

# Savage Amusement



Kate Hill

Changeling Press

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For a year rivalry has burned between spaceship pilots Starla Midnight of Amazurn and Gunther Morningsky, an overbearing alien crossbreed who oozes more testosterone than a bull in mating season. She can still hear his infuriating laughter when her engine fizzled out before last year's Speed of Light race -- the most popular race in the galaxy. This year she plans to give the jerk a dose of his own stinkin' medicine.

Before the race she attempts to sabotage his engine but is caught in the act by Gunther himself. Chained in the alien's lair, she's given two choices. If she makes love with him, he'll release her in time for the race. If she refuses, he'll hold her until after the race. Either way he's guaranteed to win, so it matters little to him.

Starla can't let a challenge like that slip by, not when she knows her ship is fast enough to blow Morningsky's out of space. She'll submit to the gorgeous alien's lustful kisses and body hotter than volcanic rocks. It's a tough decision, but a woman's got to do what a woman's got to do.

## Chapter One

"Damn, Starla, it must really suck when your archenemy is that frickin' cute," Jethrex said.

"You think he's cute?" Starla Midnight scoffed and reached for her glass of fruit juice. She would have enjoyed a more intoxicating beverage, but she never drank alcohol before a race.

She and Jethrex sat at a table in a dark corner of The Purple Asteroid, a popular hangout for those in the racing circuit. She glanced toward the object of their conversation. Gunther Morningsky sat at the bar, drinking with a couple of pilots from the planet Tauroth. Though smaller in stature than the bulky Taurothish males, Morningsky was fairly tall and exceptionally well-built. His black trousers and snug blue collarless shirt showed off his lean, mean body to advantage. Broad shoulders, a trim middle and long, hard-looking legs made him the poster boy for male fitness. His face was just as attractive. Enormous, wide set eyes such a pale blue they appeared to glow. Cheekbones that seemed chiseled out of granite and a square, very masculine jaw. He had to be good looking to carry off a buzz cut so short he might as well be bald.

In spite of her secret appreciation for his handsome appearance, Starla merely shrugged. "I guess he's okay, if you like the arrogant, primitive type."

"Mama like." Jethrex stared with lust as Morningsky took another shot of Lushithian whiskey then stood, giving the women a clear view of his gorgeous ass in those snug black pants. He stretched his arms overhead, muscles rippling across his broad back.

Shit. He had just the kind of body Starla liked. Sleek and fit without being overly bulky.

The Taurothish pilots said something to Morningsky, then called for the bartender who brought more drinks. Morningsky sat back down.

"If he keeps drinking like that, he's never going to make it to the race tomorrow," Jethrex said.

"Seems like that's the Taurothish guys' plan," Starla agreed. "I hope they succeed. It would serve him right."

"Are you still pissed over last year?"

Starla glanced at Jethrex and snorted. "You have to ask?"

"I know. It's all you've talked about since. That and Morningsky. Sometimes I think you don't hate him as much as you let on."

"You're right."

Her statement surprised Jethrex enough to turn her gaze away from Morningsky. "I knew it!"

"I hate him more."

Raising her eyes to the heavens, Jethrex reached for her glass.

The truth was, Starla loathed Morningsky's attitude but he stirred desires deep inside her -- desires she needed to keep hidden, mostly because she knew he'd never feel the same about her. He seemed to enjoy ribbing her every chance he got. To him she was just another competitor. Not only that, he had so many women flocking around him he could take his pick. Starla knew she wasn't what most men would consider beautiful. On her home planet of Amazurn, women with generous curves were the epitome of beauty. Starla wasn't the least bit glamorous and was built like a boy. In her profession, skill, not beauty, mattered.

Starla had been involved in racing for as long as she could remember. She'd been born on her parents' ship while they'd been on their way to winning the Speed of Light race for the third consecutive year. Needless to say she'd put a damper on them that year.

Unlike her parents, Starla flew alone. She didn't want or need the distractions that came with having a partner. Even though she admitted she sometimes missed the

perks that a partnership offered. Racing meant everything to Starla. She'd spent her entire life perfecting her piloting skills and saving for a top-of-the-line ship. Five years ago when she'd stepped on to the deck of *Wild Johnny*, she knew she'd found her dream vessel. It was as if she'd been born to fly it. Four years in a row Starla had won the Speed of Light, then last year *Wild Johnny's* engine had fizzled out just before the race began. She could still hear Gunther Morningsky's laughter when he noticed her predicament. What had he said about women and racing not being compatible?

Being alien to their galaxy, it was his first time competing there and Starla had hoped he'd take a beating. Unfortunately he had won the race, leaving the other entrants in his proverbial dust. Since then he'd become a regular competitor in the Silver Iris Galaxy. His path had crossed Starla's too often for her taste. Each time he'd look at her with a mocking expression in his eyes that made her long to punch him.

"I don't think I've ever seen anyone drink like that, except for the people from Vampirema," Jethrex continued. "Alcohol doesn't affect them."

"He can't be from Vampirema," Starla muttered. "He has no problem with sunlight, and besides, he's not even from our galaxy."

"Well if the poor baby passes out from excess, I'll be glad to tuck him in bed."

"Jethrex." Starla wrinkled her nose in disgust. "Think you can control yourself?"

"I'm trying, but it's been a while since I've gotten laid..."

Starla didn't pay much attention to her friend's words because a wonderful idea struck her. It looked like Morningsky and the Taurothish pilots would be occupied at the bar for a while. By the time they finished, he was bound to be drunk out of his mind...

"Jethrex, do me a favor?"

"What?"

"Make sure Morningsky doesn't leave the bar until I get back."

"Where are you going?"

"To sabotage his ship's engine."

Jethrex stared at her in shock. "Starla, I can't believe what you just said. That's cheating! You're the last person in the universe who I would expect to stoop so low --"

"Stoop low nothing! My ship didn't just fizzle out last year. Somebody fucked with my engine and who's to say he wasn't the one?"

"He didn't even know you!"

"Everybody knew I'd won four years in a row and the odds were I'd have won again. He came out of nowhere and blew everybody away, but his time was only one second behind my best time. One second. Doesn't it seem like a coincidence that I was the only one who could have touched him in that race and it was my ship that fell apart before the race even started?"

Jethrex looked skeptical. "You don't have any proof."

"Neither will he. Will you do this favor for me or not?"

At that moment Morningsky turned toward Starla and, with a mocking grin, raised his glass to her. One of the Taurothish men muttered something to him and he laughed loudly.

"Starla Midnight," he called in his lightly accented voice that sent a thrill of lust down her spine. "We'd like to know if your ship will actually get off the ground this year."

"I'm going to blow you out of space, Morningsky," she snapped.

"I like the sound of that," he said, his pale blue eyes sparkling. "Most intriguing."

"I'd like to blow him," Jethrex said under her breath.

Starla's hands clenched into fists. "Just do whatever it takes to keep him here. I'm going to give this bastard a dose of his own medicine."

Jethrex glanced at her with worry. "Starla, if you're caught you'll never be able to race again. At least not in this galaxy."

Jethrex's words almost sobered her. Almost. Morningsky smirked at her and winked before turning back to the bar. "I don't care," Starla said. "Are you going to back me or what?"

"All right. Just be careful."

Starla left abruptly, her heart pounding with fear, anticipation, and guilt. She knew she shouldn't be doing this. It was wrong. It was poor sportsmanship. Yet all she could hear was Gunther's laughter and all she could see was his gloating smile.

The dock outside the bar was surprisingly empty. Spacious with a smooth gray floor, the dock was enclosed on three sides by gridded silver walls. Dozens of ships of various sizes and models took most of the spaces. The eerie silence unsettled Starla as she hurried to her ship and removed her tool kit. Glancing around to be sure she wasn't followed, she made her way to Morningsky's ship. She had to admit it was a nice-looking vessel. Silver with black highlights and sleekly-lined, much like Morningsky himself.

Damn. She needed to stop thinking about him in that way.

Starla crouched down and crawled underneath the ship. No doubt he had an alarm field hooked up. Though inconvenient, it wouldn't deter her.

There were parts of her past she wasn't proud of, such as several years flying with a gang of contraband runners. It was during that time she learned how to disconnect alarm fields as well as some other tricks no upstanding citizen should know. Oh, she'd sorted out her life since then, but she still remembered most of the old tricks.

It took several moments for her to disengage the alarm field. She opened the outside engine hatch and stretched out beneath, staring at the intricate pattern of metal, wires, and memory chips.

Then reality struck her. What the hell was she doing? Did this guy affect her so much that she was willing to not only risk destroying her career, but jail time as well? Even worse, she prided herself in winning races fairly. Now here she was, about to become the sort of pathetic cheat she despised.

Jethrex was right. She had no proof that Morningsky had damaged her ship last year. He might be an asshole, but he didn't necessarily deserve sabotage.

Sighing, she closed the hatch and was about to reengage the alarm field when someone grasped her ankles and jerked her roughly from beneath the ship. Sliding along the hard dock floor, she screamed.

Kicking fiercely, she tried to free herself from her captor's steely grip.

Gunther Morningsky twisted her arm behind her back and pinned her, face down, to the cold, slick ground.

"Whoa. Whoa. Hold it." He applied more pressure to her arm. Leaning down, he spoke so close to her ear that his warm breath tickled her cheek. "My little saboteur."

"Get off me!" she bellowed.

He stuffed a thick black glove in her mouth, jerked her to her feet and dragged her toward the now open hatch on the passenger end of his ship. Starla fought him hard. Unfortunately he was more skilled than her in hand-to-hand combat and he was even stronger than he looked. She managed a few well-placed strikes and stomps, gratified to hear him grunt in pain and curse under his breath.

Only when the hatch slammed shut and he shoved her onto a cot built into the ship's sleeping area did the magnitude of the situation strike her. If she didn't escape now, she'd be his prisoner.

With bestial cry she flew at him, punching, kicking and clawing like an animal. Her nails dug into his flesh and she felt his blood on her hands.

"Crazy bitch!" He shoved her so hard she landed on her rump at the back of the ship. Before she had a chance to launch a second attack, he stepped into the cockpit and locked the door behind him. Seconds later, the engine roared and Starla rushed to the hatch.

Locked.

The ship coasted out of the dock and she felt a slight jolt as they rose into the air. Now she was in real trouble.

\* \* \*

"Let me out you fucker! You're going to regret this Morningsky, you bastard!" Starla bellowed, pounding futilely against the cockpit door.

"I already do," he replied over the intercom.

"This is kidnapping, you son-of-a-bitch," she shouted. "I don't know what the hell that means where you come from, but in the Silver Iris Galaxy it's a serious offence. You better let me out of this freakin' ship!"

She continued screaming at him for several moments, using every foul curse she'd picked up from Amazurn to Sultrene. Either he was ignoring her or had switched off the intercom because he didn't speak to her for the next several hours as they sped across the galaxy to heaven knew where. At least she hoped they were still in the Silver Iris Galaxy. From her position, she had no way of knowing where he was taking her.

Morningsky landed the ship so smoothly Starla didn't realize they'd touched the ground until he cut the engine. Her heart pounded with anticipation as the cockpit door opened and Morningsky glared at her with an icy look in his eyes. "Where are we?" she demanded.

"We can do this the easy way or the hard way. What's it going to be, Midnight?"

"I asked where we are." There was no way in hell she would let him intimidate her.

"Far from The Purple Asteroid. Now, are you going to come quietly?"

Curling her lip, she snorted with contempt. "Of course not."

He sighed, slipped a suspension pistol from his pocket and fired.

\* \* \*

"Oh, my head," Starla moaned. She felt as if a herd of elephants was stampeding across her skull. She blinked to clear her blurry vision and tried to push herself to a sitting position. Impossible since she was tied, spread eagle, to a bed.

Sheer terror shot through her and she momentarily forgot her headache as she tried to break free of the bonds but found the cuffs on her wrists and ankles too strong. What had Morningsky done to her? Since her clothes were intact, she guessed he hadn't assaulted her sexually, but what did he plan to do to her?

Glancing around, she noted she was inside what looked to be a sparsely decorated log cabin. Rope rugs were scattered over the floor. In one corner stood a

wood burning stove. She saw flames leaping in the stove's rounded belly and the air was pleasantly warm. The room had two doors, one to the left of the bed. Another directly across the room obviously led outside since there was a window beside it. Through the glass she saw snow falling on a backdrop of utter blackness.

The room had a small kitchen area with a sink, refrigerator and rough wooden table with two chairs. The only other piece of furniture was a scratched chest of drawers. Starla had to admit the place had a rustic charm.

The door opened and Morningsky stepped inside, looking demonically sexy in a long black coat and boots.

"You're awake."

"Give the man a gold star," she sneered.

"How do you feel?"

"What did you do to me?"

"The effects of the suspense pistol will wear off in a few minutes."

"I know how a suspense pistol works! What I mean is what did you do while I was unconscious?"

"Nothing."

"Then why am I tied to your bed?"

"To keep you from another tantrum." He closed the door behind him and stomped snow from his feet as he crossed the room, removed his coat and tossed it on the table. Beneath he wore those form-hugging black and blue clothes that showed off his athletic build to its best advantage.

"Tantrum? I'll give you a tantrum, you bastard!" She drew a deep breath then screamed as loud as she could, "Heeellp! Somebody help me! This pervert has me chained to his fucking bed! Help!"

Morningsky winced against the noise. "Let me help." He walked back to the door, opened it, and bellowed loud enough to shake the walls. "Hey! I've got Starla Midnight tied to my bed! Anybody out there?" Turning back to her, he shrugged. "There's nobody around for miles. Nothing in this area except Fangcats."

Fangcats! Panting from her screaming, Starla stared at him in horror. The only planet in the galaxy that had Fangcats was Vampirema.

Again he closed the door, then dragged a chair to the bedside and straddled it backward. His crystal blue gaze fixed on her. "Midnight, we need to talk."

"You need to untie me," she said. Damn, it was hard to meet his gaze. Those gorgeous eyes of his seemed to tear right through her, almost as if he could look into her soul.

"Not until we discuss a couple of things."

"Such as?"

"What were you trying to do to my ship?"

"Nothing."

He raised his eyes to the heavens. "Oh please. Give me some credit. You disconnected my alarm field and had my engine hatch open. I have to admit I was surprised you'd stoop to sabotage. You know, I used to have respect for you."

"I didn't do anything to your engine."

"Only because I stopped you before you had the chance. You completely destroyed my image of you, Midnight."

"Like I give a fuck," she said. Was this guy for real? Here she was tied to his bed and he was talking about her spoiling his image of her. Was he a complete psycho?

"I can't believe Starla Midnight, Goddess of the Galaxy, would *cheat* in a race." His taunting voice and annoying smirk made her long to slap him. If her hands were free...

"Look at the glimmer in your eyes. Ouch. Now you know why I've got you tied up. You'd just be all over me right now, if you were free."

"Don't flatter yourself, bozo. And for your information, I wasn't going to sabotage your engine."

"No?" He tilted his head to one side, his expression becoming even more intense. "Tell me more."

"Untie me."

"Tell me the truth first."

"Then you'll untie me?"

His lips curved upward in the slightest smile.

"All right. The truth is, I had intended to sabotage your engine but then I changed my mind."

"Did you really?"

## Chapter Two

"Yes, damn it!" Starla snapped. "I can beat you without cheating."

He sighed. "Pity we won't find out tomorrow."

More fear coiled inside her. "What do you mean?"

"I mean you're tied up here and that's where you'll stay until after the race. Unless..."

"Unless what?" Gods, this guy was out of his mind. She should have listened to Jethrex and not messed around with his engine.

"I might decide to be a nice guy, let you go and fly you back to your ship so you can compete tomorrow, as planned."

What should she do? Did he want her to beg, then laugh at her? Or did he just want a little groveling on her part and he'd actually let her go? Though it turned her stomach, she decided to try groveling. "Morningsky, would you please let me go? I swear I wasn't going to mess up your engine. Honestly. If there was some way to convince you --"

"Don't worry about convincing me. What's done is done. What I want from you is incentive."

"What kind of incentive?"

A slow smile spread across his finely-shaped lips and his gaze swept her from head to toe in a manner that made her nipples stiffen and her heart beat faster. Shit. This guy had a "let me fuck you" look that was hotter than any she'd ever seen.

"Spend tonight with me, in bed, and in the morning I'll let you enter the race."

The thought of making love with him aroused her so much that if she'd been standing she'd need to sit down. What was it about him? Yeah, he was good looking, but she'd seen guys with prettier features. He had a great body, even if he wasn't a

towering muscle-bound twenty-something. It was his eyes. They were incredibly expressive. She wondered if that was a characteristic of his species, whatever that was.

"You must be desperate," she said, masking her desire with contempt.

"Want the truth, Midnight?" He stood and squatted by the bed. His fingertip trailed down her cheek so gently that she scarcely felt his touch. "I've been desperate for a taste of you for a long time."

This both shocked and flattered her, but she forced her expression to remain impassive. "You hid it well."

"Yeah, I do that." He removed his hand from her face but continued holding her gaze. "What's it going to be, Midnight?"

"Before I decide, I want some answers."

Again he straddled the chair. "Ask away."

"Where are we? Vampirema? You mentioned fangcats."

"Yes."

"Why have you brought me here and where exactly is here?"

"This place belongs to me. It's located in the territory of the Clan of RedTooth."

Starla could scarcely believe her luck. Now she had a great hand to play. "You're in big trouble, bud. My friend, Jethrex, is best friends with the wife of the brother of the leader of the Clan of RedTooth."

He stared at her with a confused grin. "Wow. I think you lost me there, sweets. Your friend is the best friend of the leader of the Clan of RedTooth --"

"No! The brother of the leader."

"BloodRover."

"Yes!"

"You must be referring to Mary Katherine, wife of GreatSword, BloodRover's half brother?"

"Yes!"

"Nice girl. Human. Great --" He cupped his hands in front of his chest. "You know."

Starla gritted her teeth and glared at him. "Forget about her boobs! If BloodRover finds out you have me --"

"BloodRover is my half brother."

"Then you're going to be in... Say what?" Starla wrinkled her nose.

"BloodRover and I had the same father."

She stared at him for a moment in stunned silence. If that was the truth, then she was in more trouble than she thought. "You're lying. I thought this was the first time you've been to our galaxy. How can your father possibly be the former ruler of the Clan of RedTooth?"

"It's a long story, but it is a fact. Actually this is my land we're on now. He left it to me when he died."

"You don't look like you're from Vampirema. You don't have problems with daylight. I didn't see any fangs --"

"They retract and no, I have no problems with light because my mother was a Softspeaker."

"I'm not familiar with them."

"No reason you should be. They're from a distant galaxy. Do you have any other questions?"

She stared at him and drew a deep breath, a chill of fear and desire darting through her. Many disturbing rumors floated around the galaxy about the people from Vampirema, how they drank blood and had mystic powers. She knew by stories from Jethrex that at least some of these rumors were true. What about Gunther's Softspeaker half? She knew nothing about that particular breed of alien. What if they had strange mating rituals?

"I have no intention of forcing you to sleep with me, Midnight. But I'm not going to let you enter that race without payoff, either. You can stay here until the race is over, then I'll release you."

"What if you get injured or killed during the race? Then I'm stuck in the wilds of Vampirema."

"I'll make sure I tell your friend Jethrex where you are. Most likely she'll free you before I get back from the race."

Why should she believe him? He was obviously a space rogue, kidnapping a woman and chaining her to his bed. What a savage.

With eyes that could melt a glacier and the tightest ass she'd ever seen. It would be a sacrifice, but she could tolerate fucking him for just one night.

Who was she kidding? Since she'd first laid eyes on Morningsky she'd had endless sexual fantasies about him. In a few of them he'd even tied her up just like this. Still, fantasy was one thing. Reality was another. What kind of lover would he be? Was he only interested in satisfying himself, or would her feelings count?

Was she crazy? Pleasure was the last thing she should be concerned about. Yet she'd dreamed about sleeping with him for so long she couldn't help wanting to enjoy it.

"All right," she sighed, closing her eyes for a moment and swallowing hard. "I'll do it."

His eyes gleamed with pleasure. "Great."

He approached and unzipped the front of her snug red shirt. His fingertips grazed the tops of her plump breasts swelling above her bra.

"Hey! Aren't you going to untie me?" she demanded.

Gazing at her through his thick lashes, he smiled. "Eventually." He placed a firm but gentle hand on her inner thigh and stroked higher until he covered her soft mound. His palm warmed her and his touch aroused her far more than she wanted to admit. If only she wasn't wearing pants. He stroked her and she sighed with pleasure. A slight smile tugged at his lips. "If you'd prefer I stop, we can just forget the whole arrangement."

"Yeah. Right."

"Forcing women doesn't turn me on, Starla."

"What do you call this?"

"I call this fulfilling a fantasy."

She curled her lip. "Whose fantasy?"

He stood and she nearly protested the removal of his warm, stroking hand.

"I got the idea you'd enjoy being tied up."

"Why would you think that?"

He didn't reply, but continued holding her gaze. Again she felt as if he was peeling away her layers of self-protection and viewing her raw emotions. He tugged off his shirt, baring a chest even more gorgeous than she'd imagined. Lean, hard-looking and lightly dusted with chestnut hair. He had gorgeous abs, too, and arms that made her wish he'd wrap her in a firm embrace. He even had those sexy veins running along his biceps. Licking her lips that had gone dry, she tried to think of something to say but couldn't focus on anything except his body.

"Well, Starla? Do you want me to stop?"

"And risk missing the race? Are you kidding?" she lied. The race was now only a lame excuse for playing this bizarre game. She *wanted* him to fuck her. Yes, it seemed a bit strange that he'd guessed her bondage fantasy, but at the moment she wasn't going to question or complain.

Strangest of all, he was the only man she actually *wanted* to play this sort of game with. Anyone else she would have fought to her dying breath.

Once again he sat beside her on the bed and leaned close, speaking against her lips, "The race is pretty important."

"Yeah," she whispered, lifting her head slightly so their lips touched.

He deepened the kiss, pushing her head back onto the pillow and teasing her with long, slow sweeps of his tongue. Damn, she wished her hands were free, yet at the same time knowing he controlled her completely was a major turn-on.

Their kiss broke and he trailed his lips over her forehead. He kissed her eyelids then ever so slowly kissed every inch of her face and playfully bit the tip of her nose. Only when he licked and kissed her neck did she remember he'd admitted to having "retractable" fangs.

"What's wrong?" he asked between kisses. "What are you afraid of?"

"Well, I'm tied to the bed of a guy from Vampirema. Are you going to bite me?"

"Do you want me to?"

"No! I mean, I'm not sure." Starla remembered hearing stories from Jethrex about the pleasure that citizens of Vampirema could bestow with a bite. According to her, it was much like an orgasmic rush. Still, the thought of being *bitten*...

"It won't hurt," he assured her, his tongue flicking over the base of her throat.

"No?" she breathed, her eyes slipping shut. If only she could touch him. Run her fingers through his... Remembering his buzz cut, she smiled. So she couldn't run her fingers through his hair, but at least she could clutch his adorable, nearly bald head.

He unfastened the front hook on her bra and freed her breasts. Briefly she recalled his comment about Mary Katherine's great breasts. Great big breasts. Starla wasn't incredibly endowed in that department. She wondered if he'd mind. Starla had always been satisfied with her appearance, but at that moment she feared opening her eyes, not wanting to see disappointment on the face of this sexy alien.

*Don't be a chicken, Starla.*

She felt his fingertip gently trailing over her breasts and circling her nipple. Slowly she opened her eyes and her pulse skipped at Gunther's expression of raw desire. His gaze fixed on her breasts as he cupped them in his hands, brushing his thumbs over her nipples, sending little quivers of delight through her.

"You are fucking gorgeous," he said, his voice just above a whisper.

"I thought Mary Katherine had great breasts."

"They're big. These are perfect." He bent and captured one of her nipples between his lips. He rolled his tongue over the taut bud then sucked upon it.

Starla gasped, her body arching toward him. She tugged on the cuffs, but they held firm. The very tip of his tongue traced her areola then flicked across her entire nipple. He continued sucking and licking her nipples until Starla thought she'd go mad with desire.

"Gunther, will you untie me?" she panted, squirming as much as she could with the bonds in place.

"Eventually." He gave her left nipple one last tug with his teeth. He licked his way down her belly. Reaching her trousers, he unzipped them and tugged them partway down her legs, as far as the bonds allowed.

"No underwear," he commented, a pleased glimmer in his eyes. "A woman after my own heart."

He cupped her soft mound and massaged gently, stirring her passion even more. The wonderful sensations made her clit and pussy ache with need. When he slipped a long finger slowly into her lust-slicked pussy, she moaned softly. Though she longed to close her eyes, she didn't want to stop watching him fondle her. He had such gorgeous hands, rounded yet long-fingered, the nails short and clean. She stared at the pattern of veins on the back of his hand as he caressed her.

Another finger entered her, stroking, exploring, and rubbing her wet, sensitive flesh. He dipped his thumb partway inside as well, just enough to soak it with her essence, then he used it to circle her clit.

"Oh, shit," she gasped, unable to keep her eyes open a moment longer. He took his time with her, speeding and slowing his caresses and keeping her hovering on the brink of orgasm.

He began fondling her breasts as well, first one then the other. He kneaded them and lightly pinched the nipples. This was almost too much.

"Gunther, you bastard, untie me," she panted, straining against the chains, her hips lifting in time with the rhythmic stroking of his hand. "And if you say eventually, I'll make you pay. I swear."

He chuckled, a wickedly masculine sound that aroused her even more. Quickening his rhythm, he pushed her to the verge of climax and this time he didn't stop.

"Ah! Oh gods!" she cried, her heart pounding and body arching as far as the bonds allowed. It was as if she'd caught fire, she felt so hot.

Gunther continued stroking her and gently pinching her nipple until the last pulsation rolled through her and she lay, limp and panting, her pulse slowly returning to normal.

Finally she opened her eyes halfway and found him staring at her. He wasn't smiling this time and his expression was so full of lust that a thrill darted through her. His eyes seemed aglow with blue flames of desire. No man had *ever* looked at her quite like this.

"Now that you're warmed up, we can get started."

He stood, walked to the chest of drawers, and opened the top one. After shoving aside several articles of clothing, he removed a round, purple device. Starla's curiosity rose. As he approached the bed, she stared at the object, noting one side was smooth and the other had dozens of little nubs. He tightened his grip on it and the purple gizmo emitted a pleasant, humming sound.

## Chapter Three

A vibrator.

Starla had to admit Morningsky surprised her. For some reason she thought he'd be the type to push a woman down and satisfy himself with a few fast thrusts. Instead he seduced her with bondage and sex toys. "If you plan on touching me with that, it better be clean."

"It's clean. Brand new, actually." He sat on the bed and began stroking her inner thigh. Damn, she loved the sensation of his warm, callused hand on her soft flesh. "Last time I docked on Sultrene, I bought it with you in mind."

"Yeah? I bet you say that to lots of... women... oh, gods," she murmured, closing her eyes halfway and squirming a bit when he held the purple device over her clit. He didn't apply firm pressure with it, just enough to tease her and it felt wonderful.

She glanced at him and saw his gaze fixed on her pelvis. His lips parted and he ran the tip of his tongue over the points of his ivory fangs. How would it feel when he finally bit her? In spite of the stories of how much pleasure his kind could bring with a bite, she couldn't quite believe being bitten wouldn't hurt.

As if sensing her thoughts, he bent and took one of her nipples between his lips, rolled his tongue over it then scraped it gently with a fang. The sensation was unbelievable. A pre-orgasmic thrill shot through her and she moaned, her wrists and ankles twisting in the bonds.

Applying a bit more pressure with the purple gadget, he licked and sucked her nipple while intermittently teasing it with his fangs. Starla had never imagined sex could be this good. Maybe it was because no man had ever aroused her as much as Morningsky. For a year she'd competed with him, fought with him, hated him while

desiring him from afar. If she'd only known he'd wanted her too, they could have done something about satisfying the sexual tension long before now.

Yet this wasn't purely sexual. She'd been hot for guys before. This was something deeper. He touched a hidden, feminine part of her she'd never realized existed. He made her feel womanly and desirable. Yes, she'd bedded other men and experienced physical pleasure but no emotional connection. With Morningsky, she felt both.

He pierced the very tip of her nipple with a fang and all coherent thoughts vanished from her mind.

"Ah! Oh, Morningsky!" she gasped, her hips thrusting against his hand that pressed the vibrating gadget harder against her ultra-sensitive flesh. Between his bite and the stimulation on her clit, she came in a blinding haze of passion.

Gunther sucked her nipple. His tongue darted over it and she knew by his groans and growls of pleasure that he must be tasting her blood.

He kept lapping and sucking her nipple, but released the device and used his hand and fingers to continue stroking her clit and pussy until the last ripple of pleasure rolled through her.

Completed sated, Starla lay still for several moments, somewhere between wakefulness and sleep. She stirred when she felt him unfastening the bond on her left wrist.

"Finally," she murmured, a slight smile tugging at her lips. "It's time for some payback, Morningsky."

Glancing at her from the corner of his eye, he moved to her other wrist and freed it. "Tell me you aren't loving this, Midnight."

"I'm loving it," she said, running her hand over his arm. Using one fingertip, she traced the enticing vein running along his biceps. Shit, he felt as rock hard as he looked. This was a man. So much more appealing than the passive, effeminate males on Amazurn. She could scarcely wait to cling to him as he filled her with his thick cock.

He released her other wrist and pressed a kiss to her palm, using the tip of his tongue to tickle it.

"You're beautiful, Midnight," he said, taking her face in his hands and kissing her.

Starla responded with fervor. Her tongue danced with his and her fingers caressed his head. His buzzed hair felt surprisingly soft, almost velvety.

He broke the kiss and tugged away from her embrace to unfasten the bonds on her ankles. Then he unzipped his trousers and shed them quickly along with his boots and socks. Heavens, his legs were superb -- so long and lean. And he had an absolutely magnificent cock. Thick and long, the ivory flesh patterned with veins.

"Oh, Morningsky," she breathed, pushing herself to her knees, her gaze fixed on his cock.

He stepped closer and she curled her fist around the hard, satin-skinned staff. Pumping in a steady rhythm, she tilted her gaze toward his, her belly tightening at the lustful expression in his eyes. After a moment she managed to tear away from his hypnotic stare and look at his cock that was even stiffer than before. The urge to suck him almost overwhelmed her and she licked her lips.

"Do you have any protection?"

"Yeah." He walked to the chest of drawers. He removed a container and sprayed his cock with a transparent contraceptive, disease control shield.

Starla approached and swept her hand across his shoulder blades.

"Mmm," she purred, relishing the sensation of his smooth flesh over hard muscle. She kissed her way down his spine. Dropping to her knees, she grasped his gorgeous, rock-hard ass and kissed both cheeks.

Gunther turned so his cock brushed her face. She relished his sexy scent and the feel of his powerful body. He'd already given her such pleasure and she wanted to do the same for him.

Clasping his cock in both hands, she lapped the tip. Her tongue tickled the sensitive underside and he groaned, his fingers weaving through her hair. The muscles of his steely thighs stiffened and his hips thrust against her.

Starla sucked him deeply into her mouth. When she felt his cock head brush the back of her throat, she moaned. The vibrations must have pleased him because he groaned and his hands trembled slightly.

"Ah! Gods, Midnight," he breathed. "You have talent. Keep this up much longer and you might just kill me."

She chuckled and sucked harder, then licked his cock from stem to head.

"Mmm," he groaned. "Beautiful, sexy Starla. Come here, sweets."

He grasped her shoulders, tugged her to her feet, and kissed her. Damn, his kisses tasted wonderful! He swept her into his arms and carried her to the bed.

Starla's heart pounded with anticipation. He covered her body with his and rained kisses along her neck.

"Starla, oh, baby," he breathed. The tip of his cock rested against her wet pussy lips and he filled her with a long, slow thrust.

"Oh, Gunther!" she gasped, wrapping her arms and legs around him and clinging tightly, loving the feel of his hot, hard body.

Speeding and slowing his thrusts, he kept her hovering on the brink of climax until she couldn't stand the delightful frustration a moment longer.

She cried out mindlessly, her body convulsing in waves of orgasm.

"Gods, Starla!" His moist lips and wet tongue teasing her flesh before he sank his fangs in deeply.

His bite brought even more pleasure than rumor had promised. She moaned, almost weeping in ecstasy.

Somewhere in the mind-numbing haze of passion, she felt him come. With an animalistic growl, he filled her with a powerful thrust. His body stiffened and every muscle tightened as he came.

Gunther collapsed on top of her, his lust-dampened body pinning hers to the bed. After a moment he moved aside so as not to crush her and tugged her to his chest, holding her close as their breathing returned to normal.

Finally Starla opened her eyes and lifted her head. She found him gazing at her with those soul-stealing blue eyes, only this time she felt no frustration regarding their hypnotic pull over her. Their sexy expression warmed her to her toes and she sighed contentedly, stroking his calf with her foot.

"Tell me more about yourself, Gunther Morningsky. What kind of people are Softspeakers?"

"They're a peaceful race," he said, gently stroking her back with long sweeps of his hand. It felt so good she barely resisted the urge to purr with pleasure. "They communicate telepathically, especially using their eyes."

Her brow furrowed. "So you can read my mind?"

"The telepathic gift varies in half-breeds, but I've been lucky and have considerably strong telepathic powers. It might be due to my Vampiremite side."

"Yes. Supposedly those from Vampirema can form telepathic bonds when they engage in deep blood sharing. Just like we..." her voice softened and a strange -- but good -- feeling tightened her belly, "Like we did."

He smiled tenderly, ran a fingertip over her lips. "Speaking of telepathy, I want to warn you about the Taurothish pilots I was drinking with at the bar. They aren't above cheating to win the race. Watch your back, Midnight, because they won't hesitate to stab you, me, or any other pilot in it."

"Thanks for the warning. And was it your Vampiremite side that kept you from getting staggering drunk at the bar?"

"Softspeakers aren't affected by alcohol, either, so yes, my heritage on both sides kept me sober. Actually, you are my weakness. Your blood is absolutely intoxicating."

"Yeah?" She smiled.

"Uh huh. If I'd taken any more I'd be drunk as a skunk."

"Really?" She lowered her lashes and tilted her head, completely exposing the side of her neck to him.

"Sorry, sweets." He gently stroked her neck. "I don't want to risk hurting you by taking too much, tempting as your offer might be."

"Well," she sighed, "since I can't read your mind, are you going to tell me more about yourself? Such as, does your loyalty lie with Vampirema or with whatever planet the Softspeakers are from?"

"Until recently, the Softspeakers didn't have a planet. They were an oppressed people, practically slaves to the residents of Ophelia. As for where my loyalty lies, that's a difficult question. My father met my mother during an out-of-galaxy trip. He was quite taken with her and she with him. It's against Softspeaker custom to sleep with someone you're not married to, but she did anyway. He offered to take her back to Vampirema, but there was a struggle for freedom going on among the Softspeakers and she refused to abandon her people."

"That was courageous of her."

"Yes. It was. Softspeakers suffered terribly at the hands of the Ophelians. I stayed with her until I was six years old, then she began to fear for my safety since I was at the age when many were sent to work for the Ophelians. She sent me to my father on Vampirema, but my heart was with the Softspeakers. He tried to groom me to take my place in the royal family of RedTooth, but at sixteen I ran away and returned to join the Softspeakers' struggle for freedom. I got a job running Butterscotch Whiskey for a man called Romeo Taurean, a great freedom fighter for the Softspeakers. About a year later, my father found me, but I refused to return to Vampirema. Needless to say he was upset and disowned me."

Starla's brow furrowed. "That's terrible."

"He was a proud man. Proud of his heritage. He expected me to be the same, but I couldn't ignore the Softspeakers. Not until I'd done my part in their battle for freedom."

This impressed Starla. At first she'd thought Gunther to be sexy, annoying, and slightly amusing. She'd never imagined him to be a man of depth and loyalty.

"My father forgave me in the end and left me this land."

"Maybe he finally realized how much helping your mother's people meant to you."

"Maybe."

Starla kissed his cheek, then his lips. His arms tightened around her and he sighed.

"You smell so good, Midnight. You're so soft. I don't think I could ever get tired of holding you."

"Wow. I never thought you could be sweet, Morningsky, but I guess there's a lot I don't know about you. So tell me how you ended up back here. Did the Softspeakers win their struggle for freedom or is it still going on?"

"Romeo Taurean and the freedom fighters made arrangements for a mass migration of our people to the Tyarra-Set galaxy. A short time ago, we all managed to escape and settle there, most of us on the planet Octess. Some of our Softspeaker relations colonized there ages ago and their descendants are still loyal, so they offered us sanctuary. We've been safe and happy."

"Then why come here?"

"I guess I like excitement. Now that the fighting is over and our people are settled in a place where Butterscotch Whiskey is perfectly legal," his eyes glimmered with amusement, "I needed something more fulfilling. I spent so many years living by my skill as a pilot that I figured why not put my talent to use for something fun for once in my life. Racing seemed like a good opportunity to do that."

She nodded slowly, a bit of guilt washing over her. He'd had such a difficult life and all she'd been concerned with was winning the stupid race. She'd nearly sabotaged his ship to do it. But she *had* changed her mind. She desperately wanted him to know that.

"Morningsky, I honestly wasn't going to mess with your engine. I'd changed my mind. I --"

"Shh." He kissed her to silence. "I know. I can read your mind, remember?"

She felt relief, then a touch of irritation. "Are you reading my mind all the time? Isn't that an invasion of privacy?"

"Pretty much."

"And you admit it, just like that?"

"I won't read your mind unless you say it's all right, or unless I think it's absolutely important."

She raised her eyes to the heavens. "I suppose that will have to work, even though it's unfair."

"Damn right it is."

"You're a brat, Morningsky."

"Uh huh. I've answered your questions. Now you answer mine."

She flung him a teasing look. "Wouldn't it be easier if I just give you permission to read my mind?"

"True. But I'd rather you talk to me." He gazed at her with such sincerity that she melted. This guy was dangerous to her emotional health.

"What do you want to know?" she asked.

"Tell me about your family. You're obviously from Amazurn."

She snorted. "Obviously? I don't exactly look like your average Amazurnian woman."

"Uniqueness is to be admired."

"Yeah." She smiled, caressing his chest. "It is." Surely he was the most unique man she'd ever met.

"Keep talking."

"My parents aren't average Amazurians, either. For instance, my mother doesn't like submissive men. It took her a while to find a guy like my dad on Amazurn. Sometimes I wonder where he came from because he doesn't have a submissive bone in

his body. His unconventional attitude got him into lots of trouble when he was young, but after meeting my mother he calmed down a bit. I guess finding someone who appreciated his *uniqueness* was exactly what he needed to straighten out."

"That makes sense. We all want to be accepted."

Starla's brow furrowed. "You know there's more to you than I thought."

"I know what you thought."

"Well, before tonight you haven't exactly shown me your deep, sensitive side."

"Until tonight you haven't been open to it."

Sighing, she nodded. "You've got me there."

"Back to your family. Do you get along well with your parents?"

"Yeah. I get along great with them. They taught me to fly and fiddle with engines. When they were young they used to be big in the racing circuit. Now they race occasionally but they mostly spend time at their repair shop. They fix racing ships and design custom ones."

"They sound like interesting people."

"They are. You'd like them."

"Maybe I'll meet them sometime."

"That would be nice. They did a lot of work on my ship."

"It's a kick-ass model for racing, but if you ever get hit in that thing a lazar cannon will go through it like a tin can."

She grinned. "It's not like I take *the thing* into battle."

"True. And the racing laws in this galaxy are tighter than in others I've been to. So, do you have any brothers or sisters?"

"No siblings. Do you, other than BloodRover?"

"A much younger brother and sister. My mother finally married. She lives on Octess."

"I'd like to see Octess someday. I'm interested in learning more about Softspeakers." She kissed him, taking his lower lip between her teeth and biting gently.

"Mmm." He rolled her onto her back, his lean, hard body pinning her to the bed. "Looks like we'll have a lot to talk about after the race tomorrow."

"Yeah," she murmured, her eyes slipping shut as he began kissing her neck. Running her hands over his smooth back, she relished the sensation of his sleek muscles.

Deep inside, she felt a twinge of uncertainty. All these plans sounded great, but would they really follow through with them or go their separate ways? She hoped not. Never in her life had she felt so comfortable with a man, yet at the same time so aroused.

Again he kissed her mouth. This kiss was meant to postpone the conversation and drive away all thoughts except for the raw pleasure of him once again fucking her into oblivion. His tongue stroked hers with an exquisite combination of tenderness and lust.

This night with him was the best in her life. It was better than a fantasy come true because Gunther hadn't turned out to be a dream lover, but a flesh and blood man with emotions deeper than she'd ever imagined.

She ran her hands down his back to his hips and buttocks, closing her eyes and allowing her other senses to take over. The delicious, musky scent and the warmth of his skin aroused her and the sound of his breath close to her ear sent little shivers of delight down her spine.

Starla spread her legs to better accommodate him as he thrust his cock deep inside her. Once buried to the hilt, he remained stock still, allowing her to enjoy being completely filled by him.

"Look at me," he said in a husky whisper.

Obedying him was difficult with so many delicious sensations rolling through her, but she did what he ordered. Her breath caught as she stared into his enormous blue eyes that seemed to reflect all the emotions churning inside her.

"Oh, Gunther," she breathed, pressing her heels into his calves. His thick, hard cock teased her in all the right places.

"I'm here, sweets," he murmured against her lips before kissing her again. His tongue thoroughly explored her mouth. Those warm, wet kisses made her feel loved and desired in a way she'd never experienced before. Maybe it was because she'd never before had such strong feelings for a lover.

"I wish we could stay like this," he breathed. "I want to stay right here inside you forever."

She squeezed him tighter. His words sent another hot rush of desire through her. She moaned softly, her clit tingling and her pussy clenching around his cock, spurring him on until he plunged into her fast and hard. Almost simultaneously they soared into orgasm.

Starla still snug in his arms, Gunther rolled onto his side.

Sighing with pleasure, she wiggled even closer, her back and bottom pressed against him.

"Good night, Midnight," he whispered against her hair.

"Aren't you afraid I might try to escape? Maybe even steal your ship?" she teased, her voice sleepy.

"Uh uh," he murmured, squeezing her a bit tighter and kissing the back of her head.

"Why not?"

"Because both of us are right where we want to be."

She couldn't argue with that. Wearing a contented smile, she drifted to sleep.

## Chapter Four

The following morning, Starla sat across from Gunther at the table, enjoying breakfast before he flew her to back to her ship. Lord, she was hungry. Making love all night with this gorgeous half-breed certainly worked up an appetite. Looking into his eyes, she felt a bit odd knowing he could read her mind, or at least sense her emotions. She wished she could read him as easily. Did he know how badly she wanted to see him again? Starla had never considered herself the sort of woman to get attached to a man after one night...

Still, she had known him for over a year. Of course they'd spent most of that time at each other's throats, but she realized that, in their antagonistic way, they'd been flirting.

"So now we're back to being rivals," he said, a teasing glimmer in his eyes.

"It's the Speed of Light race. Every person for her -- or *him* -- self."

"And after the race?"

She shrugged, her heart beating faster at his implication. "After, if you're interested in hanging out with the woman who kicks your ass --"

Gunther gave a rather loud, frustratingly masculine laugh. "You mean after I win, if you'd like the honor of hanging out with the best pilot in the galaxy."

"That's what I always liked about you, Morningsky. Your modesty."

Grinning, he leaned across the table, cupped her face in his hand and drew her close for a lingering kiss.

Starla moaned softly, her tongue meeting his stroke for stroke. Already she hated the thought of parting from him even for the race day. When the kiss broke, they held each other's gaze for a moment.

"We need to go."

Nodding, she stood and helped him clean the breakfast dishes. A short time later, they were on their way to The Purple Asteroid's dock. Starla hoped her ship hadn't been impounded during her absence. That would be a hassle she didn't need. Not when they only had a couple of hours before the race began.

Gunther let her use the ship's communicator to contact Jethrex who was relieved to learn her whereabouts.

"You're going to have to tell me everything that happened," Jethrex said.

"After the race."

"At least tell me if he's as fine as he looks underneath his clothes."

"Jethrex!" Starla snapped, mostly because Gunther had just turned to her with a knowing grin.

"Well?" Jethrex pressed.

"Even better. I have to go. Talk to you later."

Luckily when they arrived at the dock, her ship was still there. Instead of taking off immediately, Gunther helped inspect her engine, ensuring it was in perfect working order for the race. When they'd finished, they stood by her ship.

"Well, I guess this is it," she said, gazing into his penetrating eyes.

"This is it. Goodbye, Starla." He cupped the back of her neck with his gloved hand and brushed her lips with a kiss. "You know I'd have let you race even if you didn't sleep with me."

"Yeah? Well, I'd have slept with you even if you didn't let me race."

His lips curved up in a slight smile and he saluted her, then turned and walked to his ship. Before stepping into the hatch, he glanced at her over his shoulder and she blew him a kiss.

Starla watched his ship take off, then she sighed. The fantasy was over and there was no telling whether or not they'd get together again, regardless of what they'd said. They were pilots from completely different galaxies. Free spirits.

Then why did she miss him already?

\* \* \*

When Starla reached the starting line at the dock, Gunther had already arrived. Though she still wanted to win the race, she actually looked forward to the end, no matter what the outcome. Once it was over, there was a chance she and Gunther would meet up for at least one more fling.

She recognized most of the entrants by their ships, including the Taurothish pilots Gunther had warned her about.

The blue lazar darting across the sky signaled that the entrants should start their engines. At the flash of a red lazar, the race began.

A rush of excitement shot through Starla and she couldn't keep the smile from her face. The only thing that got her blood pumping as much as a race was fucking Gunther. He was so damn cute that she was almost sorry she had to beat him. Almost.

An hour into the race she knew she had a great chance of winning. Her ship's monitors told her only two ships were near enough to give her competition. One was Gunther's and the other belonged to their Taurothish rivals. They'd made it through two asteroid fields and past the deadly magnetic rings around the planet Mysterk. With only a couple of small, mostly uninhabited planets between here and the finish line, it was now a matter of raw speed.

Nearing the planet Hector Ten, Gunther poured on the speed, matching Starla.

Glancing at her monitor, she cursed softly as he shot ahead. The fucker was faster than she thought.

She was about to push her engine harder when something struck her from behind. Her heart leapt in her throat as she tried to straighten her course. Impossible. The Taurothish pilots bombarded her with lazar cannons. Powerful ones. Being a warlike planet, Tauroth was known for their excellent weapons.

Starla returned fire, and though she struck her target, her weapons seemed to do little damage. Their ship was obviously not simply a racer, but battle quality.

Worst of all, according to her monitor, her landing controls were destroyed.

"Fuck," she breathed. "I'm dead."

The Taurothish ship fired again and she maneuvered out of range. Still, with her ship damaged she couldn't out-fly them indefinitely.

Her monitor picked up another ship and more lazar cannon fire. The Taurothish ship spun out of control. They must have sustained heavy damage because they didn't bother coming back for her.

Her communication monitor buzzed and she switched it on. "Yeah?"

"Midnight, are you hurt?"

She breathed a sigh of relief. Gunther. He'd come back to help her. It was his fire that had chased off the Taurothish ship.

"No, but my landing controls are busted." She gave a weak laugh. "It was nice knowing you, Morningsky."

"What the hell are you talking about? Hector Ten isn't far. We'll land there."

"Are you deaf? I just said my landing gear is --"

"I'm pulling alongside you. Open your passenger hatch. We'll connect with our loading bridges."

The loading bridge enabled ships to join in space and transfer passengers or goods. "Gunther, are you crazy?" she said. "If I get into your ship through the loading bridge, there's no way we'll be able to disconnect. Your landing controls aren't made to take the weight of two ships."

"Maybe they will."

"*Maybe?*"

"It's either that or you die for sure. What's it going to be, Midnight?"

The offer was tempting, but she couldn't let him go on a suicide mission for her sake. "Sorry, Morningsky, but I'll figure something out on my own."

"What?" he demanded. "What's to figure out? Your ship is busted, Midnight. If you try to land without controls you'll fucking explode."

"Well, if you try to land both our ships, the two of us will die."

"We're not going to die."

"I said no!"

"Listen to me, you stubborn pain in the ass, if you don't connect with me right now I'm going to stick to your ship like a tick on an Ophelian Wolfdog and we'll both fucking explode together."

"Don't be a fool."

"May my dick shrink and my fangs fall out, I swear I'll do it!"

He flew so close that her ship actually rocked. Something told her he spoke the truth. Or maybe she just wanted to live so badly she'd believe just about anything.

"Midnight!"

"All right. I'll do it."

It took moments for them to make the connection. Their chances of landing safely would be better if she remained in her cockpit, maneuvering alongside him.

Hector Ten's atmosphere hovered in the distance and Starla felt sick.

"We're almost there," Gunther said, his voice frustratingly calm.

"I can see that!"

"Take it easy, Midnight. Just think. In a few minutes you'll be in my arms. Any woman's dream."

"Even at the last moments of your life you're an arrogant ass, Morningsky," she said, her throat tightening. This guy was risking his life for her. It was almost incomprehensible that they'd spent the last year as rivals. Or had they? Deep inside she'd known a spark burned between them from the first.

"Midnight?"

"Yeah?"

"When we land, you better be prepared to give me a big wet kiss with lots of tongue."

"If we don't break every bone in our bodies."

"Think positively, sweets."

"I am."

"Here we go," he said as they neared Hector Ten.

They broke the atmosphere at a frightening speed. Starla said a silent prayer as she tried to keep her course in spite of how the ship jounced.

"Try to keep her steady," Gunther said.

"I am!"

"We're going to hit in a second."

"Will you shut the hell up and fly? I can see what's happening!"

"Babe, if I don't keep talking I might piss my pants."

In spite of her terror, his comment forced a chuckle from her throat.

Then they hit the ground so hard she thought her tailbone might pop through the top of her head. They crashed over fields and through trees. She prayed Hector Ten was still uninhabited by people and they didn't kill anyone who might happen to be there. Most of all she prayed they would live through this mess.

They weren't slowing down. His landing controls weren't going to work. They were dead.

Then the ships slowed and came to a complete stop.

A moment passed during which Starla sat, trembling, her eyes closed. She was alive. What about Gunther?

"Midnight." His voice came over the communication monitor. "Are you all right?"

"Yes," she said, glancing at her torn shirtsleeve darkened with blood. Though she'd been fastened into her seat with safety straps, she'd still been bounced around pretty hard and there were a few sharp edges she'd been jarred against. "You?"

"Fine. My engine needs repair, though. Had some damage. Yours?"

She glanced at her monitors and shook her head. "Shot to hell. The best ship I ever had and now it's nothing more than a scrap heap."

"You have your life. Fuck the ship."

Nodding, she drew a deep breath and released it slowly.

"I'm coming over."

Starla rose, still a bit shaky, and headed for the loading bridge. She and Gunther met each other halfway. He looked as disheveled as she felt, his face streaked with sweat, a cut over his left eye and a bruise on his cheek. Without doubt he was the most beautiful sight she'd ever seen.

"You're bleeding." He gently covering her injured arm with his gloved hand.

"It's not bad. And you're bleeding, too, if you haven't noticed."

He brushed a rough hand over the cut above his eye.

"I'll get the first aid kit," she said.

"You owe me something first."

She turned to him, her nose wrinkled in question.

A lopsided grin touched his lips. "I want my big wet kiss."

Smiling, she slipped her arms around his neck, stood on tiptoe and whispered against his mouth, "With lots of tongue."

She kissed him with all the gratitude and passion she felt. Her tongue slipped between his lips and his met it with tender strokes. In that kiss, she knew their feelings for each other were far stronger than either had originally thought. This man had risked his life for her. He was not only gorgeous and a fantastic lover, but incredibly brave. The truth struck her with breathtaking clarity. She was in love with Gunther Morningsky.

When the kiss broke, they stared at each other for a long, heavy moment. So many unspoken messages passed between them.

Finally, she said, "I... uh... better get the first aid kit."

"Yeah, then I need to get to work on my engine. If I remember correctly, some pretty nasty creatures live on this planet. That's why people haven't settled here. Even Taurothish warriors avoid this place, and they think they're pretty tough."

"Well, you kicked their asses today."

"Not all people from Tauroth are like those guys. Most of them are respectable enough."

"True. Come on. Let's get cleaned up."

She took his hand and they walked to her small sleeping area where she kept supplies. *Wild Johnny* wasn't as roomy as Gunther's ship. It was a small, sleek, purely racing model built for speed alone. She was actually glad of that. If it had been a smidgen bigger, his landing controls would never have supported both ships.

They sat on her cot, the first aid kit between them. First he cleaned her arm and applied a clear antibiotic spray bandage created on Deerworld Six, a planet known for its advanced healing techniques. She did the same for the cut over his eye. When she finished, her fingers lingered on his face. His gaze met hers and her stomach fluttered.

"As much as I'd like to take you right here and now on this cot, we need to get that engine up and running."

"Let's get to it." She stood, but he caught her arm and tugged her onto his lap.

Cupping her face in his hand he caressed her cheek with his thumb. "Once the engine is fixed and recharging --"

"I'll let you fuck me right here on this cot or anywhere else you want to." She kissed him. His eyes closed and he groaned softly, entwining his fingers in her hair and deepening the kiss. This time she reluctantly pulled away and stood, taking his hand and tugging him to his feet. "Let's go."

A short time later, Gunther lay on his back beneath a panel in the engine room. His deft hands realigned circuits and replaced memory chips while Starla alternated between passing him parts and checking readings on the control screens.

Finally, he pushed himself away from the panel and stood, stretching his arms and back that must have been tight after so many hours of work.

"Fixed?" she asked.

He shook his head. "Needs a little more work, but I have to go outside and do it. There are some wiring problems under the hatch."

A hint of fear darted through her. "I've been keeping watch outside using the monitors and there's been a lot of activity from some pretty large animals out there. Not to mention it's hot as hell with high humidity."

He wrinkled his nose. "Great. That tops off my peach of a day."

"I'll take a disrupter and keep watch while you're working."

"Thanks."

Gunther collected his tool kit and Starla checked her disrupter, then they stepped outside. Though the area they'd landed in was rather rocky, vegetation thickened in the distance, leading to a stretch of jungle as far as the eye could see.

"Whew," Starla said. "It's like an oven out here."

"More like a sauna," Gunther muttered, his blue eyes squinting toward the sunny sky. "Let's get this over with."

While he climbed under the ship, Starla stood nearby, her weapon drawn and her senses alert in spite of the oppressive heat. Many of the creatures inhabiting this planet could easily crush the ship, let alone her and Gunther.

The sound of banging and metal rattling drew her attention back to Gunther.

"Shit!" he grunted.

"What's wrong?" Starla called.

"The hatch is stuck. Must have happened when we landed."

"Do you need help?"

"No. There's only room for one under the hatch. I'll get it open."

For several moments she listened to him pant and curse as he struggled to loosen the hatch. At last it popped open with a loud crash.

"Finally," he said.

"How bad is the damage?" she asked, wiping her forehead with her hand. Sweat trickled down the back of her neck and she could scarcely wait to get into the climate controlled ship.

"Not bad. It should only take a few minutes."

Strange roars and growls filled the air. Starla's belly clenched and she prayed that whatever wildlife dwelled in the jungle stayed there, at least until they took off. Other than some birds and insects, she saw none of the beasts that had registered on her monitor earlier.

Finally Gunther crawled from beneath the ship, looking as hot as she felt and much dirtier. Dust clung to his sweat-streaked face and marked the snug black shirt and pants that clung damply to his lean frame. For some reason she thought he looked incredibly sexy. Her gaze roamed slowly over his body, lingering on his enticing crotch and long, hard legs.

When her gaze once again lifted to his eyes, she found him staring at her with such intensity that her nipples tightened and a thrill of passion shot through her.

"Let's see if we can get enough power to your ship to disconnect the loading bridges."

"If we can't, we're in trouble."

His lips curved in a lopsided grin and he brushed her mouth with a kiss as they boarded the ship.

"Oh yeah," Starla sighed with pleasure. "Climate control."

"Want some water?" he asked, heading for the storage hatch.

"Definitely."

He removed two bottles of cool water and handed one to her. Starla realized that during this crisis they'd experienced an even deeper connection than they had last night in bed. She'd had always flown alone. Never considered a partner -- until now. Did Gunther feel the same? Her gaze fixed on his gorgeous throat as he swallowed the last of his water and discarded the bottle into the recycling chute.

"Ready to see what we can do about separating these ships?" he asked.

"You bet."

Several hours later, they'd managed to milk enough power out of Starla's ruined ship to separate the loading bridges. She had to admit to feeling a little sick inside when she prepared to leave her ship for the last time. Many fond memories were attached to it.

"Hey." Gunther placed a firm hand on her shoulder. She turned to him and met his gaze. "I'm sorry about the ship."

Shrugging, she drew a deep breath and released it slowly. "It happens, right?"

He slid an arm around her and tugged her close to his side as they left *Wild Johnny*. Back in his ship, they set the engine to recharging. "It'll take about an hour."

Wearing her sexiest smile, she approached and slipped her arm around his neck. "How shall we pass the time?"

"I have a couple of ideas," he said, his hands roaming over her hips and ass.

"I bet they're all good ones," she said against his lips before he kissed her. She tugged up the bottom of his shirt and he stepped away to pull it over his head and toss it aside. They shed their clothes quickly, the sexual tension so strong it alone should have been enough to charge the engine.

"Come here." Gunther practically growled with desire, grasped her hips and hauled her to him as he kissed her again. His tongue thrust into her mouth and hers met it, stroking and tasting with animal-like intensity. He cupped her buttocks, squeezing and caressing.

Starla felt his rock hard cock trapped between their bodies and reached down, grasping the swollen staff in her fist. With a groan of desire, he broke their kiss only to trail his lips and tongue along her neck. Thrills of delight coursed through her when she felt the gentle scrape of his fangs against her flesh.

"Oh yes, Gunther. Bite me," she panted, clinging to him fiercely. Her fingers gripped the steely muscles of his back.

"Gods, Starla," he breathed, licking her neck. His hand dipped between them and he caressed her soft mound while she continued stroking his cock. It grew thicker and harder in her palm and when she ran her thumb over the tip, she felt droplets of moisture. "That feels so fucking good, Midnight."

Moaning softly, she spread her legs and leaned against the cool, sleek wall. Two of his fingers pushed inside her, caressing while gathering wetness. Then he fondled her clit. All the while his fangs continued brushing her flesh, reminding her of how electrifying his bite felt. Being with him was unlike anything she'd ever experienced. Damn, she never wanted to let him go.

Heavens, this man knew her so well. When she could scarcely take another moment of his stroking, he gave a soft yet domineering grunt, pushed her hand from his cock and used his knee to spread her legs even wider. He entered her with a long, slow thrust at the same moment his fangs sank into her neck.

"Ah!" Starla cried, her entire body aflame and so tense with passion that her muscles ached, but she didn't care. Having him inside her, thrusting over and over while he lapped her blood, felt so good it left her breathless.

"Gunther, oh gods. Gunther!" she panted.

"Mmm," he purred, still sucking and lapping as his hips pumped in a fast, steady rhythm.

Starla was on the verge of the best orgasm of her life when a ferocious roar sounded from outside and the ship rocked.

"What the fuck!" Gunther shouted. They sprang apart so quickly that if the situation hadn't been so terrifying it would have been comical. Naked, they rushed to the cockpit, stumbling as the ship tilted from side to side beneath the onslaught of one of the planet's oversized reptiles.

Gunther switched on the monitor. "Shit. Whatever it is, it's covering half the ship."

"Is the engine recharged enough for takeoff?"

"It fucking better be," he muttered. "Work the shockers while I try to get us out of here." She dropped into the seat beside him and did as he ordered, working the control that sent out an electro shock field around the ship. It seemed to stun the creature and it loosened its grip.

"Come on! Come on!" Gunther growled, trying to force the engines to life.

"Hurry up," Starla shouted.

"You think you can do better, sweets?"

"Maybe!"

"I doubt it."

"Stop arguing with me and get the fucking ship moving!"

"Shock him again."

She did as he asked and this time when the beast loosened its hold, the engines roared to life.

"Hang on tight," Gunther ordered, pushing the ship to full power. The beast tried to hold on, but moments later the ship ascended and the creature lost its grip. They rose higher and higher, breaking through the planet's atmosphere. Only when they were soaring through space did they take a moment to breathe a sigh of relief.

"Wow." Gunther grinned, glancing at her with an excited shimmer in his eyes.

"That was fucking intense."

"Almost as intense as fucking."

"Speaking of that, maybe we should put some clothes on?"

"Good idea. My balls are sticking to the seat."

"I'm not sure I needed to know that, Gunther." They glanced at each other and smiled. Something told Starla this was the beginning of a long, exciting relationship.

## Chapter Five

The party for the Speed of Light Race always took place at The Purple Asteroid. Starla and Gunther arrived while everyone was still celebrating the Taurothish pilots' win.

When they stepped inside the crowded bar, no one took much notice of them. Everyone was too busy talking, laughing and drinking. People of just about every species in the galaxy mingled in the dimly lit room.

The two Taurothish cheats sat at the bar, surrounded by a group of painted, big-breasted women from the planet Siliconaria. Females from that planet seemed genetically engineered to sniff out the jerkiest men in existence and fawn all over them.

Siliconarian sluts were the least of Starla's worries. Glancing at Morningsky, she noted a look of pure rage gleaming in his eyes and knew he was about to do something foolish.

He strode directly toward the Taurothish men who looked at him in mild surprise. Gunther's fist slammed into the face of the taller of the two burly blonds, knocking him off the barstool and onto his back.

The second Taurothish pilot punched Gunther and all hell broke loose. The Taurothish cheats dove on Gunther. Even the smaller one was easily twice his size, yet he fought like a demon, his eyes blazing and fangs flashing. After a stunned moment, Starla leapt onto the back of the shorter Taurothish pilot who had pinned Gunther to the ground. She raked her nails over his eyes and he yelped in pain. One of the Siliconarian women pulled Starla's hair. She dropped her hold on the Taurothish pilot, turned and belted the big-boobed bitch so hard she fell into a group of men from Deerworld Six.

The next thing Starla knew, almost everyone in the bar seemed to be fighting. A few patrons ran out the door while others watched the antics from a safe distance. Gunther and the Taurothish men whirled in a tangle of hooking fists and lashing feet. He knocked one out with a sharp elbow to his face and was seated atop the other, his hands tight on his throat, when two bouncers grasped Gunther's arms. After several moments they finally managed to pry him off the Taurothish pilot.

It was then the local authorities arrived.

\* \* \*

Starla stood in the police port, her foot tapping nervously on the floor as she glanced around the drab gray room.

A heavy steel door opened and an officer entered, Gunther beside him.

Gunther had a black eye and a bruised cheek, but his other injuries had faded due to the regenerative powers inherited by both his Vampiremite and Softspeaker bloodlines. His shirt was torn and bloodstained from the bar fight and he offered her a crooked smile.

"You're free to go," the officer told him.

They left the police port quickly and headed back to the dock at The Purple Asteroid to board his ship.

"Thanks for paying my fine."

"Hey, I owed you," she replied. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah. I regenerate fast."

She flung him a chastising look. "I thought Softspeakers were peaceful. What's with the bar fight?"

"That's my Vampiremite side."

"Convenient."

"Tell that to my jaw."

"I have some news that will make you feel better. It turns out we weren't the only ones the Taurothish pilots attacked. They nearly destroyed three other ships. Luckily no one was killed, but the police here have turned those two bozos over to the

authorities on Tauroth. As you know, a breach of honor there is a serious offense. They won't get off easy."

"Good."

They walked in silence for several moments and when they reached the ship he removed his dirty, tattered shirt and flung it into the recycling chute.

Starla's heart fluttered and this time it wasn't just from the sight of his gorgeous bare chest. Many emotions hung heavily between them. Over the past couple of days, their relationship had developed quickly. Knowing this frightened yet at the same time excited her.

He reached for another shirt, but before he put it on, she tugged it from his hand and tossed it aside.

"What?" he asked, a playful gleam in his eyes.

"Sit." She placed her hands on his chest and pushed him toward the cot. She knew her strength meant nothing to him, but he sat anyway, placed his hands on her waist and tugged her closer until she stood between his parted legs.

Starla gazed into his hypnotic eyes and gently trailed her fingertips over his face. She kissed the fading bruises by his eye and on his cheek.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking, Midnight," he said, his voice low and husky.

"About?"

"Us. I know you have, too."

"Yeah. I have."

"I've been thinking I can use a co-pilot in more ways than one. Do you know anyone who might be interested in partnering with a blood-drinking half-breed with a yen for racing and the need for an occasional bar fight?"

"I don't know." She took his face in her hands, her thumbs caressing his cheeks that were now lightly dusted with five o'clock shadow. "Whoever takes the job would need the patience of a Deerworld Six monk and the strength of an Amazurn yak to keep up with a certain blood-drinking half-breed's *appetites*."

"You're no monk, sweets, but you have a pretty strong appetite of your own." He tugged her onto his knee so they were closer to eye level. "I mean it, Starla, all joking aside, do you want to give us a shot? I've never felt this way about anyone before and I really want to be with you."

Warmth flooded her from head to toe and she couldn't keep the ecstatic smile from her lips. She hugged his neck and snuggled even closer when he tightened his arms around her. "Yes, Morningsky, I want to give it a shot. It's been getting a little lonely flying alone."

"Yeah. It has."

"Your ship --"

"*Our* ship."

She smiled with pleasure. "*Our* ship is going to need more repairs. How about bringing it to my parents' repair shop?"

"I wouldn't bring it anywhere else. Once it's fixed we can take a trip to Octess, if you want."

"I'm looking forward to it."

"You know, you're the first woman I've ever brought home to meet my mother."

*I just hope I'm the last.*

"You will be if I have anything to do with it." He grasped her behind and squeezing gently.

"Are you reading my mind again?"

"It's my Softspeaker half." He lifted her in his arms, stood and placed her on the cot. Stretching out beside her, he caressed her face then slowly unzipped her shirt, baring her breasts to his hands and mouth.

"Mmm," she purred as he flicked his tongue over her pebble-hard nipple. "What half is this?"

"This isn't a half. It's a whole. The whole man who loves you."

Starla's breath caught in her throat. Did he actually just admit that he loved her?

Their gazes met and he stared at her, his blue eyes wide, as if waiting for her to respond.

"I love you, too, Morningsky," she said, relief and contentment washing over her. "I think I have from the first."

"I know I have. This past year I haven't been able to get you out of my mind, Starla."

"This is going to be an interesting ride, Gunther, and there's no one I'd want to take it with but you."

His mouth covered hers in a deep, tender kiss and she heard his telepathic voice in her mind as clearly as if he'd spoken. *I love you, Starla Midnight, and I'm forever yours.*

## **Kate Hill**

What do trips around the world, endless nights of breathtaking sex, and a muscular, 6-foot 3-inch, brown-haired, blue-eyed significant other have to do with Kate Hill? Absolutely nothing, but she can dream, can't she? In reality Kate is a single, thirty-something vegetarian New Englander who loves writing romantic fantasies. Visit her online at <http://www.kate-hill.com>, [www.myspace.com/katehillromance](http://www.myspace.com/katehillromance), or join her newsgroup at [groups.yahoo.com/group/katehill](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/katehill). Stop by Kate's Amazon blog at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).