Corridian, Lars Dax, is on a crusade to rescue these slaves. A witness I interrogated told me that Dax mentioned the planet Karacos as his next destination in this crusade."

Muss was deep in thought and took a moment to respond. "Lars Dax is a dangerous renegade. He is the greatest threat to the Rigellian Hegemony. I want him hunted down and captured and I want it done quickly." He fixed Teche with a steady

glare. "You have done well. Caed, I congratulate you on your choice of investigator. Teche, you are to pursue Dax and the others. You have my complete authority to act wherever you need to bring these terrorists to justice."

Teche bowed. "Your Highness."

"I will instruct your counterpart on Karacos to expect you and give you every assistance."

"Thank you, Your Highness. I will need to go to Havensafe first and question Ghotti further as he is the hub of the Corridian conspiracy."

"Whatever," Muss said wearily. "Caed, I wish you to return the palace to normal operation. Now that we know there was no involvement by my staff we need to resume some sense of normalcy."

"I've started the process already, Your Highness."

"Good. It's been a bad week," Muss muttered as he caressed the bandage at his neck. "A very bad week."

Muss clicked his clawed fingers and an Altairan slave was ushered into the room to give His Highness some oral relief.

Teche motioned his assistants out of the chamber and strode haughtily down the corridor. His nerves were buzzing with excitement. He'd won! And now he had a mission off world! How exciting life could be!

Teche thought himself reborn, that he'd been given a second chance at life, and what an interesting life it would be.

He looked to Jiss on his left, and Joss on his right, or was it the other way round? With a broad grin he draped his arms about their shoulders.

"Are you coming with me?" he asked.

"Oh yes, Lord Teche," they said in unison.

He kissed them both on the cheek. "Then it is to Havensafe we go!" he shouted.

"To Havensafe!" they chorused.

Chapter 13

Mira stared morosely at the glass of Rigellian wine Jack had poured for her. The red liquid caught the light and she tried to lose herself in its shimmering refractions.

"They are the most repugnant of creatures," he said wistfully. "But they make the best wine."

Mira didn't answer. Her thoughts were with Lars. She hoped they had escaped the cruiser and were now safely on Corris.

"Remember that time we snuck out of the dorm and spread a blanket on the side of the hill and stared up at the stars? Was it Martian beer we were drinking or wine?"

He tapped his glass with his finger to attract her attention. "Mira?"

"I do," she replied softly, remembering the night he meant. It was the night before she dumped him. "It was freezing and it was beer."

"And I started talking about star light?"

"What did you say?" she asked absently. "I don't remember."

He gave her a wink indicating he suspected she lied. "I said that the light had been travelling for a million years and when it came to me it ceased to exist." His voice had become soft, almost wistful. "I was watching your face when I shared that melancholy observation. You smiled, your perfect teeth were like pale beacons of reflected light."

He smiled and took a sip of wine. "'That photon is part of you now,' you said. 'Feel honoured, you have a piece of a star in you.'"

Jack laughed. "What a notion that was. 'I consumed it?' I asked and you touched my face."

He reached across the table and touched her hand. "That soft caress sent excited electrons coursing through my nerve cells, jumping synaptic crevasses, climbing

dendritic heights to give my temporal cortex a limbic shiver that was virtually orgasmic. Alas, you withdrew your touch and looked back to the stars. You said, 'If not you then the ground at your feet would have swallowed it up. Sooner or later a photon's life is destined to end in absorption.'"

He took another sip of wine and studied her face for a moment before continuing. "I thought it one less thing to blame myself for at least. You laughed, a gentle purr in the darkness. You said, 'You're not responsible for everything, you know.' And I said, 'Is that my destiny? Not to be blamed for nothing?' You purred again at my grasping attempt at humour and reached out for my hand and asked me what was wrong."

She was paying attention now, wondering where he was going with this. His almost complete recall of that night sent a shiver down her spine.

He smiled gently but his eyes were lost in the memory. "I said, 'I have no history, no identity.' And you gripped my hand tightly. You were strong for someone so fragile back then and turning slightly you looked at me, your eyes shining inexplicably in the starlight. There was a significant pause that had me on the edge of panic and then your voice caressed the eternal night. 'Of course you have an identity. To me you are, and will always be, Jack Darkness, Eater of Light.'"

"I remember now," she said. "I'm sorry for hurting you."

"I deserved it. I was a real bastard back then."

"And not now?"

"I've mellowed. Believe me. I do this work because it gives me freedom to be my own boss. I have carte blanche in this sector of the galaxy. I am respected by my Solaran counterparts, who I protect; and feared by the Rigellians whom I destroy. We are at war, don't forget."

"And my ship? Were you going to destroy it?"

"It's listed as a Solaran renegade. It was on my list to destroy."

"That has been lifted. We rescued a Solaran Ambassador."

He shrugged. "The wheels of bureaucracies turn slowly. But I countermanded the order, didn't I?"

She nodded, unconvinced. "I need to get to Havensafe."

"Really?"

"I'm on a mission, as I said."

"Then I shall help. As soon as I get clearance."

Mira hesitated. Headquarters would not give her permission to go to Havensafe. They would drag her back to Earth for a debriefing about the Velos debacle, reassign her and she'd never see Lars again.

Her silence was enough for him to gauge the truth.

"Ah. It is not an official mission." He tapped his glass reflectively. "What should I do?"

"Help me. Take me to Havensafe. You said you have carte blanche in this sector of the galaxy."

He smiled and once again she saw that cruel streak flash across his face. "It all depends on how well we get along, doesn't it?"

Chapter 14

The bridge was awash with sexually charged pheromones. Lidi was flushed and exuding an astounding aroma. After the attentions of the entire crew she was a walking scent factory. Talon and Acron were hot and sweaty and the blend of their personal scents created a heady mixture. Neelan was her normal aloof self, but since her explanation of her sexual cycle, both Acron and Talon were exceedingly attentive and she'd responded very positively.

Geena's pussy was still swollen from the multiple orgasms Lidi had given her. The release had been much needed after the tension of the last few days. She felt guilty about engaging in such outrageous sex while Lars lay unconscious and in pain. The knowledge that it had been Lars' plan after all made it marginally more acceptable. But it had better be worth it, she thought.

"How much Gasper do we have?" Geena asked after they had settled in their respective seats.

"Enough for ten kilos. It will take a day to synthesize."

"That's about a million clits at current market value," Acron volunteered.

"Thank you, Lidi," Geena said.

"My pleasure, believe me."

"So," Geena asked Talon. "What's the plan?"

"Because *Mjolnir* is going to be hunted down by every Rigellian ship, we'll need to buy passage to Karacos and track down Elenii. That's where the Gasper comes in. The question is, what do we do when we get to Karacos?"

"That's my job," Geena said. "The fewer at risk the better. Gyas and Draeg, you need to be with the ship, to protect it and to get us out of trouble if we need it. Neelan, I'd feel better if our doctor was here waiting for us if something goes wrong."

Neelan nodded in agreement. "Logical, though disappointing."

Lidj's face broke into a broad grin. "That leaves just you and me."

Geena smiled. "It will be dangerous everywhere we go. We have a Rigellian bounty on our heads, so trust no one. Our goal on Havensafe is to secure passage to Karacos and gain any information about Elenii we can get. But we have to be quick. We can't expose ourselves for too long."

"To Havensafe!" Lidj yelled suddenly, holding out her hand.

One by one they clasped it. "To Havensafe!" they chorused.

The End

of this adventure, at least...

Steve Boiesman

Steve lives in New South Wales, Australia, with his favourite cat Jones (named after the Nostromo's cat in the *Alien* movie series) and at every opportunity scuba dives, walks and swims along the beautiful Australian coastline's many beaches. An amateur underwater photographer, Steve's diving forays have taken him to the U.S., Fiji, the Philippines, Malaysia and Vanuatu.

Steve grew up on a healthy diet of Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke and Robert Heinlein. Today, Steve is considered a rising star among short story writers. An avid romance reader as well as contributor, Steve is a member of Romance Writers of Australia, and has had his work selected for inclusion in several of the group's short story competition anthologies. Steve is also a Book Reviewer for a major Australian regional newspaper and is a regular contributor of stories for several adult magazines.