

Chains of Passion: Slave to Lust

Mikala Ash

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Prologue

Katsumi Ryal counted the price of her short-lived freedom. Fourteen bruises on her arms, eleven on her legs, and five dotted around her rib cage.

Her fingers and toes still tingled uncomfortably. The manacles and leg irons had been far tighter than necessary. The Skollonian guards hadn't been very empathetic, ignoring her complaints with scowls and amused grunts. Beating two of them into unconsciousness might have had something to do with their active neglect.

Thirty bruises. "Well, that's thirty I'll inflict on my wedding night. If that doesn't make old smelly breath Biffclout divorce me, nothing will."

Her limbs ached in the chill of the tiny cell. The stuffy air was a foul cocktail of the belches and body odors of a half dozen different species. The rattle of the ventilation system was punctuated by the hysterical ranting of another prisoner somewhere down the corridor.

Katsumi exhaled a long and miserable sigh. Stretching out on the stone bench she used a trick she'd learned in childhood and sent her consciousness to a far nicer place.

A tropical island, with harlequin parrots perched decoratively on the branches of red palm trees draped artistically over a lavender sea. Thin olive clouds scudded across a wide cerulean sky and a light breeze caressed her bronzed skin. She wriggled her toes in the wet sand while cool water lapped at her feet like an affectionate cat.

A drink would be nice. A fruit punch with a dash of Silvern wine would fit the bill perfectly, served by a handsome, dark-skinned waiter with a lyrical, yet masculine accent.

She'd reach out for the glass and their fingers would touch. A magical spark would pass between them, a mutual affirmation that soon their bodies would be so entwined.

He'd be a student. No. Better than that. He was a prince in disguise, paying his own way through university. Why? Because that's just the type of man he was, much too self-reliant to rest on the advantages of birth. No, he intended to succeed by his own efforts. Becoming ruler of the galaxy, he'd bring peace and stability to the wide expanse of civilization. She'd rule by his side, of course, a partnership made in heaven.

His electric smile would light up the sky. She'd flick her hair coquettishly, sending it cascading over her shoulders. With a subtle movement, she'd drape the blonde strands provocatively over her jutting breasts barely contained in a transparent and diminutive bandanna.

He'd be naked to the waist. His drum-tight ebony skin would stretch across a powerful chest whose finely defined musculature shimmered in the bright sunshine. When he crouched down to deliver the glass to her reaching fingers, his loose fitting shorts would expose his firm thighs and offer a glimpse of secret flesh.

Their eyes would meet and their gazes linger. The moment hung pregnant with possibility. The melodious, soft chattering of the parrots ceased and the waters at her feet receded.

There was a loud gravelly cough. Suddenly, the parrots took raucous flight, sending the branches springing into the darkening sky. From nowhere, a tidal wave swept up the beach, sending the future ruler of the galaxy tumbling flotsam-like into the swampy graveyard of her fantasies.

Her eyes sprang open.

Standing at the open door of the cell was the most handsome man she'd ever seen.

She blinked to make certain he wasn't the student from her fantasy. No, he was real enough. A few years older than she, this Adonis was tall and dark-haired with broad shoulders. He was a spacefarer, she guessed by his tight fitting flight suit which

left absolutely nothing to the imagination. It molded itself to his statuesque frame, adhering like paint to the wide expanse of his chest with its well defined pectorals and further down to a stomach flatter than the bench she was lying on.

His narrow hips topped solid, well shaped legs adorned with the sexiest calves. But it was what sat arrogantly at the juncture of those fantastic thighs that attracted her eyes like a magnet. The impressive bulge took her breath away.

“Princess,” he said, his teeth flashing brilliantly against his ebony flesh. “I’ve come to rescue you.”

Katsumi Ryal smiled. Her prince had come.

Chapter 1

The plaited troth hide of the punishment whip licked her exposed flesh, delivering a butterfly's kiss to her golden skin. The taut space between her shoulder blades shivered and her back arched enticingly.

Adon knew every nerve in the body of the woman lying before him must be quivering with lust and, if the invective she'd been hurling at him from her trussed up position on his bunk was any indication, savage indignation.

"I don't like doing this, Princess," Adon murmured, trailing the lash across her naked back.

"I'm surprised," she hissed, pressing her thighs together. "You seem to have a talent for it."

He studied the backs of her legs, the twin globes of her perfect ass and the hint of blonde pubic hair peeping from her flattened sex. His cock tingled and his balls tightened. "I don't believe in inflicting unnecessary pain," he said.

"It has its compensations," she purred. He noted the abrupt change in tone and was immediately suspicious. This leopard wouldn't change her spots so quickly. Though he knew from experience his hard cock could, in a millisecond, change his mind about anything. Perhaps women could be swayed just as easily.

Katsumi had liked him at first, he imagined. In her prison cell, when she'd come out of that trance-like sleep to first look at him, her face flushed and jade eyes surprised, he knew she liked what she saw.

Her face had an impish, mischievous look that belied her imperial status. She'd smiled at him so strangely, like they'd known each other before and this was a welcome reunion. His heart had raced, knocking violently inside his ribs.

"It is not my wish to do this." He shifted uncomfortably from one foot to the other, looking for excuses not to flail at this perfect body. Not with a whip anyway. "However, your father demanded it, which is his right."

She bristled at that, turning awkwardly within the silken bonds with which he'd tied her to his bunk. "How can it be his *right*?"

"Tradition," he offered weakly, trailing the whip down her spine.

She squirmed. Her right breast, flattened against the bed, was pushed to the side and he caught sight of the pink bud of her nipple.

His cock stirred. His mouth was suddenly dry. Lust had been the last thing on his mind when he'd strapped her struggling body to the bed. He'd felt sick to his stomach at the prospect of whipping this beautiful woman. Her father, however, had been adamant. "Teach her a lesson," he'd bellowed when he'd commissioned Adon to track her down. "She must learn her place."

Adon wondered what had gone wrong with her upbringing to cause her to shame the third from the throne in this most public and disgraceful way.

It had taken only a week to follow the freighter on which she'd stowed away to Skollo, a backwater world on the very rim of the galaxy. It had then taken him a fortnight to get her out of the spaceport's dingy cells. Her father, Lord Ryal, would have to compensate him for the hefty bribes he used to grease the palms of the surly locals.

He looked over his shoulder to the camera pod hovering behind him. It was recording the punishment for her father's satisfaction to be handed to him when they returned home. That alone disgusted Adon. What sort of prick would want to see his daughter whipped?

"Lord Ryal," he said to the camera. "I obey our agreement, though I wish to record that I do this reluctantly. It is against my code to inflict unnecessary pain, but I bow to the traditional values of our race."

"Values!" she spat. "What values condemn a young woman to marriage with a man she's never seen? A man she knows nothing about and doesn't love? A whipping is the least of my troubles!"

"I must," Adon countered. "By law."

"Forget the law! We're a hundred light years from home. The law cannot touch us."

He could well imagine her father's frustration with his willful and truculent daughter. She'd have been a handful when she was a child, he guessed. "Did your father beat you when you were young?" he asked, suddenly curious about her past.

"Of course."

"I can see why."

"Go on then!" she spat. "Obviously you're just another mindless male buffoon... a piece of puerile venal scum... Go on! Beat me!"

Adon's fingers tightened around the lacquered ritwood handle of the ceremonial whip Lord Ryal had presented to him. He looked down at her tensed body. She'd buried her face in the silken pillow, preparing for the blow. Law decreed that a runaway bride, regardless of her station in life, receive twenty-five lashes. He'd have to be careful not to break her golden skin. Otherwise he'd receive a penalty from Lord Ryal himself for further lowering her bride value.

Adon hesitated. She already wore bruises from the Skollo guards and he realized he must ensure the lashes only stung, not cut.

After a long moment she dared turn her head and peered at him through her flowing, blonde tresses, spreading seductively across the pillow. "Are you an honorable man?"

"Of course."

"Then you know this is not just. This is wrong."

"The ethics are not at issue here. You are plainly guilty of a heinous offence that threatens..."

"Threatens what?"

"Our culture," he said simply.

"Culture, phooey! What is culture but habit? Bad habits at that!"

"You question too much."

"You talk like a mindless buffoon, but yet --" her voice softened and his suspicion of her increased, "-- you hesitate to do an unjust act. Can it be possible that inside that thick blockhead there is a rational, thinking man?"

He shook his head in disbelief at her unrelenting defiance. "With every breath you convince me of your father's correctness in this matter."

"You just don't get it do you?"

"What is there to get?"

"You have no idea why I ran, do you? You have no fucking idea of what I'm about. Don't you see?"

Spittle ran from the corner of her voluptuous lips. He imagined licking those lips clean. He cleared his throat. "I'm sure you'll enlighten me."

"Fucking bet on it!"

He moved the whip handle down the cleavage of her ass near her anus. She arched her back automatically, widening the cleft so he could see her puckered asshole. "Well?"

"You, and every man alive, can say *no* to a bad match! We women can't or we bring dishonor to our family. If men don't like what's on offer -- she's too old, too fat, too smart, you just turn your back and look elsewhere. We have to get on our knees, no matter who the man is, and swallow his cock till we gag. Men get the pick of us. We get the *worst* of you."

He'd heard this before from his sister, now happily married with five children. "It's a system that serves society well."

"Pah! What about love?"

That vexed question reared its ugly head every time. "Love?" he mused. "What is love but a myth?"

She opened her mouth, no doubt to explain, as his sister had done, that love is freedom, that it is choice, that it is the most beautiful thing in the universe, but he acted to silence the nonsense. He trailed the lash up her butt cleavage and along her back toward her neck, letting the end of the lash slide down her ribs to the swell of her

flattened breast. Her skin quivered deliciously. She closed her eyes and swallowed noisily. Her pussy lips peeked out from between her thighs, glistening with moisture.

"Love is," she whispered huskily, "what happens when a charismatic Adonis steps into your life and you can think of nothing else but spending the rest of your life fucking his brains out."

"You speak of lust," he said with disdain. "That tainted strain of love surely fades."

"But what a time you'll have. I mean..."

He refused to let her get away with such glibness. "My mother and father have been together for fifty years. They are *partners* in life."

"Did you ever ask her if she truly loved him?"

"They had eight children. I'd say there was love there."

"Can you be that blind?"

His mouth tightened and he laid the troth's-hide ends of the lash heavily on her back. She tensed, straining against the silken bonds. A thrill pulsed through his gut. His cock thickened inside his tight leggings. "You're telling me that you'd surrender yourself to any charismatic bastard?" he asked incredulously. "And then put yourself in his thrall, at great risk of him breaking your heart?"

"There is no more danger in that than being promised to a sadistic bastard like my father! How my mother suffered!"

Adon lightened the weight of the lash on the princess's back and snaked it along the side of her straining rib cage. Her shivers intensified. He noticed the muscles of her upper thighs tense and her hips squirm.

His cock pulsed, filling uncomfortably with desire. He wanted to release it, but that would just be too dangerous. "You enjoy the caress of the lash?"

"Why hide it? It thrills me."

"You are certainly unique, Katsumi."

"I always dreamed my lover would call me Sumi," she said wistfully. "The morning star."

"I'm not your lover."

"You think I was inviting *you*?"

"I think you are cunning and wanton..." he stuttered, trying to find the right word.

"The word you're looking for in the old language is coquettish."

He was surprised. "You've studied the old language?"

"I have much spare time," she said. "As a brood mare I am too valuable for manual work. Study was the only thing that could sustain me while I waited for my fate."

She watched him out of the corner of her eye through errant strands of blonde, wavy hair. Beads of sweat had broken out on her brow. He licked his lips and shifted uncomfortably again.

"I also learned self-defense without anyone noticing."

He laughed. "So the Skollo guards told me."

"Do you think I'm trying to seduce you?" she asked, her lips curling into that strange, knowing smile that made his heart race.

"I know it."

"What could I gain by seducing you?" she asked innocently.

"If I take your virginity then you'll have thwarted your father. You'll be of no value as a marriage bride."

"And he'd set me free."

"Or imprison you."

"Only if I return home."

"Then you'd have me break my vow to your father. I would not be able to go home or I'd be imprisoned and then executed in a most unpleasant manner."

"Then come with me. We'll be free together. We'll have the whole universe for our home."

"You want us to marry?"

"Don't be an idiot!"

"Yet you speak of us sharing the universe."

"As equal partners. Not enslaved to each other as husband and wife. We'll make decisions jointly. We'll have a contract and we'll honor and respect each other."

His mouth dropped open in astonishment. "You seem to have thought this out."

"I've been planning my escape for years."

"And this was the best you could come up with?" he scoffed. "Stowing away on a freighter to Skollo? It's lucky I found you. You know you were destined for the slave markets, don't you? Now that you mention it, I don't think I want you for a partner. You're not too bright."

"Ugh!" She struggled against her bonds.

"Freedom is so important to you?"

"Yes! Obviously!"

"Then I'm interested in your strange attitude to love. If you want to be free, how can you give yourself to another in the complete and total way that the banal court poets go on about? I've never understood it."

"That's because you're a buffoon!"

Adon frowned and pursed his lips in frustration. He drew the lash down her spine to the dip in her back. Her flesh was puckered and poised on the tip of anticipation. The muscles of her thighs were tensing, drawing her buttocks together. The taut flesh of her buttocks quivered with each touch.

Licking his lips, Adon slid the lash between those inviting cheeks. She opened her thighs in automatic response. The hairless lips of her pussy were swollen and he could see more dewy moisture gathering at the pink opening.

He reversed the whip in his hand and sawed the smooth wooden shaft between her buttocks, taking special care that it only grazed the lips of her pussy, not entered them.

Katsumi moaned, the sound coming from deep within her chest. He licked his lips. A year of celibacy was having its effect. The death of his own betrothed had placed

a double burden upon him. His six-month pre-marriage vow followed by the six-month period of mourning had left him chomping at the bit.

Agnetha, his gap-toothed betrothed, had been a widow herself, the wife of a long-time friend. Adon had offered to save her from the shunned solitude of widowhood. She'd accepted, knowing he did it out of solidarity with his lost friend and not out of love. Her unexpected death in an air-car accident had forced him to return to his former occupation, that of space-faring adventurer.

While he considered his plight he'd been unconsciously caressing Katsumi's swollen pussy lips. She cried out, bringing him back to his present dilemma with a jolt. His cock was straining against his pants like an imprisoned beast. He dropped one hand to stroke the hard shaft, hoping to quell its desire with a touch. It only inflamed his lust.

Still mindful of the camera behind his shoulder, he considered what he owed his odious employer. The best chance he'd had at a fortune had come and gone with Agnetha's death. He now had no friends and no prospects. If that was all life back home had to offer, then why not consider this wanton creature's challenge?

He gazed appreciatively at the perfect globes of her ass, the sinuous curve of her spine and her golden skin. Why not run away with her? She was certainly beautiful and the prospect of a surfeit of wild sex flooded his imagination.

What did he have to lose? Lord Ryal would chase him for a while, but would give up soon enough. The embarrassment at court alone would see to that, not to mention the cost.

On the down side, he had no doubt she'd dump him as soon as she was out of her father's sphere of influence and go her own way. Adon doubted she'd ever tie herself down to someone like him. Besides, she'd be nothing but trouble. She was willful and high spirited. Attributes to be desired and respected on their own, but in his experience, they turned every relationship into a special type of hell.

But what if she stayed with him? What a future they could have. The whole galaxy beckoned with the promise of adventure and wealth.

She suddenly cried out in frustration. "For fuck's sake!"

He was startled into stillness.

"Will you deflower me?" she gasped. "Or are you really a sadist?"

Excitement coursed through his veins yet caution held him back. "Taking your maidenhead is a big step," he said.

"One easily taken."

"At a great cost, I fear. I'd hoped fate had something else in store for me."

"Fate. What a stupid concept."

"And what sort of fate do you see for yourself?"

"Freedom to choose. That's all."

"Maia," he said softly to the ship's computer. "Terminate the recording."

"Thank the gods you've seen sense."

He smiled. "You wish to be deflowered by me?"

"I wish to be deflowered."

"Now?"

"Now."

"Maia, resume the recording."

"What?" the princess asked incredulously, turning her head to look at him.

"You wish to be deflowered by me?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"Why?"

Katsumi's expression turned pensive for a moment. Her eyes darted from him to the camera while she figured out what he was up to. Understanding suddenly dawned on her face. "I want to defy my father because he is unjust to me. He wishes me to marry someone I do not love."

"And who do you love?"

She hesitated, obviously playing in her head the consequences of what she was about to say.

"And who do you love?" he insisted.

"You."

He considered his next words. They would brand him a criminal. But they would get the princess off the hook. What he was about to say would make the responsibility - and the punishment -- his alone. He'd have to make sure he never came in contact with anyone from home again. Not that this posed a problem. His parents had disowned him years ago. He'd nothing to lose really, except his life.

"Let it be recorded that we were secretly betrothed and married before your father announced his marriage plans for you."

Her face darkened. She obviously hadn't expected him to go this far. If she agreed it would be on record they were married. Under law she would be his. She would renounce everything she'd ever owned or could possibly own in the future. There would be no going back.

She'd chosen that path when she'd stowed away on the freighter. He bet she hadn't planned to be publicly owned by anyone, but this was simply a ruse and she'd figure it out soon enough.

He followed her thought processes; being her husband, he could have her anywhere, anytime, any way. Legally, that is. But what did that matter? There was no one to enforce the law here or anywhere they were likely to end up. The prospect, however, obviously didn't sit easily with her. "Yes, damn you!" she spat. "Satisfied?"

He trailed the lash across her back while he undid the crotch of his leggings one-handed. His cock sprang out and he sighed gratefully for the sudden freedom. He let the lash linger on her ass cheeks.

"You still intend to whip me?"

"You said it thrilled you."

"But I can think of something that would thrill me more."

He gave her buttocks a tickle with the lash, eliciting a quivering gasp. If he was to ship out with her, she needed some discipline. She needed to know he was boss. What better way than to exert his dominance now.

"Do you desire me?" he asked, reversing the whip and putting the handle between her swollen pussy lips once more.

She didn't answer.

He withdrew the handle from between her lips. She pushed her buttocks upward, pursuing the device. He reversed his grip and again traced the leather thongs along her back.

She whimpered in frustration and her reaction thrilled him. "Do you desire me?" he demanded, withdrawing the whip so that only the tips of the thongs danced across her trembling skin. She arched her back higher and he raised the lash.

"Do you desire me?"

"Yes," she said, her voice husky with lust.

"What?"

"Oh, yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!"

Adon knelt on the bed between her splayed thighs. With deliberate slowness he nudged the swollen head of his cock against the wet lips of her slit. He closed his eyes at the warmth of her cunt against his straining cock. He pushed inward a fraction, savoring the sensation of silky warmth. "Before I deflower you I must have some assurance."

"Of what?" she groaned.

"That you are an honorable person."

"I am that."

"Then, before I continue..." he moved the head of his cock against that tight barrier of flesh to emphasize the power he had at this moment, "...I want your assurance that you accept my position as captain of my own ship, and that I give the orders."

"On one condition," she said after a moment's thought.

"And that is?"

"You give the orders only so far as they concern your ship. I remain my own woman."

He considered that for a moment. It wasn't absolute control, but it was a fair and workable compromise. Probably the best he could hope for with her. She was a free spirit and he realized that no one could control her completely. It was what he liked about her. On a practical level, it was far more likely she'd cooperate if he compromised. "Fair enough. Deal."

"Then take me now!"

His cock swelled and he moved it a millimeter further inside her. She'd be his first virgin. She would also be his first princess. But she was more than both those things. With that first enchanting smile she'd stirred something within him. "Ready?"

"Get on with it!" she urged. "I'm burning up!"

"Maia, please terminate the recording."

"Fuck the recording," Katsumi cried.

Adon focused on the satin-like texture of her skin, the warmth of her flesh, the scent of her arousal. He braced himself for the expected resistance of her hymen.

His concentration was shattered by the shrill clamor of the alert klaxon. The ear-piercing shriek startled Katsumi so that she jumped away from his cock.

"Saved by the bell," he said. "Maia, cut it."

"What was that?" she sighed, the frustration in her voice obvious.

"A quantum space SOS," Maia reported in her soft, unhurried voice.

Adon reluctantly climbed from between Katsumi's thighs. Hurriedly he put his cock away and was halfway out the door before he remembered her situation. "I'll be back," he said. "Someone's in trouble."

"They're not the only one."

Chapter 2

"Is it an asteroid?"

"It is and it isn't," he said. "Look there at the pole. That structure looks like an engine assembly of some sort, maybe a fusion drive."

All was quiet below them. The ancient asteroid, the source of the SOS, was silent, and had been for millennia. Maia had tried every bandwidth on the electromagnetic spectrum, even primitive radio waves, but there was nothing. For all intents and purposes it was dead.

Katsumi shivered. The situation seemed so ominous. Why had they been drawn here to a piece of rock barely ten kilometers wide, circling a putrescent black hole?

Adon stood so close she could feel his shimmering body heat. She breathed deeply. His musk sent tingles of desire through her frustrated body. They'd been so close to fucking when the alarm had sounded.

To her chagrin Adon had left her trussed like a kokibird ready for slaughter while he'd attended to the SOS. Ignoring her screams of protest he'd left her for twenty minutes, altering their course co-ordinates and initiating the sequencing which would drop them out of quantum space.

"I thought we were going to be partners," she protested when he'd finally returned and told her what he'd done.

"No choice, Princess. It's an SOS. We have to respond immediately. It's the Code of the Spaceways."

"You're making that up. I haven't heard of any such code."

"That's because it's known only to spacers. It would be unconscionable to fly past an SOS."

He'd caressed her shoulders while he spoke, his voice tender. She was still unbearably horny from her whipping and near deflowering. For that reason, she was willing to forgive him his carelessness and continue where they'd left off, with his cock head at the entrance of her throbbing cunt.

But he'd been in a talking mood and she'd indulged him for a little while. While he spoke she considered her feelings about him. When he'd first appeared in the jail on Skollo she'd admired his flamboyant style. He had an easy way with the corrupt Skollo officials, like he'd dealt with these lowlifes many times before. He was quick-witted and forceful. She detected a hint of incipient danger about him. He had, she was sure, the potential for sudden violence and she was certain her jailers suspected the same.

He smelled nice too, his slightly musky, male scent initiating a lusty response every time he came near. When he'd escorted her onto his ship, the *Nymph*, her pussy went wild, pulsing with lust. She anticipated all sorts of carnal experiences, including the long desired loss of her virginity, which had sent a flutter of excited trepidation through her eager flesh.

Her pussy became a molten cauldron once again at the memory of what happened next. That she was so aroused by the whip in Adon's hands caused her to wonder at her own nature. She'd come such a long way since escaping the luxurious prison of her father's palace.

Katsumi felt so different now, so physically alive. Her desire for Adon surprised her by its intensity. Her past experience with men had been limited to strictly supervised school lessons with her tutors, old men with beards and smelly breath. To be so close to the man of her dreams sent Katsumi's body singing. She wanted him so badly. That desire was riding roughshod over caution.

Thank the stars there was something about him that set her heart racing and her juices flowing. It was more than the aura of sexuality that flowed around him. His attraction transcended mere physicality. There was a certain nobility in him more substantial than the colorful but empty trappings of the egotistical denizens of the imperial court. Adon was a man she could respect. Someone she could have a life with.

"Release me," she'd said, interrupting his monologue about interstellar law and the spacer code. "And we can continue where we left off."

He looked down at her, his expression denoting uncertainty. What was wrong? Had he changed his mind? Her heart sank. The prospect of marriage and perpetual carnal servitude once again loomed in her imagination.

"Before we do I want to make one thing clear."

She couldn't help but roll her eyes. "Go on?"

"I know you only want me to... deflower you so you are of no use to your father and to escape having to go back to an unwanted marriage."

She started to speak but he silenced her with a finger to her lips. "It doesn't matter. I want you because I like you and you are undeniably sexy. So I just wanted you to know that we are both using each other for our own purposes. I do like your attitude and your courage. I respect that. We could make a great team. But you have a lot to learn. If you're willing to learn, I'll teach you, and we'll have adventures beyond your imagination. But we have to get one thing straight."

It was the most sensible he'd been since she met him. "And that is?"

"The *Nymph* is my ship. She will stay my ship. Nothing we do or say here or in the future will change that. Do you understand?"

"We're not getting married, for Dil's sake."

"Despite what we said on the tape to your father. That was just to keep him off your back. But beyond that we have no hold over each other, do we?"

Her heart thudded at the knowledge of what he risked to release her from familial duty. She was in his debt, a feeling she didn't like at all. "None whatsoever," she said simply. "Are you recording this?"

"Of course. I'll give you a copy. Consider this a contract of apprenticeship. I will teach, you will follow orders and we will work together."

"And what do you get out of such an onerous arrangement?"

"A partner, someone to share my adventures with. Someone I can rely on to get *me* out of trouble when things go pear-shaped."

"Is that it?"

"Absolutely."

She scoffed. "So you don't want to get *friendly* every ten minutes?"

He threw his head back and laughed. "Not sure if I could manage that sort of schedule. Of course I want to... get friendly, as you put it. But only if you want me to. Contrary to what you might think of me, I do not rape women."

"You said women. I take it you rape other sentient beings."

"Of course not!"

"Beasts of the field then?"

"Don't be ridiculous! I only engage in consensual sex."

"Like you were going to before the SOS arrived."

"You said you wanted to."

"Tied up with my legs spread and a whip trailing down my butt cleavage? Of course I said yes."

"By the ice of Dil!" he exploded. "Do we have to go through the agreement again with you untied?"

"You will if you want me bound to it." She smiled. "Yes, the pun *was* intended."

He rolled his eyes. "What guarantee will I have that you'll agree?"

"None. You'll have to take your chances."

He seemed to think on that, weighing up probabilities. "Want to give me a hint which way you'll go?"

"I could, but could you trust it with me being tied up?"

"I have a bad feeling the fifty-fifty-ninety rule is in play."

"What's that?"

"Whenever there is a fifty-fifty chance of getting something right, I have a ninety percent chance of choosing the wrong option."

She laughed. "What's your alternative? Keep me tied up while you investigate an unknown SOS? I could be useful. You said yourself you like my style."

He took a deep breath. "Good point. This is why I think we'll make a good team."

"I do too. Me the brains and you the brawn."

"I wasn't thinking along those lines."

"But if you don't untie me in ten seconds I'll scream until your ears burst."

"Attitude. That's what I like. It'll make us rich and infamous!"

He smiled and she couldn't help but smile back. He started untying her. Katsumi breathed deep and caught his masculine scent again. A pulse of excitement coursed through her. She was about to enter a new life, not just sex, which was exciting enough, but danger and adventure with this charismatic stranger.

Doubt stabbed at her heart. Was she ready for this? She'd made a hash of her original escape, he'd been right about that. Was this just another mistake?

When he released her, the touch of his strong hands about her wrists was electric. At last she was free and she rolled over onto her back, affording him a full view of her naked body.

His eyes devoured her, from the peaks of her coral-tipped breasts to her firm stomach, to the shaved V between her thighs.

She rubbed her wrists. He'd been considerate enough not to tie them too tightly but she made a show of it just the same. They'd been elevated too -- as the blood rushed to her fingers, pins and needles bit at her. She winced.

"Here," he said. "Let me help." He grasped her nearest hand and rubbed it briskly. The pins and needles screamed at her for a moment. Then the warmth of his hands gave her a wondrous, heady feeling. "How are your feet?"

"Stinging," she said, telling a little lie.

He let go of her hand and knelt on the bed so he could massage her ankles. She reached out and ran her hand across the tight seat of his pants. He turned his head to gaze at her. "So," he said, "partners?"

"Fifty-fifty?" she confirmed.

"Of what we earn from now on? Absolutely. But the ship stays mine. Deal?"

"Deal."

"This is going to be fun," he said and gave a cute, boyish smile.

Her heart bounced crazily inside her chest.

He let go of her foot and turned around so he could lay by her side. He propped himself on his elbow and looked down on her face. "You're so very beautiful."

Her stomach quivered with a sudden flight of butterflies. He reached for her breast and she intercepted his hand, entangling her fingers in his. She told herself she wanted to savor this moment, not delay it, though she recognized her transparent self-deception. "Why did you call your ship the *Nymph*?"

He shrugged. "It seemed appropriate."

"Do you know what it stands for?"

"Some ancient goddess, I think."

"Half right. The name represents a whole bevy of female spirits known for their sexual pursuit of men."

"Are you saying I called my ship a slut? Maia, did you hear that?"

"I hear everything, Adon," the computer replied. "You know that."

Katsumi laughed. "Well? Is that the type of woman you like?"

"They have their attractions," he admitted. "But Maia seduced me. I mean, I took one look at her and I had to have her."

"How did you get her?"

"That's a story for another time."

She blushed beneath his gaze, which caressed her face from her green eyes to what her governess described as a dainty nose and then to her full lips, which she parted involuntarily. His eyes lingered on her throat, watching the excited pulse she knew was vibrating the soft skin of her neck, then ran down to her breasts where he found her erect and straining nipples.

Adon slowly lowered his mouth to hers. She hesitated a moment, then rose to meet him, closing on him hungrily. Their tongues entwined and electric shivers radiated through her body.

Adon managed to pull away his shirt, revealing smooth skin stretched tight over bands of solid muscle. His kisses became more urgent, and he worked one hand between their bodies so he could cup her naked breast. Her nipples tingled and her pussy pulsed in anticipation. She moved one hand down his chest to his flat stomach. It was in rapid motion with his urgent breathing. Further down she found his cock which he'd released from his flight suit. Freed of constraint, it all but leapt into her hand. She wrapped her fingers around the hard shaft and was amazed that her fingertips barely met.

He struggled to his feet and shucked off his leggings. In a moment his cock was bouncing impatiently before her face. She'd seen holo-pics of forbidden movies, of course, but this was her first real live cock. It rose arrogantly against the flatness of his stomach. The fat, pink shaft was crisscrossed with thick blue veins that wound their way up to the bulging head. At the center of the head was a single hole, and inside she could make out a tiny drop of dew.

His cock jerked upward every few moments, pulsing, she guessed, with the beat of his heart. Hanging heavily beneath the base of the shaft was a curious, wrinkled sac.

"Touch it," he urged.

Tentatively she reached up and with her fingertips delicately caressed the outline of his balls. Adon closed his eyes and tilted his head back.

Gaining courage she replaced her fingers on his shaft. She traced them along the track of a vein upward to the lip of the head. Despite the hardness of the shaft, the skin was thin and translucent, soft and silky to the touch.

"Hold it," Adon whispered, his voice thick and husky.

Katsumi's fingers only just met and she wondered, with a shiver of concern, how that solid girth would fit inside her.

She tightened her grip and Adon slowly moved his cock back and forth, sliding the shaft between her fingers. The motion brought his cock head closer to her face. She reached under his ball sac and cupped the twin eggs. His expression told of sublime

bliss and an unexpected sense of control swept over her. For the first time Katsumi realized that women weren't as powerless as she'd been taught.

"Don't stop," he whispered.

She resumed the milking motion.

"Kiss it," he instructed.

Katsumi pursed her lips and kissed the tip of his shaft. She closed her eyes and savored the unexpected silkiness of his flesh.

"Lick it."

Katsumi extended her tongue. A dew drop formed at the tip of his cock and with a moment's hesitation, she licked it off. The liquid was warm on her tongue. She became aware his scent had changed subtly, becoming thicker and muskier. She was aware of her own reaction too. Her whole body was flushed and her heart was pounding painfully in her chest. Her nipples ached and between her thighs, her pussy was aflame.

"Suck it," he whispered.

Katsumi stretched her lips wide and fed the swollen head into her mouth. She rhythmically milked the steel-hard shaft and Adon groaned from deep within his chest. His hands gently grasped her head, urging her to take his cock further into her mouth.

She reveled in that sense of complete fullness and wondered what it would feel like in her cunt. Would she be able to take all of it?

The head of his cock nudged the back of her throat. She stopped and withdrew a few millimeters. He shifted beneath her and that heady sense of power surged through her again.

She tilted her head. Taking a deep breath through her nose she inflated her throat and eased his cock's passage down her throat. Adon groaned deeply and his fingers flexed in her hair. Deeper and deeper his shaft went until her nose buried itself in the flesh of his stomach. She held herself there for a moment. His cock pulsed in her throat and, tightening her lips around it, she slid her mouth back up to the tip, leaving behind a slick sheen of saliva on the shaft.

She repeated the process twice, three times and, when she withdrew the fourth time, she could feel his cock thickening even further.

"Whoa, Princess," he said. "Any more of that and I'll come down your throat." He smiled at her mischievously. "Your turn."

Pushing her back onto the bed, he covered her body with his. Katsumi arched her back, forcing her mounds into his face and busy hands. He caught a nipple between his teeth and flicked its imprisoned nub with his tongue.

His hands swept down her stomach and finding her legs together he spread them open with the gentle pressure of his hands. His fingers slid along her thigh without touching her pussy lips. Electricity followed their progress, leaving her flesh tingling and alive.

Katsumi was squirming uncontrollably now. She knew her pussy was unashamedly wet but she didn't care.

Adon adjusted his position on the bed so that he lay beside her, his head near her pussy. Katsumi propped herself on one elbow and gazed at his throbbing cock. The tip had another dew drop and she stretched out her tongue to lick off that warm silky tear.

He groaned at the touch and his hot breath blanketed her pussy. She liquefied at the whisper of his breath. Her heart thudded in her chest, propelling a wash of hot blood through her body. Sweat beaded on her upper lip. She licked it off and then returned her tongue to the head of his cock, sucking him into her mouth.

Adon responded by pushing his tongue against the hood of her clit. Katsumi thought her mind would explode. His busy tongue worried the erect nub, sending bolt after bolt of searing heat to her spine.

This was so much better than pleasuring herself. Masturbation was a poor sister at best. All those years of bringing herself off with fingers rubbing urgently at her clit and pussy lips had never generated so much pleasure.

Suddenly her consciousness exploded in a nova of sparkling, electric sensation. Katsumi screamed and bucked beneath his cock.

"I'm going to come," he announced and abruptly pulled himself away from her. "I need to fuck you," he grunted huskily.

"Oh, yes," she moaned before realizing this was the point of no return. If Adon's tongue could send her flying over the edge into some sort of abyss of orgasmic pleasure, Katsumi wondered what his gorgeous cock could do.

Kneeling between her legs, his hands gripping her raised knees, Adon gazed approvingly down at her pussy. His beautiful cock, which had probed her mouth only a few moments before, was now pointing at her center, pulsing impatiently with the beat of his heart. "Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"It may hurt the first time. You're so small."

"I'm ready," she said, wondering if she really was ready.

He caressed her dewy pussy lips. She gasped at the sudden jolt of pleasure and then again when he brought his glistening fingers to his lips and licked them dry.

He returned his fingers to her pulsing pussy, collecting more of her juice, smearing it on the head of his cock and down the shaft so that it shimmered under the overhead lights.

Gripping himself firmly, he brought it closer to her waiting cunt. She arched her hips to encourage him. The first contact of his cock with her pussy lips sent a shiver of electricity up her spine and then, instead of simply entering her, Adon rubbed it up the length of her pussy lips.

Katsumi locked her ankles behind his hips and urged him closer. The slippery motion of his cock head sent wave after wave of pleasure coursing through her. She tensed like a coiled spring and feared her muscles would break every bone in her body. She needed the release only his cock could give.

"Fuck me, please," she whispered.

He returned his cock head to her sex. It nestled there, just like before the SOS had arrived...

The klaxon sounded again.

"Shit!" he exclaimed.

She locked her ankles behind his hips. She wasn't going to let him go. Not yet.

"Fuck!" he yelled. "Let me go," he pleaded, the urgency in his voice not masking his disappointment. "We don't have time."

"What is it this time?"

"We're about to drop out of quantum space. We have to go to the bridge."

"I don't believe it." Surely he was joking, but his expression, which had nothing to do with lust, told her differently. Reluctantly she released him.

"Come on," he said and climbed off the bed. "I'll show you the controls."

She flopped petulantly back onto the bed. "But we were so close..."

He quickly pulled his leggings back on. "There'll be time later. Come on. You'll enjoy this."

"Not as much as..." Katsumi let her voice trail away and lay back in disappointment. Her body was pulsing with unrelieved lust and she resorted to pleasuring herself.

She'd hardly touched her clit when the intercom beside the bed blared. "Hurry up!" he called. "You'll miss the fun."

She rolled off the bed and stood on quivering legs. She bent to pick up her blouse, which he'd ripped off her when he'd first tied her up, but decided what the hell, and left it.

Naked, she padded along the narrow corridors of his ship. She knew from what he'd said before, his ship was a small scout, designed for exploration and low mass cargo. It was neat and tidy. The air held a pleasant jasmine scent.

She came to the end of the corridor and the door swished open. Adon was there, bending over the controls. The leather leggings stretched tight over his compact ass. He was naked to the waist and the lights from the control panel played across his smooth muscular shoulders.

"Come here," he said happily. "I always enjoy this."

"What?"

"The drop into real space. Are you ready?"

"Sure."

There was a ping and he grasped her hand. The blank screens suddenly became alive with stars. It seemed they had jumped out of nothingness. She gasped in wonder. "It's beautiful!"

The blackness of space was powdered with multicolored stars that were thick at the center of the view and gradually thinning above and below.

"We're on the outer reach of the Perseus arm," he explained. "We're looking back toward the galaxy, that's why there are so many stars. Behind us is mostly empty, except for one thing."

"What's that?"

"Maia, aft view, please."

The screens switched and the blackness of space resolved into an enormous red glow.

"What is it?"

"A black hole. The red glow is caused by gas and dust falling into the gravity well. They are raised to immense energies and release radiation when they approach the event horizon. It's the red end of the spectrum we are seeing."

"So it's not really a star?"

"It used to be a big one. It's now an invisible, super dense mass."

"Are we in danger?"

"Of being sucked in? Not at all. The thing we are after is in a stable orbit."

"Where?"

"Maia, zero in on the source of the SOS."

The screen filled with a teardrop-shaped asteroid. Its surface was pockmarked with a multitude of craters. The day side was ruby hued and its night side was various shades of black and gray. The shadow at the terminator was moving, indicating the asteroid was spinning about its central axis.

Adon leaned forward to adjust the controls. Their hips touched and the heat emanating from his body dropped her into another well of desire. His body was like a black hole, she mused, sucking her in, raising her temperature.

Shivers of desire cascaded through her body.

"Maia, zero in on the structure at the far end of the asteroid."

The screen centered on an array of metallic structures rising out of a symmetrical and presumably artificial crater.

"Who'd build an engine on an asteroid?" Adon mused.

Katsumi noted his professional attitude and tried to adopt the same. She frowned at a memory of something she'd read. "It may be a generational ship."

"And there is the source," he continued excitedly. "The SOS is coming from that ship."

She couldn't see it. "Where?"

The view on the screen switched. "Up there at the north pole, a small prospector ship."

She finally caught it. Beside a blockhouse-type structure, a small, chunky spacecraft that resembled a misshapen wasp was sitting half in and half out of shadow. She figured it was at the pole because to land anywhere else, say at the equator, would have meant being thrown off the asteroid by centrifugal force.

"It looks in good shape. No obvious damage. The SOS is faint though..." His voice trailed off and he suddenly turned to her. "What did you say?" he asked. He was leaning uncomfortably close to her now and his proximity was driving her nuts.

"When?"

"Just a second ago."

"Oh, I think it might be a generational starship. It looks like pictures I've seen in an old text."

"How old?"

"From Earth time, before the empire. These were the first starships, long before they discovered quantum space."

"You mean they traveled at sub-light speed?"

"Yep. Thousands of people lived and died in them during the centuries it took to get to their destination."

Katsumi wondered at the audacity of these ancient people, to brave eternity and venture into the vast unknown. To know they would die on board, but to be satisfied with the knowledge their children's children would look upon alien skies. "Then what's this one doing out here?"

"It's been on its journey for over a thousand years," she whispered, her voice bordering awe. "I wonder what they're like."

"Who?"

"The inhabitants."

"Two-headed with seven fingers on each hand, I expect. Inbreeding would see to that."

"Don't be silly. They carried over five thousand people with stored egg and semen samples to maintain genetic diversity. They were the most perfect humans of their time."

"Anything could go wrong in a thousand years."

"Only a couple of generational ships survived out of the dozens that departed. There were searches made. But the ships are pretty small and space is big. The ones that were found had destroyed themselves, the inhabitants turned into savages."

He was rubbing his chin thoughtfully. She thought it an unusually attractive mannerism. "What are you thinking?"

"Just that the technology inside will be ancient."

She nodded. "It's a time capsule."

"Maybe there's money in that."

She concentrated on the little ship resting at the pole of the asteroid. "How old is that?"

"It's a Delphinium Class Prospector, about a hundred years old. They're good units. I've flown one."

"So it may have just arrived?"

He nodded.

"And the SOS is coming from there?"

"The timing code on the SOS indicates it has been in operation five days," Maia reported.

She stretched her back, knowing his gaze had shifted from the asteroid to her jutting breasts. "Well, Captain. What are you going to do?"

He gave her a quizzical glance. "What do you want to do?"

"I was thinking of continuing where we left off."

He met her gaze. "That seems like a great idea. Just let me program our approach. You should watch this. Your astrogator training begins now."

She smiled coquettishly. "And my reward for being a good student?"

"We'll see."

"Are you being deliberately perverse?" There was something in the way his expression altered that alarmed her. "You haven't changed your mind, have you?"

"Not at all, it's just..."

"Just what?"

"I know how important this is to you. I don't want it to be... shabby."

Katsumi's jaw dropped. He actually cared about her feelings. This was unexpected and she felt a wash of affection for him. "It won't be."

"I want to make it memorable," he said.

The thrill of anticipation made her smile. He kissed her suddenly, his lips gentle but determined. The warm tingle radiating from her pussy spread through her chest cavity like the kisses of a butterfly's wing. Finally she released him and was pleased to sense his own reluctance to let her go.

"You need to watch this," he said huskily.

She groaned in disappointment but watched him dutifully while he manipulated the controls and explained their function. "Maneuvering close to a body like this is tricky. There are gravitational and rotational effects we need to negotiate. Plus we need

to go in real slow to avoid a hard landing. I want to set down close to the prospector. He landed dead on the pole to avoid centripetal forces. We need to do the same. Our tractor beam will hold us firm, but I don't want to drain our power cells completely."

"What will we do once we land?"

"We need to put on environmental suits and go for a short walk outside. If Maia can't interrogate its computer and get it to open the door, we'll have to break in. But with any luck, because the SOS is engaged, its normal security systems will be disabled." While he spoke he caressed her right breast, his fingers lightly circling her nipple, sending electric pulses straight to her clit.

Katsumi licked her lips. "How long will it take to land?"

He kissed her suddenly. "Not long," he mumbled. He flicked a few switches and the view on the screen changed. Adon had begun their descent toward the asteroid. "Which means we shouldn't waste any time."

Adon hoisted her onto the control panel so that she balanced on the very edge. She leaned backward and propped herself up with her arms while he sat in the high-backed control chair and deftly spread her legs. She rested her feet on the armrests and threw her head back when his hot breath brushed across her clit.

Adon gently kissed her pussy lips and his breath reached inside her like a finger of fire. She gasped at the wet heat of his tongue which licked the outside of her sex along the firm skin of her inner thigh. He orbited her open pussy and when his lips brushed against her clit, she almost slipped off the control panel in surprise at the intensity of the jolt of pleasure.

She repositioned herself and he sucked her whole pussy into his mouth. The shocks of sensation rocketing up her body made every sinew tense. Katsumi's orgasm was building inexorably. Her breathing was ragged, coming in short, staccato gasps. She clamped her eyes shut, concentrating on the exquisite sensations radiating from her pussy.

Adon stood up and positioned his cock at the entrance of her sex.

"Ready?" he asked huskily.

She smiled at him, touched by his concern. "I've been ready since we met," she said breathlessly.

Gripping his thick shaft Adon brought the burgeoning head of his cock to her moist inner flesh.

Suddenly the ship lurched violently. The klaxon sounded. Adon lost his balance and fell backward. Katsumi slipped off the control panel and landed heavily on her ass.

"Dil's breakfast!" Adon exclaimed.

"What the hell was that?" Katsumi said, her ass numb from the fall.

Adon was quickly onto his feet and at the controls.

"Well?" she prompted angrily. "What is it *this* time?"

"Proximity alert," Maia reported. "There is debris orbiting the asteroid."

"Debris? What from?"

Adon shrugged. "An old explosion."

While he negotiated the *Nymph* through the debris cloud with deft touches of the controls, Katsumi wondered if there was anyone left alive on the asteroid.

Then, in a surreal moment, her thoughts became confused and fuzzy, like she'd just woken from a deep sleep and nothing around her was in focus. She shook her head to clear her thoughts when something really weird surprised her. For some unaccountable reason she wondered what manner of man was inside the asteroid and how good his monstrous cock would feel inside her cunt.

What the hell? She shook her head again to dispel the erotic images, swimming snakelike through her mind. The shadowy shape of a tall, imperious man stalked her mind and refused to be dismissed. His hungry eyes devoured her and powerful hands reached out for her, his long sensuous fingers stroking her throat.

She slapped at her neck.

"What is it?"

The sting dispelled her errant thoughts which left behind what seemed to her to be a trail of malignant slime. "Nothing." Her whole body shivered. "I just don't like this."

"There *is* something wrong here," he agreed. "There's no answer from the prospector. Maia's been hailing them since we dropped out of quantum space."

"Maybe they're inside the asteroid?"

"Maybe, but why are the asteroid people out here at all?" He screwed up his face in thought. She traced the frown lines with her finger, fascinated that they gave him even more character. He flicked the camera to the ugly, red glow of the distant collapsed star. Clouds of gas roiled and boiled around it. "Why go through the richest star fields in the outer arms and end up orbiting a black hole on the edge of nothing?"

"Maybe they missed their target and had to stop here or end up in interstellar space."

He nodded. "You could be right. Some major fubar or other."

"Fubar?"

"Old spacer slang for when things go wrong, 'fucked up beyond all recognition'."

She giggled, wishing she'd read more about spacer culture. "So what fubar would make them miss their target?"

"Something like this," he murmured and switched the camera back to the asteroid.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Those craters near the engine are definitely not impact. See, the profile is too smooth, like the surface has slumped."

"What would do that?"

"Somehow the internal supports have given way. I'd say that's why they are still here. They're stranded."

She nodded. "But why did they stop here anyway? They were designed to decelerate for a century or more. Surely they would've realized it was a black hole long before they got here."

"Maybe they had navigational problems. Maybe this black hole was their last chance for a gravitational slingshot back into the galactic center. But whoever was

navigating got them into a stable orbit instead. That couldn't be accidental. Someone deliberately stranded them."

"And their broken engines kept them here?"

"Looks like it."

"Well, what do we do, Captain?"

His eyes brightened and he shot her a sparkling smile. "Ready for your first adventure?"

Her heart melted and she smiled back at him.

He returned his eyes to the screen. "Hello," he said. "What's that?" He indicated a trench running down the length of the asteroid from the north to south poles.

Adon zoomed the camera in to reveal a single rail at the bottom of the deep trench.

"It could be an external transport system," she offered. "See there are tunnels leading off at regular intervals. I bet it's for maintenance purposes."

He smiled at her. "I think you're right."

"What do we do next?"

"Land next to the prospector and check it out first. Then we'll work out how to get inside the asteroid."

She shivered again. The unseen hand had caressed her neck.

"Don't worry," he said, putting an arm about her shoulders. "I have weapons."

That didn't make her feel any better. "Do you think we'll need them?"

"The SOS is coming from the prospector. They are the ones in trouble."

"Who are they?"

"The identity of the sender is encoded in the SOS. The prospector is called *Hades Assay*."

"An odd name."

"Probably apt, though. I can imagine it's prospected some hellholes in its time."

Adon's proximity was driving her nuts. She reached across and stroked his arm.

"So, are we going to finish what we started...?"

"Sorry, sweetheart. No time. We're coming in fast."

"How did I know you were going to say that?" she pouted.

"Don't worry," he said and kissed her. "We'll finish eventually."

She poked out her tongue. "I may not be in the mood, eventually."

She knew she'd wait as long as it took. But the erotic thought was killed. Her eyes were drawn back to the screen and that malevolent image of the shadow man returned to her mind.

Chapter 3

Katsumi watched Adon guide the ship down to the asteroid's pitted surface. No way would she make a pilot with such a short lesson, but she grasped the essentials. She marveled at how adeptly Adon manipulated the joystick to make the final approach.

"Maia will make sure we don't crash or anything. If I suddenly had a heart attack, she'd fly us to safety."

"So," she started mischievously, "I could have my way with you and we'd still be safe?"

He laughed. "Of course. If Maia detected some erratic movements of the stick... the joystick that is, she'd immediately take control."

"Then why not let Maia fly everywhere?"

"Where's the fun in that?"

She nodded in understanding. "So, it's just a macho thing."

"What do you mean, 'just'?"

The insect-shaped prospector loomed large in the screen. "I'm going to land right next to its portside hatchway. Maia has activated it, so it will open for us."

"Can Maia tell the *Hades'* computer what to do?"

"Not really." He frowned. "The *Hades'* pilot initiated the complete emergency program which lets any rescuers into the ship if they were incapacitated."

"Why does that worry you?"

"That they did that means something really catastrophic has happened. Sensors indicate everything is still functioning on board, though. The ship is flyable."

"But there's no one on board?"

"Doesn't look like it. Maia has been hailing them since we popped out of quantum space." He looked at her and winked. "In my voice, of course."

She laughed.

"What's so funny?"

"You have an ego the size of..."

"My cock?"

"That would probably cover it." Mention of his cock sent a pulse of warmth through her body. She gazed at him longingly.

"Wish we had time," he said wistfully. "I really do."

Adon went silent while he focused on the controls. He brought the *Nymph* to a gentle touchdown on the gray dusty surface. They were only meters from the prospector and the cameras showed a blinking, green light by the hatchway.

His beaming smile was so boyish she laughed. "Proud of yourself, huh?"

"That wasn't a bad landing, if I do say so myself. Come on. We'd better get over there and see what's going on."

She touched his arm and he placed his hand over hers. "Partner," he whispered huskily. "I want you very, very badly. But there may be people injured on the prospector. We should get this sorted and then we can play."

Though it was a gentle chastisement, Katsumi felt a little affronted. She'd never taken being criticized very well. Her mind started to close in on itself, shutting down the stinging remark.

It was a trick she'd learned in childhood. How she did it, shut herself off from the world, she didn't know. But it was useful and she'd developed it to a fine art, so that she could quarantine her mind, but still carry on, so that those watching would only suspect she was a little distracted.

Whenever her father had lectured her about her numerous transgressions she'd been able to switch off her consciousness and go "somewhere" else. Her thoughts expanded to fill her universe and whatever was going on about her washed by, never touching her awareness. She used it at every opportunity. With her tutors, the boring

people at palace balls, and that ugly oaf her father had wanted to give her to. What a bore. If it wasn't for her ability to...

"Katsumi! Come on!"

He was standing at the hatchway waiting for her. "Sorry. I was just thinking."

"So I saw. Come on. This will be an adventure, the first of our new partnership."

She beamed at him, aware of his admiring gaze. Suddenly she was aware she was still naked. "Can I get dressed first?"

"At the airlock. The environmental suits will suffice for now. Come on!"

Katsumi followed him at a rush down the *Nymph's* narrow corridors. Through a set of double hatchways they came to a semi-circular room with the airlock assembly. From wall cabinets Adon extracted two brightly colored suits, one blue and one green. "What's your favorite color?"

"Green," she said automatically. "But you're bigger than me..."

"One size fits all. Smart nano-suits. They conform to your body shape. Something I'd like to do right now."

She considered the environmental suits doubtfully. They didn't seem robust enough to brave the vacuum of space. He grinned and tossed her the green suit. "I want to watch *you* put that on," he said, his eyes glinting.

The suit opened at the back. Stretching out her long sinuous legs, she stepped into it aware of his hungry gaze. Her nipples were painfully erect, aching for attention and her clit pulsed with desire. She wanted him to touch her like he had before. The last thing she wanted to do was get into such a confining suit.

"Clip the top stud at the back of the neck," he advised.

She did so and the suit seemed to shrink, folding itself around her. It cupped her breasts, holding her tightly in a warm embrace. It felt kind of sexy.

Adon whistled in appreciation. He picked up a helmet and lifted it over her head. Before he lowered it, he gave her a quick open-mouthed kiss.

"You're the most beautiful woman I've ever met," he whispered, his hot breath on her cheek. "Follow my lead and we'll be fine." He pointed to a switch on the inside

of her left wrist. "This is our com unit. The red button here will allow you to talk to Maia. Just tell her what you want, open the airlock, close the airlock, whatever, and she'll do it for you."

"She? I've been meaning to ask."

"We've been together for years."

"Should I be jealous?"

"It's likely to be the other way 'round."

"She's not sentient, is she?"

"I don't know... sometimes..." He laughed. "Let's just say Maia knows me very well."

Perverse jealousy swept through her. She discounted it. Maia was only the ship's computer, after all. "Maia, what a pretty name," she mused.

"One of the Pleiades, she tells me." He secured her helmet before pulling on his own. He touched his com unit. "Can you hear okay?"

She nodded. He finished suiting up and from the cabinet extracted two holstered belts. "These are laser pistols. Have you used them before?"

"I used to sneak into Father's armory and use them for target practice." She didn't tell him she'd taught herself and wasn't that good a shot.

He shrugged. "Good enough. Just don't point it at me."

"I'll try not to."

He noticed her expression and correctly read her fear. Guessing she'd never been outside a spacecraft before, he reassured her. "It's only a short walk to the *Hades*. Gravity will be next to nothing here, so don't take any big jumps, okay? We'll lanyard ourselves to each other and the ship so we'll have something to hold onto."

She nodded, impressed by his authoritative voice. He attached an elastic lanyard to her belt. Feeling a little reassured, she gripped his hand.

"Come on, partner," he said. "Adventure awaits."

Maia opened the outer door and reality suddenly dawned on Katsumi. She was about to step into the vacuum and walk on the *outside* of an asteroid. Adon fixed his

lanyard to a cleat on the outside of the hatch and they stepped out onto the gray powdery surface. Katsumi's booties hardly sank into the dust and the crisp crunch of her steps was conducted through the material of her suit. She looked up into the blackness of space, marveling at the great swirl of the galaxy and feeling dwarfed by the immensity of it all.

The gunmetal gray of the *Hades'* hull was only a few meters away and with five bounding steps they reached the prospector's airlock hatch. Adon spoke to Maia and she opened it for them.

Once they were inside, the outer door closed and the prospector's computer flooded the airlock with a rush of air.

"We'll keep our gear on," Adon instructed. "We don't know what's in the air. When we get back to the *Nymph*, Maia will decontaminate us with a dose of UV."

Katsumi nodded. He hadn't said anything before about the need for decontamination. Her ignorance of what could possibly happen to them out here sent a shiver of fear down to her toes. "Great, just great."

He laughed and they stepped into the darkened corridor of the prospector. "Maia, ask the *Hades'* computer for the lights please."

"Unable to comply," Maia responded and Katsumi suppressed a giggle when she finally recognized the voice as belonging to a holo-porn star famous for marrying a senator. "The *Hades* is on manual override."

"Now why would the lights be on manual override?" Adon said under his breath.

"Insufficient data to speculate," Maia responded. "I suggest caution, Adon."

Katsumi's jealousy of the seeming cozy relationship that existed between Adon and Maia grew. Irrational she knew, but real all the same. For the first time she wondered if the timing of interruptions to their lovemaking was purely coincidental.

They made their way forward to the bridge and Katsumi noted the pristine cleanliness of the ship segued into increasing levels of disarray and damage. Their torch beams revealed broken equipment and blaster scorch marks marring the white walls of

the access corridors from the airlock to the bridge. The door to the darkened bridge was wide open.

Katsumi looked to Adon for reassurance but through his faceplate his expression was strangely vacant. She was about to ask him what was wrong when his eyes suddenly blinked. "Holy shit!" he exclaimed.

The oval of his torch beam was centered on one of the high-backed pilot's chairs. Cowering beside it, half under the main console, was a woman. She sat with her knees drawn up, bright eyes staring back in what appeared to be abject terror.

She's beautiful, Katsumi thought.

Framing a perfect, heart-shaped face was a halo of jet black hair. The clear complexion was almost transparent alabaster. Her full, sensuous lips were a strange shade of blue that Katsumi realized was not makeup but the result of lack of oxygen.

Her teeth were a brilliant white. Katsumi thought them too big for her small mouth, but instead of making her ugly, they gave her a primal beauty which was strangely stirring. Katsumi was surprised at the warmth in her belly at the sight of the stranger. She'd never been attracted to a woman before, but there was something compelling about her that had, in a glance, heated her blood.

Katsumi noted the almond-shaped eyes were bright yellow, cat-like and shaded by long, black lashes. The arched eyebrows gave her a skeptical, questioning appearance. The small nose was well defined, perfectly symmetrical and in proportion with her face.

Katsumi's eyes were drawn to the woman's small, perfectly round breasts. Coral colored nipples showed through the almost transparent silk of a bloody and torn blouse.

The woman's eyes, not so frightened now, were fixed unwaveringly on Adon. Katsumi saw in that gaze a hunger that unsettled her. She suspected that the fear she had noted at first had been an act, though why the stranger would pretend she had no idea.

Adon crouched down and held out his hand.

"Be careful," Katsumi warned, but he took no heed.

"It's all right now," he whispered. "I've come."

His soft voice seemed to embolden her. The expression hardened and she looked from his eyes to his outstretched hand and back again. He nodded gently in encouragement and she put out a slim, white arm. Her long, delicate fingers stretched out and, to Katsumi's surprise, stroked the palm of Adon's hand before gripping his fingers.

"You're safe now," he whispered again.

There was something about her that Katsumi didn't like, didn't trust. She sent her torch beam to Adon's face. Even through the glass of his helmet he was clearly besotted.

Men!

The woman's expression had become confident and, Katsumi couldn't believe it, seductive. She looked at Adon like he was a lost lover. The impression that they were not strangers was so powerful that Katsumi blurted out the question before realizing it. "Do you know her?"

"Of course not," he said abruptly. "We have to get her back to *Nymph*. She's trembling." With his other hand he reached out and pushed a strand of hair away from her strange cat-like eyes. "What's your name?"

Her lips parted slightly, the whiteness of those crowded, pointy teeth shining wetly in the torch light. "Mi-Kun," she replied. Her voice, though soft, was sharp like glass. Katsumi tried to place her accent. It was eerily like Adon's, from the southern continent, but her face was like no other she'd ever seen. The yellow eyes and white skin were features that didn't belong to her planet. It occurred to her the woman was a mimic. Having heard Adon's voice, she now replicated it. Katsumi's distrust grew.

"Well, Mi-Kun. We're going back to my ship now. You'll be safe there." Adon gently urged the woman to her feet. She was very small and once standing she pulled herself into him, so that his arms were tight about her, her body pressed hard against his.

Katsumi's fist closed about her gun. "Adon!"

He caught her eye and shook his head. "She's scared," he offered.

"Not of you, apparently." *She hasn't once looked at me*, Katsumi thought. *I wonder if she even knows I'm here.* At once, Mi-Kun glanced at her with eyes of yellow malevolence.

"Come on," Adon said abruptly. "Let's get out of here."

"I'm right behind you," Katsumi said, but paused a moment, trying to make sense of what just happened. There was something Adon should have done, though just what it was remained stubbornly beyond her reasoning. It was something so glaringly obvious, but she just couldn't grasp it. She stared at the bridge consoles, looking for something, but she couldn't guess what.

A wave of confusion swept over her consciousness and Mi-Kun's face danced in front of her eyes. She started and looked over her shoulder. Adon and the strange girl were standing in the hatchway waiting. Mi-Kun was gazing at her steadily with those bright, captivating eyes.

"Do not stay here," Mi-Kun warned. Her lips hardly moved yet her voice was strong and clear, the threat tangible. "You are in great peril."

Katsumi followed them to the airlock, watching with suspicion and palpable jealousy at how Mi-Kun held herself so close to Adon. Both sinuous arms were wrapped tightly around his waist so that she was walking crablike beside him. Hardly walking though, Katsumi realized; she glided with cat-like grace.

One of Mi-Kun's alabaster hands found its way to the base of his neck and was languidly caressing it. Jealousy stabbed at Katsumi's heart each time those sensuous fingers repeated their rhythmic caress. The pain of this new emotion was startling and like nothing she'd ever experienced before.

Anger swelled within her breast. Adon was obviously smitten by this strange woman. In the airlock prep room she glared at him while he carefully selected a red environmental suit for Mi-Kun. The way he helped her pull off the torn and bloodied blouse only plunged the knife deeper into her heart. He could hardly keep his eyes off

Mi-Kun's pert breasts which jiggled enticingly when she stepped out of her ill fitting trousers.

Had she been wrong about him? How could he be so fickle? How could he be so easily snared by a pretty face and firm body?

Naked now, Mi-Kun's hairless pussy was clearly visible. Katsumi studied the woman's unnaturally transparent flesh. The tracery of thin veins beneath her skin was blue, almost black. She fancied she could even see the woman's fine-boned skeleton beneath that fragile exterior.

With Adon's help Mi-Kun stepped into the environmental suit. She allowed him to press the closing stud and hold her steady, her eyes locked on his. The suit cocooned itself around her petite body and she clung to him possessively. Adon lowered the helmet about her head and took her to the airlock door.

"Shouldn't we check for other survivors?" Katsumi asked.

"There are no others on board," Mi-Kun replied emphatically.

"We'll get back to the ship before we do anything else," Adon added.

Adon and Mi-Kun were acting as one. Katsumi was so taken aback she stood dumbly at the hatch. She felt left out and alienated.

Once they were safely inside the *Nymph*, Maia doused them in a strong UV light, sterilizing their environmental suits. Mi-Kun gasped more in fear than surprise and cowered behind Adon trying to shrink behind him while shielding her eyes from the actinic light. She reluctantly followed Adon's instructions to strip off her suit and stand naked. Another burst of UV light left her standing unsteadily. She reached out for Adon's arm for support and her hands left a fine ash palm print on his arm.

Adon attended to her with great care. The airlock door opened and he helped her inside the ship. Katsumi scowled whenever he guarded Mi-Kun's head with his hand when they stepped through the hatches, as if someone of her height was going to bump her head.

Mi-Kun, despite the anemic cast of her body, was certainly beautiful. Though unusually petite, she was so perfectly in proportion. There was a feral quality about her

that exuded sensuality. Each graceful movement of her limbs was inviting. Each alluring glance of her saffron eyes said, "Fuck me."

Katsumi fumed. Adon didn't even give her a glance, though an hour before, he couldn't take his hands off her. Mi-Kun, in the short time she'd been in his presence, had supplanted her completely.

Katsumi considered his capriciousness. He'd been her charming knight in shining armor when he'd rescued her on Skollo. He had professed his desire and she was sure he had been truthful. Yet with this stranger he'd once again adopted the knight in shining armor persona and become Mi-Kun's savior instead.

Katsumi pursed her lips in concentration. Though she was angry, she suspected that Mi-Kun exerted some sort of influence over him. She couldn't believe Adon was so fickle by his own nature. Her jealousy, however, wouldn't let him off the hook so easily. She wanted to slap his face and tell him to wake up.

Adon wrapped a towel around Mi-Kun and led her to his cabin. Katsumi followed with fists balled and teeth clenched. He motioned toward his bed, but Mi-Kun remained standing. Katsumi watched that bloodless hand go once again to Adon's neck and start caressing it.

"Where are you from?" Katsumi asked.

"Plenty of time for questions later," Adon said, brushing the silken bonds with which he'd recently restrained Katsumi to the floor and sitting Mi-Kun down. "Are you hungry?" he asked her.

Mi-Kun turned her eyes sharply to him, a half smile on those voluptuous, blue tinged lips. "No, not hungry," she said.

"What have you been eating?" Katsumi asked.

Mi-Kun turned to her. "Whatever was in the lockers."

"Was that your ship?" Katsumi was irritated that Adon was so uncurious and felt compelled to ask the obvious questions.

"I am a passenger," Mi-Kun said to Adon and glanced challengingly at Katsumi, a tiny smile creasing the corner of her full mouth.

"Ah," Adon said and dropped to his haunches in front of her. Katsumi frowned at the way he clasped her tiny hands so tightly.

"And the crew?" Katsumi pressed.

"Taken," she said.

"By who?"

Mi-Kun rounded on her. "The inhabitants of this place are barbarous savages that lured us here and killed everyone."

"Except you."

"Draco protected me before he too was taken."

"Draco?" Adon asked, his voice guarded.

"My brother."

Katsumi waited for Adon to continue the interrogation but he was just gazing mindlessly at Mi-Kun. "The *Hades* is a prospector," she said. "How did you become passengers? Where were you going?"

Mi-Kun turned her yellow eyes back to Adon.

"That's not important now," he said suddenly. "We have to look for them."

Katsumi was horrified. "Don't be an idiot. There are about five thousand people on these generational ships. We shouldn't do this alone. We should get help."

Anger swept briefly across Mi-Kun's face. "We cannot leave Draco." Then she started to cry and touched Adon's face. "Please. Save my brother."

Katsumi rolled her eyes. "We should get help," she insisted.

Mi-Kun held his face steadily in front of hers and they seemed to be in some silent conference. Finally he nodded and slowly dragged his gaze away to look at Katsumi. The tiny fingers lingered on his face. "There may be no time," he said.

Adon went to Katsumi's side and placed his hands on her shoulders. She was aware of Mi-Kun's poisonous glare. "We promised we'd have adventures together. Well, here's an adventure."

"But the ship is filled with killers."

"We don't know the real situation. Besides, we won't be surprised like the crew of the *Hades*. We are heavily armed and forewarned."

"We should leave," Katsumi said, looking squarely into Mi-Kun's angry face. The woman reached out and grasped Adon's hand. He sat down beside her and put an arm around her quivering shoulders.

Katsumi's anger flared. "Adon, can I see you alone for a moment?"

"Why?"

She fixed him with a stony glare. "There's a problem with the engine. Now follow me."

She wrenched his arm away from the girl's shoulders and pulled him toward the hatchway, giving Mi-Kun a withering look. "Stay here. We'll be right back."

"Yes, yes," Adon said apologetically. "We'll be right back."

Katsumi dragged him out of his cabin and down the corridor out of earshot. "What the hell? What's wrong with you?"

"Me? What the hell's wrong with you?" He shrugged her off. "Are you mad?"

"Are you always this reckless? I don't think I want to team up with someone who thinks with his dick!" She searched his eyes and saw the languid confusion lift from his face. "I don't trust her."

He grinned as if he'd just worked out some difficult problem in astronavigation. "Jealous are we?"

"What?"

"Now that there's another pretty girl in the picture."

She laughed. She couldn't help it. "You're such an idiot. You're the one who's so sexually frustrated that the mere presence of a defenseless piece of skirt gets you thinking with your dick."

"I don't understand. What's a 'piece of skirt'?"

She rolled her eyes. "An old expression."

"Why don't you trust her?"

"Something smells... fishy."

"Fishy? Where do you get these weird expressions?"

"You should read more. You really should."

He reached out and touched her cheek. "You know, I'm still horny."

Her pussy gave a pulse of desire. She wanted him. She really did. But the last hour had confused her. She couldn't believe the change in him. He was all over the place. He wasn't thinking things through. How different he was from the man who'd calmed her fears and taken her out onto the surface of an asteroid. He'd been so careful, systematic and methodical. Where was that experienced spacefarer now?

Though his touch was light, the electric charge it sent spiraling through her body took her breath away. Before she knew it he was kissing her, his lips hot and urgent.

His hands moved to her naked breasts. He cupped them, rolling her nipples between thumb and forefinger. Her knees buckled.

She pushed him away. "What's wrong with you?"

"Huh?"

"Why can't you concentrate? We have a bad situation here!"

"An hour ago you didn't seem to mind," he smirked.

"That was before we entered a war zone. Didn't you see the blood? The blaster marks? There was a fucking battle in that prospector. Three people were kidnapped by creatures of some sort. Who knows what's happened to them. What are we going to do about it?"

That glint returned to his startled eyes. "We're going to investigate!" he declared excitedly.

"You really think it's wise?"

"Of course," he said, a wide grin creasing his face. "Who knows what this could mean for us."

Adon's enthusiastic smile became seductive when he noticed Mi-Kun standing at the hatchway. She'd abandoned the towel and had turned sideways, accentuating the curves of her small breasts. Her coral-hued nipples were shamelessly erect. Mi-Kun's

hand was at her crotch, her fingers pressing between her lips of her pussy. With her eyes fixed on Adon she extracted her fingers and brought them to her lips.

Mi-Kun advanced on them. Her tongue extended, licking at her fingers, drawing them into the provocative pout of her mouth. Her other hand cupped her left breast, rolling the nipple sensuously between thumb and forefinger.

Katsumi gasped at the wanton sight and her pussy tingled perversely. Mi-Kun reached out and touched both of them on the cheek. Katsumi didn't flinch. Instead she leaned into the touch, her nipples tightening. What was it about this woman? Her raw sexuality was compelling, irresistible.

Adon stared open-eyed at Mi-Kun, who reached behind his head and pulled his face down to kiss him. Amazed and furious Katsumi watched the deep kiss, trying to deny her arousal. Her hand dropped to her pussy.

Mi-Kun released Adon and placed her hand behind Katsumi's neck to draw her in. Katsumi closed her eyes in preparation for the kiss but before those luscious lips claimed her she caught a faint hint of corruption on the woman's breath. She recoiled. "This is wrong," she whispered huskily.

Mi-Kun's hand urged her closer. "Kiss me," she insisted. Her mouth was so open and inviting. Katsumi fought the urge to surrender, to open her mouth and kiss the stranger's lips.

She stepped back. "No!"

It wasn't lack of desire on her part. Her nipples ached, longing for a touch from this sensual woman. What had snapped her out of Mi-Kun's seductive embrace was, and she struggled to understand this, a sudden urge to go into the asteroid to search for Mi-Kun's brother.

"Adon. We have to go inside the asteroid."

Adon was staring deeply into Mi-Kun's eyes. "What?" he asked without breaking his rapt gaze.

"We have to go inside," she said firmly.

Mi-Kun's hands had dropped to his crotch, massaging his cock urgently.

"But didn't you just say we should go get help?"

"I've changed my mind."

"Well, okay. But wait for me. I'll get Mi-Kun settled and we'll go searching together."

The urge to enter the asteroid was becoming more powerful with every moment. She had to do something and do it now. "I'll be on the bridge."

Adon nodded absently. He was busy staring deeply into Mi-Kun's eyes. Enraged, Katsumi stomped to the bridge and threw herself into the command chair. Her anger at his betrayal had temporarily supplanted the urge to go to the asteroid, though it was still there, like a hunger gnawing at her insides.

"Maia!" she shouted.

"Yes, Katsumi?"

"What can you tell me about the *Hades*?"

"I do not have access to its central data banks."

"I thought you were in touch with it?"

"Only within the parameters of the Imperial SOS protocols."

"What does that mean?"

"I can operate its airlock for ingress and egress only."

"That's all?"

"Until the ship's manual overrides are removed I can do nothing."

That was it! That was what Adon had neglected to do. He'd been so besotted by Mi-Kun he'd hustled them back to the *Nymph* before doing the obvious. "Maia. If I went into *Hades* and removed the manual override, could you access its... what do you call it? Its records?"

"The ship's log."

"Could you do it?"

"I could."

"Tremendous! I'll go over now."

"Do you think that's wise?"

Katsumi was surprised at the tone of Maia's voice. "You are sentient, aren't you?"

"Sentience is a matter of degree. What level of sentience do you mean?"

"I can't possibly know." Katsumi recalled her earlier suspicions. "Tell me, do you love Adon?"

"How do you know when you're in love?"

"That's a fairly sentient question," Katsumi said. "When you are jealous," she answered. "That's when you know."

"How does it feel to be jealous?"

Like a kick in the guts. "We'll talk about this later, Maia. I need to go to the prospector now."

"Do you think it is wise to go into the *Hades* alone?"

"Not at all. But it's better than fucking about here." She stood up. "I'll call you."

On the way to the airlock she peeked inside Adon's cabin. He was sitting on his bunk with Mi-Kun straddling him, his back against the wall. She held him there with one hand on his shoulder, caressing his face with the back of her fingers and speaking to him in silent whispers.

Katsumi fought back a sudden rush of tears, yet couldn't look away. Adon turned his head from Mi-Kun and Katsumi could see the confusion on his face. *He is struggling*, she thought and anger flared again. *Yeah, sure. He's struggling all right, a big strong man who can't resist this wisp of a woman. If he doesn't want her attentions why doesn't he just push her away?*

Mi-Kun's hips were rotating provocatively over his crotch. Her fingers caressed his throat and her voluptuous lips followed. There was something feral in the way she opened her mouth wide and clamped it on the side of his neck.

A shiver of fear swept through her. This wasn't right. "Adon!" she shouted.

Mi-Kun looked up and hissed, those yellow eyes wide with hatred.

Adon's eyes, however, were completely vacant. Mi-Kun whispered to him and his eyes fixed on Katsumi. "Later," he said slowly, the word drawn out and labored. "We'll talk later."

Mi-Kun's expression was triumphant.

Angry beyond measure Katsumi shouted, "I'm going into the asteroid!"

"Wait," he said, seeming to come to his senses for a moment.

Mi-Kun whispered to him again, or rather, her lips moved but there was no sound at all this time. "Wait for me," he said slowly and then added, seemingly reluctantly. "Join us."

Katsumi had the definite impression that it was not Adon speaking at all. But that was clearly stupid. "There isn't time," she said. "People are in danger. We can't just fuck about here."

Mi-Kun draped her arms about Adon's neck and smiled condescendingly. Katsumi wanted to march in there and wipe that look off her face with a good right hook.

The only thing that stopped her was the urge to go to the asteroid. The force that beckoned her had been getting stronger and stronger by the moment, battering at the edge of her consciousness. Its tendrils were creeping through her brain, and when each tentacle took a grip it pulled her, cell by cell, in the direction of the air lock.

Suppressing hot tears, Katsumi backed away from Adon's cabin. She went directly to the airlock and opened the weapons locker. She selected a laser rifle, checked its charge and set it to its most lethal setting. She was surprised at the ease and determination with which her fingers selected the proper setting and the sensual comfort of the weapon's stock in her palm.

She recalled her surreptitious exploration of her father's armory. How she clumsily loaded the weapon and tentatively pressed the trigger. The startled surprise at the loud discharge and stunned awe of the damage she'd caused still remained. She'd practiced often but after the novelty had worn off she had shunned weapons of any

kind, considering them immoral and dangerous. Now, with so much anger coursing through her veins, this powerful weapon gave her a definite feeling of control.

She considered going back to Adon's cabin and shooting Mi-Kun between those pert little breasts, but again the need to go to the asteroid precluded such a diversion.

"Maia, can you get me through the airlock?" she asked.

"Certainly."

Once she was suited up she asked Maia to commence cycling the airlock through its stages and she was once again exposed to the void. With a deep breath to still her wildly beating heart Katsumi stepped out onto the surface. She grasped the line Adon had placed between the two ships and loped over to the *Hades*.

Maia opened the hatches for her and once inside she strode purposely along the corridor toward the bridge, but the further she got from the airlock the stronger the urge to go into the asteroid became. She forced herself to continue with her own plan. "Okay, Maia. How do I cancel the manual override?"

"You need to enter the code."

"What? You didn't tell me that!"

"In my experience humans are very lazy and write the code somewhere visible."

Katsumi scanned the bridge. "What do codes usually look like?"

"They consist of five digits and five letters."

"I can't see anything."

"Often humans use some combination of the ship's name."

Maia instructed her on how to type in the code. She guessed the obvious, HADES00000 without result and spent a frustrating twenty minutes before H1A2D3E4S5 was rewarded by a green light appearing on the console above the keypad. The overhead lights came on with a sudden glare.

Maia gave her instructions for accessing the log. Katsumi had only followed the first few steps when her mind began to cloud over. The effect was faint at first, like a mist rising over the lake she could see from her bedroom window back home. The fine

tendrils snaked through her mind, making it at first difficult for her to hear Maia's instructions. Then her fingers refused to tap out the keys.

She struggled with her uncooperative fingers before finally giving up.

The urge to enter the asteroid was now irresistible. "I have to get inside," she said.

"That is not wise," Maia responded.

She grabbed the pulse rifle and strode to the ship's second airlock. The outer hatch opened onto the asteroid's surface and a blockhouse-type structure not ten meters away.

The blockhouse turned out to be a small chamber with the asteroid's airlock on the *floor*. Katsumi closed the outer hatch and opened the asteroid's hatch. It slid silently aside and her stomach lurched in alarm. She clutched at a handrail to prevent herself from falling into the abyss.

Katsumi was looking down the shaft of a great well. She took a deep breath to calm herself. The view was dizzying. In the dull lighting she could make out countless windows and balconies that opened onto the shaft.

She'd never experienced such an immense enclosed space before. It took a conscious act of will to slow the staccato beat of her heart against her breast to a mild gallop.

Though the pressure urging her on was insistent, her body refused to take that step outside the safety of the airlock.

Then, just when she thought she would flee back to Adon in the *Nymph*, a luscious, languid feeling descended over her like a shroud. Her wildly beating heart calmed and finally settled.

It is not a well, a soundless voice caressed her consciousness. It is a tunnel, my love. Walk along the tunnel.

The words wore a coat of sensuality that permeated the fabric of her body with a dye that soaked every cell with need. Her pussy moistened and ached with a desperate longing.

Walk along the tunnel, the voice commanded. Like an automaton, she took a step through the inner hatch and descended a short staircase that hugged the curving wall. The steps took her down to a series of wide platforms. Feeling like a fly crawling on some high ceiling she continued one step at a time.

Once she reached the first platform and stood on a relatively flat surface her vertigo disappeared. She saw herself now standing on the inside wall of a great cylinder. She noticed that she felt heavier, the asteroid's rotation having created a comforting sense of artificial gravity.

The last platform had a doorway and she made her way toward it. It slid open, sending wisps of dust into the still air. She stepped into a long corridor. Behind her the door slid shut.

"Katsumi," Maia said. "You have only limited air in your environmental suit. You will need to return to the *Nymph* as soon as possible."

She desperately wanted to return to Adon, but couldn't work her legs to turn around. She felt like one of the puppets she'd played with in her childhood. Only then she was the one in control, making them walk, run and fall down, not this unseen voice in her head.

Take off your helmet. Without demur she undid her helmet and lifted it off her head. She coughed and screwed up her nose. The air was very bad, reminiscent of rotting food in a trash can.

At the end of the corridor was another hatchway. The closer she got to it the grimmer the walls became and on the floor was a wide burgundy stain.

A shiver ran down her spine when she realized the stain was blood.

Chapter 4

Katsumi's hand was poised over the bloody door control. She knew that if she opened that door she'd be on an irresistible track into the bowels of the asteroid and whatever horrors it contained.

Her fingers quivered with the effort to fight the urge. But the force was too powerful. Katsumi made a decision. Fighting this irresistible power was soaking up her energy. To save her mental resources she'd have to go with the flow and see where it took her.

"Fuck it!" she growled and pressed the switch.

The corridor was empty, but the floor and walls were stained with blood. Some blotches were old and brown, but were overlapped by newer stains, some with pathetic finger marks trailing through them.

Boldly Katsumi strode into the corridor. Her pace had become quick and determined. She seemed to know where she was going without benefit of ever being in the place.

An image flashed into her mind: an elevator door with the number three showing on the indicator panel. A moment later she came to the elevator door which opened automatically. She stepped in and pressed three.

The elevator descended and she felt herself getting heavier. Of course, she must have been heading back toward the surface of the asteroid and, due to centripetal force, higher gravity.

The elevator slowed and finally stopped. Gripping the gun tightly she waited for the door to open. It did so to an empty corridor. She followed it, knowing when to turn right and follow the cross corridor to its end.

Nothing. The lighting was getting fainter and the stale smell stronger. She paused at the door at the end of the corridor. A surge of fear swept through her. She was certain there was danger here. An image of a humanoid shape crawling along the ceiling flashed into her mind. She pushed the door control and it slid open.

Without thinking Katsumi aimed the gun at the ceiling and stepped through. There, in the dimness, she saw a figure clinging to the ceiling. She had time to note bright yellow eyes, blood red lips and flashing teeth.

The thing snarled and tensed, preparing to leap, but Katsumi fired first. Somehow she knew to aim at the neck and head. There was a truncated screech and the decapitated creature fell writhing to the floor.

She stared in disbelief at what she'd done. The separated head blinked at her, sending slithers of guilt down her spine. She fired again and put the creature out of its misery. In disgust she threw the gun to the floor.

Pick it up.

She did so immediately though her body was shaking violently in shock. *What's happening to me?* She stared at the strange creature. Its skinny limbs, naked and hairless, were gnarled and bore terrible scars. A foul stench, other than the smell of burnt flesh, rose from the wreckage, suggesting unimaginable putrescence.

Move on. The voice inside the deepest reaches of her spirit pulled her onward.

But to where?

Immediately a sense of absolute certainty overcame her. She was approaching an aura of absolute love. She swooned with the intensity of the sensual energy. A flood of warmth filled her sex. Was this what Adon felt around Mi-Kun? She hoped it explained his behavior which was every bit as strange as her own.

The imperative to proceed tugged at her. She went forward until she came to another door. Again she tensed, knowing that danger lay behind it.

With an athleticism which surprised her, Katsumi leapt through the opening door and twisted to her right. She fired and another grotesque figure fell to the floor.

She looked down at the creature, letting her guilt fight against the certainty of love. Taking a life was something she'd never considered before. Practicing with her father's guns, she'd only been aiming at paper targets, never at something alive.

You're close, the voice in her head urged. She continued down the corridor. *Turn around!*

She did so in time to see a shape scrambling crablike across the ceiling. Without thinking she fired and the creature fell to the floor in a writhing, screaming heap.

Behind the door. The voice was strong, indefatigable. *Come to me.*

She opened the door and revealed an appalling scene.

Chapter 5

Sweat slid into Adon's eyes and ran down the bridge of his nose before dripping onto Mi-Kun's extended tongue. His heart beat so loudly he thought he could hear it echoing from the cabin walls.

He wanted to push her away but his resistance had dissolved. He feared he was going insane. Mi-Kun was inside his head filling his mind with all kinds of sexual imagery that made his body hot and hard.

He struggled uselessly against her. She had him pinned against the wall and held him steady with surprising force.

Mi-Kun pulled his head closer so her tongue could lap, cat-like, at his sweaty face and neck. She licked his throat, leaving a trail of ice cold saliva against his tingling flesh. Adon swooned. With an emphatic hiss she sank her teeth into his throat.

He felt the pressure of her bite, but no pain. It was a wonderful feeling. He felt he would simply float away had it not been for Mi-Kun's cold embrace that kept him rooted to the spot.

While Mi-Kun's mouth worked at his neck, drawing the lifeblood out of him, her softly cooing voice inside his head conveyed such profound warmth and love. *No one else loves you*, her whispers said. *Only I*.

After an eternity she stopped drinking from his throat. She did not release him. Instead she nuzzled at his bloodied neck. He sensed her thoughts trolling his brain, teasing his memories, testing his knowledge. Wherever the tentacles of her mind caressed his synapses she left behind a tangible trail of perverted love.

She released him after a time and in his languid state he gazed dully at her savage beauty. Her pallor had improved. Her flesh was now a healthy shade of pink.

Her bloodstained lips curled in a cruel, voluptuous smile. Her expression became maniacal, yet he couldn't look away.

She tilted her head in a way that suggested to him she was listening to a far off voice. He thought he could hear the echo of a man's commanding tones leaking from her mind into his. Suddenly she sprang from the bunk. "We must go."

"Go? Where?" he murmured tiredly.

"Your friend is in danger."

"Katsumi?" He suddenly remembered she'd left while... he couldn't remember what they were doing. Why hadn't she waited for him? Was she jealous and couldn't bear the sight of him talking to Mi-Kun? He smiled at the thought of Katsumi being so in love with him she was jealous.

Mi-Kun snarled and gripped his face in her hands. "We must go and rescue my brother."

"Your brother. Yes. We must rescue Katsumi and your brother."

She flicked his neck with her fingernail and it stung. He touched his neck and felt a wound. The swollen flesh was almost dry. Only a thin trail of watery blood ran down his neck. He looked at his fingertip and couldn't resist the urge to lick it off. The coppery taste made his stomach cry out for more.

Mi-Kun wiped her mouth with the towel and looked at the red stain. She brought the smudge to her lips and licked at the remaining blood with her sinuous tongue. She glared at him. "Where are your weapons?"

"In the airlock. I have pulse rifles, sonic grenades, enough to handle a small army."

"We'll need them. Show me."

"Who are we fighting?"

"Mutants, descendants of the people who set out in the *Star Seeker*."

"*Star Seeker*," he repeated, wondering how Mi-Kun knew its name. "So, how did you end up here?"

"There is no time for irrelevant questions. We must go to him."

"Yes," he said. Mi-Kun was not to be disobeyed. He cursed himself for his weakness. She led him to the airlock and, puppy-like, he followed her swaying buttocks. They quickly donned their environmental suits and exited the ship. Instead of going into the *Hades* they skirted the prospector and went directly to a blockhouse structure.

Once inside, Mi-Kun operated the airlocks. When the inner door opened Adon whistled in amazement. The revealed space was enormous!

The great shaft running down the core of the asteroid went for kilometer after kilometer. It was a dizzying sight and he castigated himself, an experienced spacer, for feeling a tinge of vertigo.

Mi-Kun was distracted, as if listening to something.

"Everything here is a museum piece," he whispered in awe. "I wonder if anything still works."

"It does," she replied, her voice distant. "The mutants will use every lift and air duct to attack us."

"What do they want?"

"Our blood."

He followed Mi-Kun down a flight of steps through several doors and then along a seemingly endless corridor. They came to a lift and she punched in number three.

"Adon," Maia said. "This is not wise. Your suits have only limited air."

"You're right, sweetheart. Is the air okay?"

"Katsumi had no problems," Maia advised.

Katsumi! He cursed himself again for not thinking of her. Why was she dropping out of his thoughts so often?

Mi-Kun turned on him quickly. "She is jealous of our love," she hissed, answering his unvoiced question. "She is not to be trusted. She hates you."

"Surely not," he protested.

Mi-Kun put her hand behind his neck and dragged his face close to hers. "You love me."

It wasn't a question, yet he answered. "Yes, I love you."

"She will try to poison your mind against me. Do not listen to her."

He struggled with conflicting thoughts. He loved Mi-Kun now. But he'd loved Katsumi first. He wrestled with the conundrum, trying to work out his true feelings. Katsumi was smart, witty, funny and incredibly sexy. He'd planned to travel the galaxy with her. He'd even had a fleeting glimpse of their child in her arms.

Yet Mi-Kun had completely stolen his affection. But how?

"You love only me." Mi-Kun's voice was cold and undeniable. "You and I will not travel the galaxy. We will rule it!"

Her powerful voice flooded his brain. *Take off your helmet*, she instructed.

He did so without further hesitation and took a deep breath. Mi-Kun did the same and kissed him on the mouth. Her musky scent mingled with the stuffy air and overwhelmed his senses. She released him. "You love me."

"Yes," he responded. "I love you."

"No one else."

He hesitated but a sharp stab of pain in the centre of his brain put an end to his doubts. "I love no one else."

Mi-Kun pulled his suit away from his neck and brushed his wounded throat with her voluptuous lips. A wave of ecstasy swept over him. She held him tight while her mouth worked. His growing erection pressed painfully at his suit. He wanted to fuck her and all thoughts of Katsumi fell from his mind like so many autumn leaves.

"There is no time now," she whispered after releasing him. Her tongue flicked her lips, catching a drop of his blood from the corner of her mouth. "We have all eternity. Come."

They moved forward through corridors rank with strange dead odors. "There was a fight here," he said.

She nodded. "We must find Draco."

"How do you know where to go?"

"I can feel him."

"So, what are you? Twins?"

She looked at him in surprise then threw her head back in laughter. "More than that."

The lift stopped and the door swished open. She strode with purpose to the end of the corridor and paused at a closed hatch. "There are two mutants waiting for us. One is on the ceiling. You must decapitate it without hesitation."

"You mean blow its head off?"

"Do it quickly. They are hard to kill. Ignore the one waiting at the end of the corridor. It is mine."

"Why should I kill it?" he asked, uneasy with the thought of killing indiscriminately.

Mi-Kun rounded on him. "Because it will rip out your heart," she hissed and he *knew* it to be true. He checked his rifle to ensure it was charged and ready. Mi-Kun opened the hatch. Adon jumped into the corridor and fired before really seeing the creature hanging from the ceiling. The thing's screech was cut short as its face boiled away and the blackened skull separated from the body.

Mi-Kun was waiting for him at the end of the corridor standing over the body of a mutant. How had she gotten down there so quickly? He ran to her side. The thing at her feet was headless. With a frown of distaste she threw the skull aside. "Be ready. There will be more."

He adjusted his grip on the rifle. "I'm ready," he said. "To find your brother *and* Katsumi."

Her yellow eyes flared. She shook her head. "You will learn," she said and opened the hatch.

Chapter 6

Katsumi recoiled at the unbearable stench that awaited her. It was a tangible curtain of putrescence. The smell tore at her nose and throat.

Bodies of creatures were heaped high, making a solid wall of ruined flesh. A shadowy figure considered her from behind that gruesome barrier. He was tall and broad-shouldered, with an aura of power surrounding him. Somehow she knew he posed her no threat.

"At last!" His voice was deep and smooth. "You've come. You are more beautiful seen by my own eyes. Come to me."

Katsumi knew him instantly. Here was the puppet master, the One who pulled her strings. The One who'd brought her here against all her better judgment. She knew, in the rational part of her brain that was still functioning, that she should raise her rifle and shoot him.

"My love," he said smoothly, motioning to the corpses that surrounded him. "I knew you would survive these filth. Come to me. Let me embrace you."

With a sweep of his arms the wall of bodies moved aside. Now she could see him clearly and he was truly beautiful. Like a lover softly caressing her flesh, his mind stretched out to hers, stroking her brain like fingers parting the folds of her pussy and dipping into its liquid center.

"Come to me."

Her sex pulsed with desire, her mouth was dry and her throat constricted. Without thought she stepped past the shattered bodies of the creatures and went to him.

One of the bodies Katsumi passed was clothed in an environmental suit. A pilot of the *Hades* she guessed. She recoiled at the bloody mess at the throat. The head

seemed almost torn from the body. There was, surprisingly, no blood in the wounds. Panic threatened to rip open the languid curtains of her mind. She suddenly wanted Adon.

“Forget the others,” he commanded. “There is only you and I.”

“Adon?” she whispered uncertainly.

“He belongs to Mi-Kun. You are mine.”

Jealousy was short lived as her mind was again inundated with love for Draco. Lord Draco. Her master, her lover, her future husband.

“Say my name,” he commanded.

“Lord Draco,” she murmured, luxuriating in the way the strange words caressed her tongue. He sighed and she felt so happy to give him pleasure. The strength of his mind, the power of his consciousness enveloped her. She was his and would belong to him for all time. She knew he loved her with a certainty she’d never felt about anything in her life.

He reached out to her and Katsumi allowed herself to be wrapped inside his protective arms. She pressed her face into his chest and hugged him with all her might. The bulge at his groin pressed undeniably into her stomach. *Take off this ugly suit*, he commanded.

Katsumi rested the pulse rifle against the pile of bodies. She pressed the stud at her neck and the suit released her. She peeled it away from her naked body and wantonly cupped her breasts, offering herself to him.

Lord Draco sighed in appreciation. “Beautiful.” His whispered voice seemed to echo throughout the ship. His thoughts prompted her to reach behind his head and press the stud of his suit. She admired his powerful body, brushing his cold marble-like skin with her fingertips. Beneath the alabaster flesh thick ropes of veins glowed blue. Katsumi’s whole body was tingling with desire.

She knelt to pull the suit down his legs so he could step out of the leggings. His monstrous cock sprang out and seemed to search for her mouth. It forced itself between her pliable lips and speared into her open throat.

Mouth stretched wide, she eagerly took it all. He grasped her head and pulled her deeper onto the thick shaft until the bulbous head stuffed her throat. While he fucked her mouth, his thoughts became focused on his own pleasure and Katsumi felt the blanket of his all-encompassing love lift away from her.

This is madness, her consciousness screamed.

But he loves me, she answered herself. I love him. He is my Lord Draco.

His orgasm was building and with it, his power over her dissipated completely. At first she felt deserted and like a distraught lover her mind searched for him, reaching out for him, begging him to return. But he was too involved with his own impending climax.

She had a moment now to think for herself. Despite his furious thrusting, his cock battering the back of her throat, she decided that she loved him still, though she allowed he was using her most callously. He had his reasons, she assumed, and that made it all right.

He groaned and his cock thickened in preparation for orgasm.

She wanted to delay his coming so she could think some more about her situation but his hands held her head in a vice-like grip, his thrusting hips driving his cock remorselessly into her throat.

She gagged and retched around his shaft. Her convulsions brought his attention back to her and she welcomed his calming caress. He withdrew the length of his cock, trailing strings of spittle after it. "Do you love me?" he asked.

"Yes, Lord," she replied and she did. She knew she did.

Draco pulled her to her feet and laid her on a bench. He grasped her knees and savagely opened her legs, exposing her sex most wantonly. He advanced on her until the head of his cock probed the entrance of her glistening cunt.

You are mine, his thoughts told her. For the rest of eternity, you are mine.

"Yes Lord," she replied.

"You are a virgin," he observed. "So much the better."

He bent over her, his blue lips hungrily claiming her. The sweet stench of death washed over her and she felt herself falling into a whirlpool of dark and clammy desire. His lips slid wetly from her mouth across her cheek to her neck. Wherever his lips touched, her flesh tingled and went numb.

The pressure at Katsumi's neck was a mere pinch and then Draco's mouth sucked at her hungrily. She thought she should struggle and prevent him from taking her life but she simply lacked the energy.

Katsumi was verging on unconsciousness when he raised his mouth from her neck. "You will not die, my love," he said soothingly. "We will rule the galaxy, you and I. Together we will have sons. We will give them whole star systems over which they will have dominion."

"Yes, Lord."

"How apt that I am to be your first and only lover."

"Adon," she protested weakly.

"He is Mi-Kun's," he said irritably.

He worked the head of his cock into the lips of her pussy. Katsumi opened her legs wider and locked her ankles behind his hips.

"Do you want me to fuck you?" he asked imperiously, his words initiating a memory. Adon had asked her the very same question. Adon, her first true love. "Say it!"

The cock at her pussy took on the character of Adon's. She adjusted her hips to give greater access to her open cunt. "Fuck me!" Katsumi demanded, bracing herself for the onslaught.

"Husband!" Mi-Kun's voice had come from behind her.

Draco looked up, his lustful expression changing to a beaming smile as his eyes alighted on her. "You've come, finally."

"We met resistance," Mi-Kun replied, suddenly beside him, looking down at Katsumi's breasts. "Her blood is pure?"

"Virginal," Draco replied with triumph in his voice. "Is he of good quality?"

She nodded. "Not a virgin, though his blood is sweet, his body healthy. He will serve."

"He has the knowledge?"

"Enough." Her yellow eyes descended on Katsumi. "And this one?" Mi-Kun's tone, though optimistic, was tinged with bitterness and hurt.

Draco reached out and caressed Mi-Kun's cheek with the back of his fingers. "She is of royal blood."

Mi-Kun's eyes dropped to the floor. "Then our needs are fulfilled."

"What's going on?" Katsumi asked huskily.

Draco ignored her and stepped away to face Mi-Kun. "You know if we are to survive, we must part. We cannot survive together."

"My husband, I want to be strong, but this is the hardest step."

Draco's face betrayed a broken heart. "Oh, my love, come here."

Katsumi watched in frustration as Draco, *her* Draco, undressed Mi-Kun, and hoisted her up onto his hips, impaling her on his rigid cock. Mi-Kun wrapped her legs around Draco's waist and clung to him, grinding her hairless cunt into his groin.

"Draco!" Katsumi shouted in anger. "You are mine!"

"Katsumi?" Adon was looking down at her. "What the hell is going on?"

"Adon?"

While Draco concentrated on Mi-Kun, Katsumi's mind cleared and she was instantly ashamed at what she'd just said. "Adon, has she fed on you?" she whispered.

"What?"

"Never mind. I can see. Come here."

He smiled, signifying his mind had cleared too. "I've been waiting to fuck you for hours."

"Then this may be your last chance. Quickly!"

He knelt between her thighs and positioned his straining cock at the mouth of her pussy. "Are you sure?"

"For Dil's sake! Fuck me!" She gripped his hips with her hands and pulled him forward.

At last, his cock, his beautiful cock, entered her. The exquisite moment was perversely painful. She felt a stab of pain when his cock forced its way past the thinly stretched barrier, but it lasted only a moment and then her body was suffused with such sublime sensations she thought she would die.

It took her breath away. It was oh, so wonderful. His cock was warm, so hard, and her cunt molded itself around it, sheathing it in a tight wet grip.

He began to withdraw. "I'm hurting you."

"No," she said, clinging to him. "No, not at all."

Despite her voluminous reading of erotic literature, nothing had prepared her for this. The sensations his cock provoked and sent cascading through every cell in her being had no adequate words to describe it. The words simply did not exist.

It just *was*.

Her first orgasm was a tsunami of sensation. Every nerve fiber fired in synchronic harmony and her brain collapsed into a singularity within her center and then burst like some personal big bang.

The muscles in her cunt pulsed rhythmically, milking Adon's thrusting shaft. He cried out suddenly and his hot seed gushed out. He collapsed onto her body and kissed her hungrily.

"Oh, Adon," she whispered. "I cannot lose you now."

Tears dripped from his eyes and he kissed her again.

She broke the kiss. "Adon, my love. I must tell you something. I have only a few moments. These two ghouls are vampires, immortal beings that live on blood. They have wiped out the human colonists of this ship and turned them into mutants. They have enslaved us with the power of their minds!"

"I thought as much, but didn't know what they were called."

"They want to escape the asteroid and take over the galaxy!"

He looked over to the pair. Mi-Kun was clinging in orgasm to Draco, his thrusting cock a glistening blur. Mi-Kun screamed again as another climax overtook her. Adon shook his head as if to clear his confusion. "What can we do?" he whispered.

"When they are distracted from us their mental power relaxes. We have to get away somehow and warn... someone."

"We can shoot them when they are not looking."

"I don't think that will work. They are too powerful," she said. "They can read our minds. I don't know how much they know."

At that moment Draco let out a roar. He'd been nuzzling Mi-Kun's neck. He'd bared his teeth, ready to bite, but he pushed her away instead. "Forgive me, my love," he whispered.

Mi-Kun stroked his cheek like he was a distraught child who'd broken a favorite toy. "I do, my love."

He suddenly swung and glared balefully at Katsumi with eyes of fire. "My virgin has been ruined," he hissed. "Get away from her!"

Adon was thrown aside by a mere sweep of Draco's arm.

Mi-Kun was smiling. "We must complete their initiation nonetheless," she murmured.

Draco snarled. "Quickly then. We've things to do."

Draco stepped toward her as Mi-Kun claimed Adon with a deep kiss. "We must bond, the four of us, and be joined together for all eternity."

Draco's fingers traced the outline of Katsumi's breasts. Her erect nipples ached at his touch. He bent his head and licked her neck. His hot, sweet breath on her cheek sent her senses reeling.

Beside her Mi-Kun and Adon were embracing. Draco's cock nudged Katsumi's pussy, still wet with Adon's come. "What is his name?" he asked though she knew he knew it well enough.

"Adon, my Lord," Katsumi replied.

Draco spat on his cock. "Order him to lie beside you."

"Adon," Katsumi called hesitantly. "Come here."

With a dismissive shove Mi-Kun pushed Adon onto the bench beside her.

"Ride his puny weapon," Draco ordered Katsumi.

Katsumi straddled Adon's hips and for the second time was impaled on his beautiful cock. Mi-Kun positioned herself over Adon's face so that her pussy lips covered his mouth. Mi-Kun reached out and grasped Katsumi by the shoulders and pulled her down so Katsumi's face was now level with her cunt. Adon was slurping hungrily at Mi-Kun's pussy and Katsumi longed to kiss him.

"Suck my clit!" Mi-Kun commanded.

"I'm not yours to command!" Katsumi spat.

A lance of pain speared through her brain. It was Draco. *Do it!* Reluctantly Katsumi stretched out her tongue and licked at Mi-Kun's hairless cunt. Inside her, Adon's glorious cock moved with slippery grace, stroking a spot that sent shivers of pleasure shooting into her brain.

Draco moved behind her and Katsumi imagined his view of her shamelessly raised ass. She guessed what he was about to do. Oh, how wonderful. To have both her lovers inside her at the same time!

"Your human has taken your virginity one way, but there is another."

"Yes, my Lord," she sighed.

Mi-Kun laughed. "Welcome to ecstasy."

Draco spat onto his fingers and rubbed his soothing saliva over Katsumi's asshole. Her flesh tingled and the tight muscles relaxed. He pushed the bulbous head against her.

His swollen length slid inside her ass with surprising ease and with no pain. She felt so complete, so full. Both Adon and Draco were now moving inside her with only the thin membrane separating their cocks.

Katsumi's orgasm came suddenly. The pressure of both cock heads massaging her inner flesh sent her over the edge of ecstasy. She raised her head away from Mi-Kun's clit and screamed.

With rough hands Mi-Kun pushed Katsumi's face back to her cunt. She found Adon's mouth instead and their lips met over the distended flesh of the vampire's pussy.

Katsumi's cunt and asshole contracted around their respective cocks. She sucked Adon's lip into her mouth and in her unconscious passion bit it. His blood washed into her mouth and she swallowed the coppery liquid unconsciously.

She rejoiced in the sinuous rhythm of the men within her, visualizing the venous shafts of their cocks rubbing each other through her flesh.

She came again and her pussy clenched around Adon's cock, which rewarded her with another glut of come. Beneath Mi-Kun's hot cunt he groaned into Katsumi's mouth and their kiss went on and on.

From behind her Draco's grunts became a bestial cry. His cock swelled, threatening to burst her fragile flesh. His powerful fingers which gripped her hips tightened, squeezing her flesh to the bone. Draco howled and released a flood of hot steaming come high up into her ass.

Draco bent over her and fastened his mouth on her neck. Katsumi moaned at the pressure of his lips and the sharp nip, reaching up to hold his head close while he slurped at her life blood.

Inside Katsumi's chest her heart galloped at a frenetic pace. Suddenly she went into a wave of convulsions that almost obliterated her consciousness.

Adon groaned from deep inside his chest when he came, his cock responding to her clenching pussy.

Finally Katsumi lay still, totally spent and used. She was barely aware of Draco withdrawing his persistently erect cock. Though she still straddled Adon's cock, Draco twisted her around and held her by the hair so she faced his muscled breast. With a sudden sweep of his hand he sliced open his breast.

Drink! he commanded and forced her face into the stream of cold blood pouring from the incision. Her mouth filled with the acidic liquid and with it, his malevolent essence.

Katsumi's perceptions expanded like a blossoming flower. Suddenly she could hear everyone's heart beating inside their chests. It seemed to her that she could smell each and every molecule in the room. Her sight! She could see the full range of the spectrum, even infrared and ultraviolet. No wonder Mi-Kun had staggered in the decontamination unit. The experience must have been blinding.

Katsumi could *see* through the walls and sense the movements of the mutants positioning themselves for ambush. She *knew* the mutants' thoughts and their angry resignation to death, because Draco and Mi-Kun could see their every move.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw Adon lapping at the incision Mi-Kun had made at her own breast. She cradled his head like he was a suckling child. Katsumi felt the deep stab of jealousy. Mi-Kun looked lovingly at Adon, and he returned the same adoring expression.

But there was more to learn. With Draco's blood came his memories. She knew what had happened to this starship and its people.

Soon after leaving the solar system Draco had infected Mi-Kun, and together they'd taken control of the crew. For a millennium they had controlled them, farming them for their blood.

Katsumi learned how the humans had revolted and sent the ship careering out of the galaxy. They'd aimed at this black hole but their calculations had been in error and the ship had been sent into orbit instead of a suicidal spiral into the sanguine singularity.

She winced at the terror and savagery that followed the revolt. How some of the vampires Draco had created for his army to fight the rebellion had made their own vampires to fight against him. The war had ruined the ship.

Draco and Mi-Kun had kept their own private stock of humans. The other vampires fed on each other's tainted blood and mutated. Then one mutant who the vampire couple had trusted tricked them. He stole their stock of remaining humans and created an army of his own. Draco and Mi-Kun were left to wither, to die, but with the

last of their mental energies they had attracted the *Hades*, which had strayed close by in its investigation of the black hole.

Before they could escape, the mutants had captured and killed the pilots. Without piloting and navigation skills, Draco and Mi-Kun waited for the SOS to attract their next victims.

Katsumi learned of Draco's plans for escaping and, ironically, destroying the asteroid, lest the mutants escape too. Adon was instrumental in the plan. Only he had the technical expertise to re-ignite and then destroy the *Star Seeker's* reactor.

But the worst was that Draco and Mi-Kun would have to separate. They feared drinking each other's blood and contaminating themselves as the others had done.

Draco pushed Katsumi's face away from his breast. "Enough for now."

Mi-Kun gave an orgasmic sigh and then plucked Adon from her breast. "There, my love. You are mine, for all eternity."

Draco pushed Katsumi away like a rag doll and quickly donned his gray environmental suit. He went and helped Mi-Kun. "We must go to the engines. Our enemies are massing for the final assault. But now we are strong. With new blood we are invincible."

While the two vampires were distracted with each other Katsumi took advantage of her release from Draco's mental control. She held Adon close while she listened to them converse.

"We can save him?" Mi-Kun asked.

Draco sighed. "Yes, my love. Perhaps we can, after all."

"Then we should try."

He nodded gravely. "As you wish."

Chapter 7

"Do you know what you're doing?" Katsumi asked.

Adon was busy manipulating the reactor's central console. They'd followed their masters and made easy progress to the engine room at the asteroid's south pole. The mutants had been massing to prevent their escape to the north and so had been surprised by this reversal.

"Of course. First we must get the engines powered up."

"Is that possible?"

"It has to be if I'm to destroy them."

"Will it work?"

Adon shrugged. "The out-gassing from the explosion will disrupt the asteroid's orbit. Eventually, it will spiral into the black hole. In the shorter term the explosion should fracture the asteroid. The air will leak out and the mutants will have nothing to breathe."

She glanced over to Draco and Mi-Kun. They were whispering, caressing each other's faces and kissing. She sensed the deep melancholy that had descended over them.

"Adon. Do you know why they are thinking of going back into the core?"

"I can't tell. They have blocked their thoughts."

"What will happen to us?"

"They'll separate and take us to be their consorts."

Draco and Mi-Kun were deep kissing and totally ignoring their human prisoners. Draco's love for Katsumi had momentarily dissipated and the pain it caused her, to lose him for only a few minutes, brought tears flooding to her eyes.

But she knew that Mi-Kun was Draco's true love and had been for a thousand years. For Katsumi that knowledge was almost unbearable. A strange determination gripped her. She would strive to displace Mi-Kun; she would possess the master vampire herself. She would take his love for her own.

Adon grasped her hand. She looked at him and sensed his genuine love. The perverse thoughts that Draco had planted in her mind fell away. She gazed hopefully into Adon's eyes. With her heightened senses she perceived love in his mind, not the powerful all-consuming love of the vampire, but something much more gentle and human.

"Do you actually love me?" she asked, not really believing it.

"As much as you love me."

She smiled, somehow, despite it all, contented. "What a thing it is to be loved."

"I wish..." He glanced toward the two vampires, his brow creasing in regret.

She held her fingers to his lips to silence him. "Me too," she said gently. "We'll always have this time."

"Remember me..."

She sensed a great outpouring of emotional energy and they turned to face their masters. Draco and Mi-Kun stood toe to toe, their palms pressed together. From their joining an aura of blue light cocooned them. "I will love you for all eternity," he whispered, though the room echoed with haunting resonance.

"And I you," she said, her yellow eyes weeping tears of blood.

"Till the crack of doom, I shall love you. Till worlds collide and rivers boil. Though the universe burns and stars turn to ash, my love will not fail. My love for you will warm the cold dead heart of existence. Only for you, Mi-Kun. Never doubt it."

"My love," she sobbed. "My sweet love."

"Though a billion stars lie between us, we will be joined. Look for me while you sleep. As the years settle, as the dust of ages grows deep within your mind, rake for me there and there you'll find me."

"Yes, my love."

"And know I will search for you. Through the centuries to come, though the carcass of time covers us like a blanket, in my sleep I will seek you. We will be together again and we shall rule all. We shall rule the galaxy."

Mi-Kun raised her quivering lips and they kissed.

Katsumi's heart cried out and Adon's hand gripped hers in jealous rage. It was a moment before they realized that they were both free. Occupied as they were with each other, the vampires' power over them completely disappeared. For a brief moment they were totally free.

Adon took Katsumi in his arms and kissed her. His mouth was warm and sweet. His lips held her tight until the power of the vampires like the incoming tide swept over them again.

"A kiss to last eternity," he murmured and then released her.

A warning klaxon blared. "We must go now," Draco said. "Or we are doomed."

"In my heart always," Mi-Kun said.

Mi-Kun faced the two humans. She snarled at Katsumi, the woman that would have her husband's love for the centuries to come. Her eyes settled on Adon and she took his hand. "Have you done it?"

"Yes, Mistress. I will initiate the detonation when you order it."

Draco gripped Katsumi's neck. "You will both wait here till we call for you. And then, my new lover, you'll fly me to the ends of the galaxy."

A last faint squeeze and Adon's hands dropped away from Katsumi.

Draco pulled Katsumi to him, his lips barely brushing hers. "Wait for my call. Then meet me at the *Hades*."

"They are coming down the core!" Mi-Kun hissed with venom.

"The scum have broken through our mind block."

Katsumi realized that the core had been their escape route to the north pole and the waiting ships. In her mind's eye, through Draco's far sight, she saw hundreds of creatures swarming down the core.

Draco cast his flaming eyes to them. "Complete the preparations and initiate the detonation when you are able. This ship must be destroyed."

"Yes, Master," Adon replied robotically.

"We will call you when the core is safe," Mi-Kun added.

The two vampires joined hands and glided down the corridor to the core, the pull of their minds decreasing with each step.

Adon returned to working on the reactor. Occasionally he asked her for assistance and Katsumi followed his directions precisely. She knew that the asteroid had to be destroyed. The galaxy had to be protected from these vermin. If Adon and she simply escaped themselves without destroying the asteroid, there was a risk that another ship would be lured here. If the creatures somehow escaped into the wider galactic community they'd spread unthinkable disaster.

But what of Draco and Mi-Kun? What havoc would they wreak if they got out? They'd have an eternity to pollute the galaxy with their foul lives, spreading death and misery among trillions of innocents.

Katsumi clamped down on her angry thoughts lest her Master know her true feelings. She hoped he was too occupied with laying a trap for the creatures swarming down the core to pay any attention to his new concubine's heresy.

While she watched Adon manipulate the vent controls to the reactor cooling system, a plan formulated in her mind. Access to their ship through the core was blocked by the creatures. But there might be another way.

"Adon," she said. "How long till you're finished?"

"Not long," he replied. His voice was passive and distant. He was still under the latent control of Mi-Kun.

"Are all systems still functioning?"

"Mostly," he said.

"Tell me when the thing is done and we can leave."

"The Master will tell us when to leave."

She rolled her eyes. "We can help the Master by going halfway."

He nodded and closed another vent. "There. We've shut down the cooling system."

"What will happen next?"

"The emergency cooling systems will try and kick in, but the damage caused by the ancient explosions will cause them to fail. The reactor will go critical in about thirty minutes."

She kept her thoughts shielded. "Okay. I think we should go back to the ships and make them ready for the Master."

"That is impossible. The corridors and core are still occupied by the mutants."

Katsumi grasped him by the shoulders and looked into his eyes. He stared at her blankly and she felt like slapping him across the face but restrained herself. She grabbed his crotch instead.

He blinked sharply.

"Now that I have your attention," she smiled, "are you here with me, Adon?" The vacant expression dropped from his face as Mi-Kun's control faded. "Remember the rail system we saw when we approached the asteroid?"

"What about it?"

"Do you think it still works?"

"Perhaps. Much of the equipment was well engineered and most of it has worked without maintenance for many centuries."

"How can we get to it?"

"Difficult. The terminus at this pole is in the damaged area."

"Adon, we need to get to the ship. It will be best for everyone if we go now."

His frown was evidence of the conflict going on in his mind. Mi-Kun had told him to stay and wait for her command. Katsumi hoped that the vampire's control had weakened sufficiently for Adon to win the mental battle. He nodded finally. "We can follow the access corridor to the next station and call the car from there."

She smiled and ruffled his hair. He'd obviously gone a step further and accessed Mi-Kun's memories of the layout of the ship. She gripped his shoulder and brought his lips down onto hers. "Do you think that will work?" she asked when she released him.

"We can try."

A klaxon sounded, informing them the reactor emergency shut down procedures had failed and detonation was thirty minutes away.

"We'd better go."

She ran after Adon to a hatchway which led to a platform above a single rail. He went to a control pylon set in the middle of the platform and examined the simple controls. Looking over his shoulder she saw the map indicating the tramway did a loop from the south to the north pole and back again on the opposite side of the asteroid. There were four tramways that girdled the small planet.

Adon pressed a green button. Immediately a hum erupted from the rail. "It's working. It will take a few moments to power up." He pointed down the track to a bulky hatch assembly. "The rail heads to a big airlock assembly," Adon explained.

She tightened her fingers about her trigger guard. "And it will take us to the north pole?"

"Yep." He traced the map with his finger. "There's even a stop near the *Nymph*!"

"Then we'll get out there and hike across the surface. How far?"

"Looks like about a kilometer."

"Can't we stop it closer?"

"There is an emergency brake."

The airlock hatch, like the iris of a great eye, suddenly opened and a squat box-shaped tram car rolled silently toward them. The side door slid open and she followed him onboard. He checked the control panel inside the door, satisfied himself he knew how to operate it and closed the door.

The tram lurched slightly and rolled into the airlock. Through the small window at the rear she watched the airlock hatch blink shut. The door in front of them opened to the awe-inspiring ruddy glow of the black hole. The tram trundled out and entered the

deep-sided trench that led eventually to the north pole and freedom. "Will you show me how to work it?" she asked.

He gave her a quizzical glance.

"Just in case," she offered.

He showed her the brake switch and indicated on the lighted map how the progress of the tram could be followed. "The *Nymph* is around here. So we'll brake when we get close."

His beautiful eyes had that dazed look about them again. Mi-Kun must have reached out for him. Katsumi reached up and caressed his cheek. Her fingers traced the line of his jaw, stopping just short of the wound at his neck. Poor Adon didn't have any mental techniques to shield himself like she did. He could turn on her at any moment if Mi-Kun so wished it.

They had less than twenty-five minutes to get the *Nymph* off and away. If Lord Draco and Mi-Kun turned their attention back on them instead of whatever mission they were on, she and Adon would, she feared, succumb to their thrall.

She didn't know how much time they had before Draco or Mi-Kun searched for them. It could be anytime. She had to act now if she was to act at all. She turned to Adon and kissed him. His lips were strangely cold and his tongue a lump in his mouth. "Forgive me," she said.

"Huh?"

She took a deep breath and hit him square on the jaw.

Chapter 8

Katsumi lowered Adon onto the bench seat, kissed him and snapped his helmet in place. Keeping her mind blank she went to the control panel to watch their progress on the lighted map. Stations were spaced unevenly along the track where they serviced installations of unknown purpose. Out the side windows she watched the trench walls rapidly slide by. At this rate they'd be at the pole in no time. For the first time in hours she felt truly happy. Escape was well within their reach.

She put on her own helmet. "Maia?"

"Yes, Katsumi."

"We need to leave this place immediately Adon and I are onboard. The asteroid's reactor will blow in," she consulted her wrist chronometer, "twenty-three minutes."

"The ship is prepped and ready," Maia announced.

"Thank you. If Mi-Kun or Lord Draco approach the ship, whatever you do, don't let them in."

"That is counter to emergency SOS protocols."

"Forget the fucking protocols! They are dangerous criminals," Katsumi shouted.

"SOS protocol programming prevents me from doing as you request."

"Maia, you must understand. They attacked us and tried to kill us. You must not let them on board."

"SOS protocol programming prevents --"

"Maia, you asked before about love. Remember? You asked me how do you know you're in love."

"I remember."

"Just imagine what your life, your existence, would be like if Adon dies."

The silence was protracted, an eternity when considering Maia's computing capacity.

"If Draco or Mi-Kun get on board," Katsumi continued urgently, "Adon will not survive, trust me on this."

Another, shorter silence. "Very well. I am reading Adon's suit telltales. He appears to be unconscious. Will he need medical attention when you arrive?"

Fear stabbed at her guts. What if she'd hit him too hard? "Perhaps..." The tram slid to a shuddering halt. "What the hell?"

She looked out the window. They were at a platform. She studied the map and decided it must be a scheduled stop. The silent seconds dragged into a minute. She punched the green start button. Nothing happened. "Come on!" She pounded the button again.

The tram lurched into motion and slowly accelerated, resuming, after a minute, its normal cruising speed. It must have been on a pre-programmed run. But that wasn't going to help them. She didn't want it to stop at the... she counted the stops on the map. There were fifteen. That meant at least fifteen minutes before she could brake close to the *Nymph*! She had to override it. But how? She asked Maia.

"From your description you do not have access to the main control board. The tram is a slave unit."

Katsumi pounded the wall with her gloved hand. "Can you do anything from your end? Help me here, Maia. This asteroid is going to blow in... twenty minutes!"

"Is there a com link on the board?"

She scanned the board. "Yes! Yes there is!" Hope burst through her chest and she described the unit to Maia. The tram came to another shuddering stop.

"That is an audio microphone only," Maia said. "That would be received by a human operator in the control center who would then direct the tram manually."

Fuck! "Are you saying what I think you are saying?"

"There is no one in control except the central computer. I cannot help you. It was a low probability option anyway. You are riding technology a thousand years old. It is unlikely that the central computer and I speak the same language."

"Fuck me dead!"

Defeated, Katsumi slid down the wall. The tram started off again. She crawled across the floor and sat by Adon's unconscious body. They weren't going to get out of this. They were going to die here.

Their future could've held so much promise. To end now before it had begun was just so unfair!

She fingered the wound at her neck. Her mind was flooded with images from Lord Draco's perspective. He and Mi-Kun were in desperate hand to hand combat with a horde of mutants. Draco punched into the chest of one attacker who had pounced on him and wrenched out the still beating heart.

Draco and Mi-Kun were fighting with a ferocity Katsumi could not comprehend. They were drenched in the sick, black blood of the incensed mutants. She couldn't figure what had drawn them back into the path of their enemies. They had a means of escape and had set in motion the destruction of the asteroid. Why risk sharing that destruction?

Katsumi's curiosity got the better of her. She reached out to Draco's mind. She felt like a burglar breaking into a heavily protected vault. She'd no idea of what the treasure she was searching for was, but she'd know when she found it.

The answer was guarded and fleeting in Draco's mind and she gently teased it open. Had he not been fighting for his existence Draco would've detected her invasion and she could only guess at the violence of his response.

Carefully she laid aside the folds of his thoughts and sensed Draco and Mi-Kun were searching for something... no, not something... someone.

She had fleeting images of a beautiful child morphing into a grotesque mutant.

A son! They were searching for their son!

The tram shuddered to a halt. She ignored the stop, too engrossed in studying the face of the vampire child. Suddenly her mind was filled with Draco's cry of exultation.

Katsumi was sickened by the savagery of it. Lord Draco was single-minded in his determination to... capture... no, to rescue his son! No matter the cost. He would gladly give away eternal life for his son.

The battle slowed. The last of the mutant warriors fell and there before them was their leader. A giant grotesque figure, its dirty, gray skin covered in open rotting sores. It stood alone amongst the bloody ruin of its army.

It couldn't be. Katsumi was repelled at the thought that this abomination was Draco's son.

"Come!" Lord Draco commanded.

The monster snarled.

"Come with us," Mi-Kun purred.

"Come," Draco pleaded. For the first time in a thousand years his voice quavered.

The mutant tilted its head, considering the bloody wreckage lying at its feet. It glared at its parents with its dead, yellow eyes and snarled in petulant rage.

"It is no use, son." Mi-Kun stepped toward him, her bloody hands outstretched. "Come with us."

Slowly, the mutant's hands went out to meet his mother's.

"Come," Lord Draco said, once more in command, though his mind was awash with parental love. "We have little time."

Katsumi fled the mind of her master lest he detect her. The tram moved off. She didn't bother to look at her chronometer. She had no interest in counting down the few remaining minutes of her life.

She laid her hand on Adon's shoulder. What a team they could've made. What wonders would they now never see? What could *their* sons and daughters have achieved?

Anger welled up inside her chest and burst. Her fists balled until the knuckles turned white. This wasn't fair! She couldn't -- wouldn't die! She'd live to have children! If Draco could have his son, then so should she!

Her unrestrained anger drew Draco's attention. She felt the stab of pain piercing her mind when he saw through her eyes where she was. She closed herself off, but too late, he was there, inside her head. She screwed her eyes shut and fought him with the only defense she had.

Her dreams.

She imagined Adon standing over her child's bed, their son wrapped in a blanket, a toothless, loving smile on the baby's lips. He had curly blond hair, and dimpled cheeks.

She risked a glance at the map. They were close to the *Nymph*. Just a few more stops and she could apply the brake. Then she'd have to run, carrying Adon up the steep sides of the trench and across the surface of the asteroid. She looked at her watch. Ten minutes. There wasn't enough time!

Panic made her drop her defenses and she knew that Lord Draco had seen the map. He knew where they were.

Katsumi looked through Draco's eyes. The vampire family was running, scuttling with amazing speed, along the corridors up the stairs to the north pole. They were closer to the ships than she was!

"God dammit!" She pictured the *Nymph* sitting defenseless on the surface, Lord Draco and his horrible family pounding on the hatch. What a total unmitigated fubar. "Maia. We won't make it. Save yourself."

"I cannot leave Adon," Maia replied.

"We won't make it, I tell you. The reactor will detonate in less than eight minutes. Leave!"

"And you are only ten minutes away."

"It might as well be an eternity. Lord Draco will attempt to get inside and fly to safety."

"He cannot enter the *Nymph*. I will not allow it."

"Then he is trapped." She smiled at the thought and sensed the onslaught of his rage when he too realized that the *Nymph* was denied him. She laughed out loud. She couldn't help it. His despair when they had first tried to escape in the *Hades* but hadn't been able to break the code for the manual override would be doubled by this new frustration.

A stab of fear penetrated her gut. That was something she shouldn't think of, and she tried to avoid the thought lest Draco learned it too. She bit her lip with effort while she returned to admiring her son.

Look how Adon held him; his light blond hair, the curl on his forehead, his piercing blue eyes and that happy innocent smile. Their son giggled suddenly and from within the asteroid, she felt Lord Draco's rage.

The tram came to another stop. Katsumi focused her eyes on the emergency brake button. She touched it lightly with her fingertip, caressed it, watching her finger leave a thin trail in the patina of dust. The seconds passed sluggishly. How many centuries had this tram lain dormant waiting for this last trip to the pole?

The tram moved off at last. Adon groaned, his face contorted, and at the same time a mental cry of rage battered its way into her awareness. Draco and Mi-Kun were running up the stairs to the airlock.

Mi-Kun was injured. Through Draco's eyes she saw blood streaming from her right arm. The scent of fresh blood leaking from the wound drove her monstrous son mad with lust. He attacked his mother, ripping into her arm with his flashing teeth.

Draco seized his son by the throat. With a roar he hurled him away and in the low gravity the monster flew fifty meters before thudding into the wall. He quickly found his feet and in fury charged at his father.

Draco, using his mental power, projected a field before him. The monster drew back.

"Enough!" Draco roared. "Or I'll leave you here to die."

His mutant son snarled in defiance but then bowed its head in submission. Draco hoisted Mi-Kun in his arms. Hatches flew open before them and Katsumi recognized the steps leading to the north pole airlock.

They'll beat us, Katsumi despaired. Only a few minutes left and they'll beat us! Unless...

Draco, my love. For just a moment she focused her attention onto Draco and his mental concentration faltered. The monster's son took advantage of her distraction and closed in. *I want your cock, she thought. I want your blood.*

Mi-Kun's son, driven mad by the scent of her blood, leapt upon them. Mi-Kun screamed.

Katsumi distracted Draco again. *Master, I want your blood.*

She felt the full force of his consciousness. In a moment he'd searched her thoughts. Enraged that her purpose was to distract him, he sent a blast that threw her back against the tram's wall.

She sat dazed, her mind struggling to climb out of the pool of numbing dark. The tram had stopped and when it lurched into motion once more she began to think coherently.

The brake!

She jumped to her feet. Bracing herself she locked her eyes onto the map and found the north pole entrance of the airlock. She had to stop the tram just before she reached it. Then she'd clamber out into the trench and up over the side.

She didn't look at her chronometer. She didn't want to know how many seconds she had left. She braced herself against the wall and punched the emergency brake.

Nothing.

She punched it again.

Nothing.

She cried out in despair. She was really going to die.

Chapter 9

Katsumi counted the bruises that marked the price of her short-lived freedom. How silly to think that running away from her arranged marriage would not come at such a terrible price, though not even her father could have dreamt up this punishment.

The tram came to a halt once again.

"Katsumi, you have a minute. You must try."

"What's the point, Maia? The reactor will detonate in a moment."

"But the asteroid will not disintegrate immediately. You must be on the surface before the explosion in case the airlock becomes inoperative."

"You mean...?"

"Only if you hurry."

She grabbed Adon by the shoulder. "Wake up! Please wake up!"

He moaned and she dragged him to his feet. She punched the door control and dragged him through. She guessed the way to the airlock and ran from the platform. There was a deep rumbling which shook the floor. The reactor was close to blowing. The cooling systems were failing, one by one.

The airlock was in sight. Beyond it, a hatchway was sliding open. Draco!

"Come on, Adon!"

As she ran she thought of their child, as yet unborn. They would name him Adon, after his father. He would be bright, cheery and polite. He would be smart. He'd grow up to be a great star pilot.

Only one more meter and they'd be safe.

Draco snarled and Mi-Kun whimpered in pain. The monster overtook his parents, sensing Katsumi's blood and rushing to make the kill. For a moment she

looked into the yellow eyes and then beyond into the putrescent mind. She saw only death.

She raised her rifle and fired. The thing shrieked but she'd missed. Draco had thwarted her aim. She shouldered the useless weapon and pushed Adon into the airlock.

The thing snarled and hurled itself at her. She punched the button and the door closed on its outstretched arm. It screeched in pain. The automatic safety system stopped the door and began to open it again.

"No!" she screamed and raised the rifle. Firing point blank, she severed the arm. The monster shrieked in pain and the door slammed shut.

She pressed the outer door control and realized that it would take time to cycle open. "Maia. How do I blow the outer door?"

"There may be an override control unit, but I can't imagine any reason they would build such a device into their airlock. It would compromise safety."

"Well, that's just fucking..."

The floor shook violently beneath them. Through her feet she could feel a low frequency rumble. A crack appeared in the wall. The reactor had blown and the hollow asteroid was cracking like a nut.

"Oh, shit!"

She pulled on her helmet. The outer door slid open. "Thank fucking Dil!" She grabbed Adon's shoulders. He was still groggy but was coming round. "Adon?"

His eyes were vacant, but his expression was angry. Mi-Kun was in there!

Katsumi rolled her eyes and sighed in resignation. "Sorry." Summoning all her strength she hit him in the stomach as hard as she possibly could.

She pulled him out of the airlock assembly and began dragging him toward the *Nymph*. The ground shivered beneath her feet. Maia had the ship's outer airlock door open and ready.

She scrambled into the airlock, pulling Adon behind her. The *Nymph's* engines rumbled. Before the airlock door closed she glimpsed the trio of vampires clambering out of the disintegrating blockhouse and making their faltering way toward the *Hades*.

Epilogue

They watched the final moments of the asteroid in silence. The fractures created by the reactor explosion together with the gravitational pressures of its new orbit were tearing it apart. Great chunks of rock and steel were exploding outward propelled by pockets of pressurized air that erupted through the splintering shell. Eventually the debris would spiral into the black hole and disappear forever into the soup of a quantum singularity.

Amongst the debris field she could no longer sense *their* presence. The vampires had survived. Thank Dil that Draco didn't need them any more. They had their son and they had a ship, courtesy of Katsumi's brilliant idea to disable the manual override. The vampires also had enough of Adon's knowledge to instruct the *Hades'* computer to quantum shift. She stared at the unsuspecting galaxy that lay at their murderous feet and despaired.

"Are you all right?" Adon asked.

She cradled his head at her breast. "Yes, my love."

"Where to next?"

"Anywhere," she said.

He caressed the wound at her throat. "We have a few things to work out, don't we?" He withdrew his fingers and rubbed his jaw. "Like, you really have to stop hitting me."

With her heightened senses she looked down at his sparkling eyes and saw into his mind, *feeling* his love. Her gaze slid to the wound at his throat. "That among other things." She touched his lips with her fingertip. "But we have an eternity to figure it out."

Mikala Ash

Mikala Ash wakes up every morning to the sound of the crashing surf and has her first coffee of the day on her verandah overlooking the wide Pacific Ocean. It's a double-edged blessing, she says:

I have to drag myself away to do anything at all -- like work. I'm a management consultant and I don't think Ricky (my beautiful Border Collie) fully understands the economic necessity of me working to keep him in the lifestyle he's become accustomed to (typical male). He just wants me to run with him along the beach all day chasing those pesky sea gulls. He's good company though, and if there are shape shifters in the world, I think I'd like him to be one -- loyal, trustworthy, obedient and protective.

A voracious reader, I've been writing in one form or another since I was little. I'm so lucky that I've found a way of sharing my passion for spicy romance and the more fantastical realms that hover just beyond our grasp.