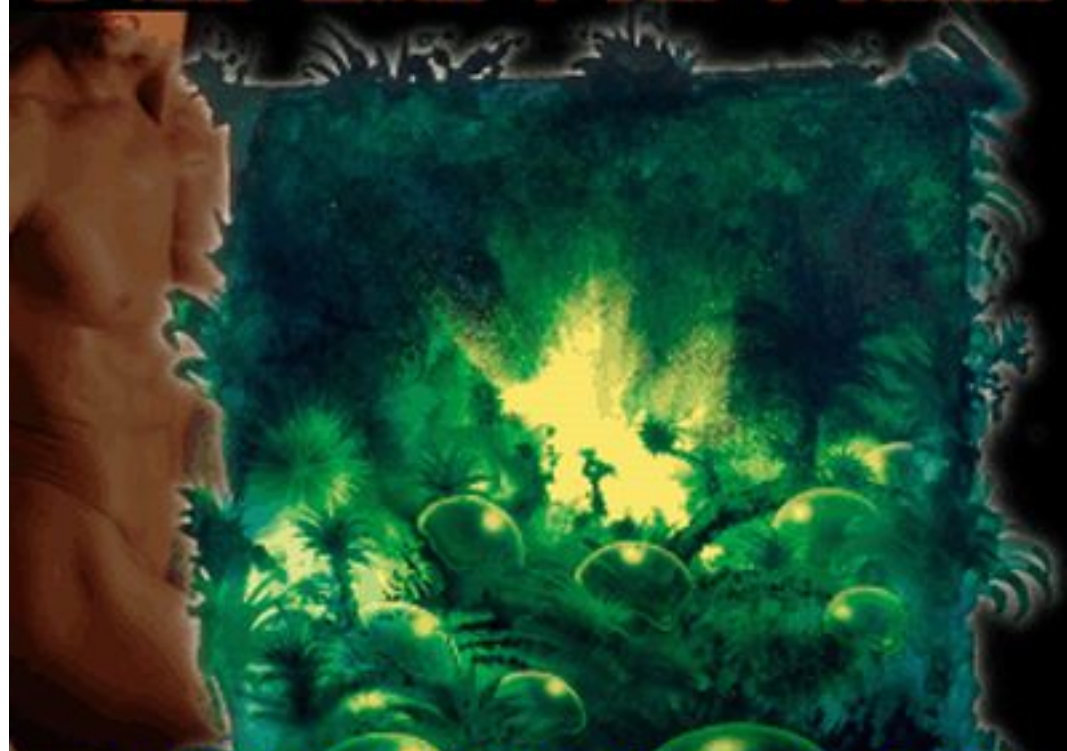


Dark Eden Press Presents



BASILISK TALES BOOK ONE

DARKDESCENT



RIANE LASAIR

A Dark Eden Press Publication



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Dark Descent

Basilisk Tales...Book 1

Riane Lasair

DEDICATION - To Nicole who urged me to “go for it” and to the rest of the gals on the loops for encouraging me and standing behind me every step of the way. This one’s for you.

Prologue

Over fifty levels of tunnels, cross sections and hidey holes littered the heavy rock under the foundation of the newer city-state of Aergra. The under-dwellers named their city below the city Undernegra. When those above, in Aergra found little use for someone, they were cast out and left to fend for themselves. It was when they found a safe haven in Undernegra. After centuries of evolution, those below evolved, changed and adapted to their underground world making them, in some ways, better than those above.

They had no fear of storms or fires that those above dealt with but at the same time they had the technology, sometimes stolen or adapted, but always thought up by those below. In some ways, they thought themselves better than those above but at the same time shied away from them, keeping below ground.

Because of centuries of evolution, their eyes couldn't withstand the brightness of being above ground. Many felt it was their right as living beings to be able to go above and prove their worth to the upper-worlders but their own scientists believed that to do so would sign their own death warrants.

This story is just one of many of the inhabitants of Undernegra...

Chapter One

There was a tentative order of cooperation between those above and below. The Council of Undernegra allowed a five member team to have access to Undernegra for a period as of yet undetermined, the first step in a meeting of minds between both cities. Until now, those above in Aergra believed the inhabitants of Undernegra to be dimwitted and psychotic, why else would they be outcast from above? Soon they would understand that their hypothesis was completely wrong.

The security detail that met the team from Aergra at one of many entrances to their underground city met them and converged. In the dim lights of the corridor they surrounded the five person team, providing both protection and security at the same time.

“Simply fascinating!” One of the Aergrans breathed in awe at the technology they saw. Computer panels were apparent every one hundred feet along the silver metal of the halls, no rock showing, no decayed metals. “The reports were wrong.”

“Doctor, please remain silent.” The head of the team didn’t even glance over his shoulder. “I have a feeling a lot of what Aergra has been told was a complete fabrication.”

A chuckle sounded from one of the under-worlders, but otherwise they showed no sign they were even listening. As they approached a security wall, one stepped forward and placed his gloved hand on the scanner. Instead of a light scan, a needle appeared under his hand and pierced the leather of the glove and into his hand. No sign, no flinching, just stoic silence throughout the procedure.

“Command team 76 cleared for entry.” The voice echoed through the hall over the speaker.

Huge, thick steel doors slid open soundlessly, disappearing into the walls. As soon as they passed through the checkpoint, the doors slid shut; the only sound was their boots on the floors and the mechanical hiss of the hydraulics deactivating.

After three more checkpoints and a long series of halls all leading down and round, turning in on themselves, they finally approached an open area. Milling people stopped and stared at the newcomers with carefully controlled fear and trepidation. News had spread quickly that Aergran's had requested an audience with the Undernegra council. Many who were in the area had arrived just to see what exactly an Aergran looked like.

For the most part there wasn't much that differentiated Aergran from Undernegran. Apart from their size, the only visual difference was that the typical Undernegran had larger eyes, their pupils enlarged due to the dim light below the ground.

Mothers pulled their children away from the sight of the large contingent moving towards the hall leading to the council chambers. Furious whispers followed in their wake.

Another five minutes, they were standing in front of the huge, wooden doors leading to the council chamber. Another security scan and the doors were opening from the inside.

The seven members that comprised the Council sat around the table, facing their guests. Robes covered them from head to toe, each a different color and each a different emblem.

"We have honored your request for an audience Aergran." Spoke the council member dressed in a black robe, the emblem of a hawk in flight gracing his chest over his heart.

Stepping forward, the tallest Aergran inclined his head at each member. "I am Brandish Andormis. Our president has sent us with the hope you would be able to provide assistance to both our peoples." His voice was soft but clear. "A scientist of Aergra has managed, in secret mind you; to develop a contagion that when released would eradicate all life above and below. My team has been sent hoping that you would be able to help us capture him before he has the chance to release the contagion." He had been told to state their problem clearly and precisely, up front without evasion.

The members of the council murmured softly to one another, covered heads and faces turned this way and that. Finally the one dressed in red posed a question. "If this scientist managed to elude you this far, what makes you think we can offer assistance?"

Brandish held out the report disc, “Our visual tracking system tracked him to sector 725, a sewer entrance to your city I believe. He has been able to access your old tunnels on the west side of the quadrant. We have no information if he has a contact within your city or merely stumbled upon the entrance. All we know is that he is still underground and without your assistance, it is extremely probable that he will find a way of releasing the contagion into the water supply or worse, the mountains where it will fly on the winds. No one above or below will be safe if he manages to release it.”

A guard stepped forward and took the report from him and placed it on the table before the one dressed in black.

More furious whispers were flying around the room. Even the guards standing along the walls were shifting in their places, but kept their eyes forward.

Their speech was too fast for Brandish to understand, the whispers overlapping each other as they deliberated. Finally the furor died down and silence reigned once again.

“Send for Vee.” The tone of the council member was subdued, almost sad as he made the order.

Chapter Two

Veesign never knew his parents, but from a young age he remembered hiding in tunnels, away from the others in Undernagra. He realized soon that even their slightest touch brought twinges of pain as he could literally feel their emotions, their pain, and their happiness. When his abilities were discovered by the Council, he became even more reclusive, hiding out away from people so they wouldn't look upon him or get too close.

It had taken years of solitude and hard lonely work but finally by his majority, Vee had been able to control his talents somewhat. It helped to have heavy cloth between his skin and anything he might come in contact with, whether by accident or on purpose. The Council didn't call him anymore unless it was absolutely imperative that his services and gifts were required.

He had been laying in bed, the gel gently undulating around him, the mood music filtering out all unwanted vibes in the area around his quarters. After a week Vee had finally been able to rest in solitude only to be interrupted by a guard requesting his immediate presence in the Council chamber.

That could only mean more people around him than he could stand at the moment. Rolling from the bed, ignoring the guards shocked stare at his nakedness, Vee hid his agitation by moving to the deep closet, pulling on his leather pants, tucking himself in before sliding up the closure. A white shirt, made especially for him, went on next, covering his rangy body from view. Over that a deep red leather vest tunic that fell to his knees with slits up the sides ending just above his chest.

Reaching out he grabbed the black leather gloves that matched his pants went on over his hands. Last he grabbed the heavy boots, again leather, sitting by the entry to the closet; the thick shiny buckles ran all the way up to the tops that would end at his knees.

Finally dressed, Vee stood before the guard, as he was looked up and down. "Well?" His voice was rusty, gravelly from disuse. He didn't have much use for talking

when he was alone. People tended to look at you strangely when you talked to yourself and he was never one to encourage communication from anyone. Towering over the guard, he could have been perceived to be making a threatening move but at six foot five, Vee never succeeded at being non-threatening. When you're that tall and thin as a reed, with hair falling to your ass in a thick mass of curls that were so deep a red it was almost black, one tended to move out of the way.

Vee moved so silently the guard kept looking over his shoulder to make sure he was still with him. Many thought that because of size, he would make a lot of noise when he moved, but after many years of perfecting his hiding and avoiding techniques, Vee found it easy to be silent. He had a Zen-like manner in the way he moved, one foot carefully in front of the other, not even his clothing rustled as he moved.

Finally they reached the doors leading to the Council chambers and Vee heard the guard breathe a sigh of relief. He tended to do that to people, scare the crap out of them without even meaning to. Standing up just a little straighter, Vee waved a gloved hand towards the door and the guards scurried to obey the unspoken command. The doors opened soundlessly and he walked through careful to avoid eye contact with anyone.

He could feel the confused emotions writhing throughout the room. Flinching, he felt his shoulders hunch as he tried to turn in on himself to escape the unwanted emotions. It wasn't until he was a few steps away from the strangers that he felt it, a strange numbing, as if something or someone was drawing the emotions away from him. In a second, it was gone and Vee was left wondering what the feeling had been. With a noticeable twitch, he started moving again, carefully keeping his eyes on his feet, measuring his steps straight to the front of the table where he stopped and raised his eyes to the head of the council. The man was dressed in black from his head to his hands, down to the floor.

With silent movements, Vee moved his palms together, middle fingers folded over one another as he bowed his head over his clasped hands. "Peace and honor." His voice shivered through the room, sending out waves of peaceful feelings to all, calming the room instantaneously.

“Vee,” the Council spoke as one, nodding their heads in unison. Then just the black robed council member spoke. “We have called you here on a matter of great urgency.”

He nodded in understanding. They never called him unless it was of the utmost importance. His eyes were trained straight on the bowed head of the head of the Council. These were important people in their society. Each wore their colored robes with pride and great honor. When they moved to the council, it showed they had the wisdom and respect for all life and worked for the good of their people. In that event, they gave up the public name, instead they were referred to as their robes designated. The Black as he was called, because of his black robe, garnered the greatest respect because of his long life on the council.

“We have allowed the delegation entrance to our city because of their plea for aide. One of their scientists has managed to create a dangerous and terrible weapon.” The Black let the words sink in.

Vee now understood the emotions that had been running throughout the room, fear, anger, and terror. Nodding, he closed his eyes and centered himself for the rest to come.

“I must ask that you work with these upper-worlders in the hopes you can locate this scientist before he is allowed to let this weapon loose, destroying all life above and possibly below. Is this possible Vee? I know you have been working on something draining as of late.”

“You ask and I will help, I can do nothing else.” Vee still didn’t turn around to look at the upper-worlders, despite his innate curiosity of them. Everyone in Undernagra was curious about the above world. Aergra was something of myths and legends now to those below.

The Black, as well as several other members of the council breathed a sigh of relief, “We accept your aide Vee. You have never turned away from us and we thank you for that. Please,” The Black waived his hand towards the door, “take our guests to rooms so they may rest. I imagine the doctor will wish to confer with our own scientists and doctors? Please do what you can.”

Vee nodded and bowed once again.

“Brandish Andormis,” The Black’s voice brought everyone to a stop, “please make sure your team members are aware of the security measures we take. If anyone needs to go somewhere let Vee know so that someone can accompany him. Many of our people fear the Aergran and too much has been lost over the centuries. We would not wish any harm to come to your people while here.” There was no threat in his tone, just a wish that their people could and would work together.

The fate of both their worlds was at stake and Brandish would do anything necessary to catch his quarry and prevent his plans from succeeding.

Chapter Three

Brandish nodded, his eyes calm as he joined the rest of the team. The team waited for him to leave the room before filing out behind Brandish and Vee. He was curious about this “Vee” but the man wasn’t exactly calling out friendship and cooperation at the moment. He saw Vee had wrapped his arms around himself as if warding off the chill but the underground city was kept at a constant temperature, warm and comfortable.

From what Brandish could see of his face, Vee had a smooth jaw, curving around just so to a softly pointed chin, not sharp but not rounded either. His lips were hidden by the fall of red-black hair unsecured and falling thick around his frame. That frame while thin was tall and ropey, not an ounce of fat that he could tell despite all the clothing the man wore. If asked, Brandish couldn’t really say what made him think that but it’s what he believed.

They walked the endless corridors following Vee through a network of walkways and people working. They would stop their work for a moment and call out to Vee in welcome but the man never said anything, just waved a gloved hand in their general direction without stopping.

Finally they stopped at a door. There were no markings, just a series of colored lights along the top plate above the door.

“Doctor?” the voice that emanated from this strange man caused a shiver to work its way through Brandish’s body. His eyes widened just a fraction before settling back in his usual calm façade.

Edmund stepped forward and looked curiously at the door then turned back towards Vee.

“This is the laboratory that has been assigned to your use. If you require any assistance there will be technicians secured for your use during your stay.” That was the most words out of his mouth since his arrival in the council chambers.

“Thank you.” Edmund nodded before stepping back in his assigned spot in line.

Again they were off, trudging down miles of corridors, everything looking the same except the series of lights above the doors. Finally they entered an area that looked familiar. The room took up about the size of a square mile, if Brandish judged correctly. A small boy raced up; in his hands he clutched something shiny and humming.

“Vee!” His voice broke showing his entry into adolescence. “Can you look at my Baja whip? Please? We’re being graded tomorrow and I wanted to make sure I have everything calibrated correctly.”

For the first time, Vee stood up straight since leaving the council chamber. Pushing his hair back over his shoulder gave Brandish a better view of his face. The side view was smooth and soft, nothing sharp to detract from the whole picture. His eyes were dark orbs ringed by a flash of the lightest blue he had ever seen, solemn as he watched the boy.

Kneeling down Vee held out his hand for the Baja whip. A curved, fitted handle was smooth and shiny with its grey metal but flexible, conforming to his hand and grip. The glowing strands of the whip slithered to the ground, humming and vibrating as he shook it out.

“I worked on it all night, Vee. Is it right? I missed one of the classes so I had to follow the books direction and then fine tune it.” The boy chattered on excitedly as Vee straightened and tested the weight. Moving several yards away from them, people started noticing him and moved out of the way accordingly until Vee stood in the center of a cleared area. Children watched in awe as he brought the whip high above his head, whipping it to the side allowing the whip to crack, the sound echoing through the cavernous room. Sparks flew from the tip as it cracked, creating a light display along the walls closest to them.

“Targets?” It was both a question and a request as Vee waited for the boy to throw out the clay targets into the air. Crack after crack, Vee hit the clay targets with the whip, shattering them into bits of dust.

When finally all the targets were dust on the floor around him, Vee nodded and curled the whip back, the hum decreasing as he stepped back.

“The balance is a bit off. Double check your formulations.” Vee handed back the whip to the boy who beamed at his mentor of the moment.

With a quick move, the boy threw his arms around Vee causing the taller man to freeze with something akin to panic on his face before it transformed to wonder.

He looked around at the people around and looked confused.

Vee was unprepared for Adel when the small adolescent threw his arms around him. Normally he would have braced for the flooding of emotion that came with touching even through the cloth. But as startling as the embrace was, it was equally startling to realize he didn't have the swamping emotion flooding his senses. Looking around, trying to find out what was happening, he spotted the only thing that could make sense.

The upper-worlders were the only thing different from all the rest of the times. Someone was unknowingly shielding him from the emotions that would normally flood his psyche. His breath released in a silent rush as he stepped closer to the strangers as he tried to control his elation. It could be just a fluke, a one time aberration. There would be time to speculate on the conundrum later. They were garnering more than a fair share of curiosity, unwanted curiosity surely.

“We must go Adel.” He nodded to the boy and motioned for the upper-worlders to follow once again.

“Fascinating!” This was from the small man, this doctor of theirs. Edmund was young compared to the aging scientists and doctors here in Undernagra. Their own doctors took years to prepare before they took their place in their society as healers and researchers. “Commander have you seen a whip such as that before?” the doctor rushed out to say.

“We have a variation.” Brandish's voice flowed around Vee almost causing him to stumble at the tremor that raced through him at the sound. “Over the years, doctor, it has been modified but one exactly like that? No.”

“The Baja whip is used more for ceremonial purposes now.” Vee inserted quietly as he kept his gaze firmly ahead. Who knew what would happen if he were to look at

Brandish's face dead on. "Of course, it is also used in the training of our animals. Both pet and working stock."

"Animals?" Edmund broke in excitedly. "We were unaware that animals could live below. What kind? How many species are there?" The questions came at lightening speed and Vee just stared at him curiously, unable to understand a word the little man said.

Brandish placed a gentle hand on the doctor's shoulder and leaned in close. Vee could see where the man's lips brushed against the doctor's ear, which caused another tremor to shake him. When he straightened, the doctor subsided and Vee quickly averted his gaze.

Chapter Four

Brandish had seen Vee quickly look away, so he couldn't see the heat that filled his eyes, he had been watching the man while telling Edmund to stay his questions for another time. It was plain that Vee was nervous around them or perhaps him in particular. Brandish didn't have time to ponder the mystery that was Vee, they had a traitor to catch.

Armon, Edmund's cousin through marriage had months of research stashed away. When he had escaped, the first thing Brandish had done was search every single place he could think of for clues. It was among some of the research papers Armon had written that gave them the best lead. The underground fissures in the mountains carried a lot of the spring thaw to the city above and to Undernegra. Who knew what his little serum would do to them. Brandish wanted to catch Armon before he had a chance to release the chemical into the water supply. The lives of so many people both above and below could be counting on his ability to catch Armon. He would do anything within his power to make sure he didn't disappoint them.

Resuming their trek through the network of tunnels, Brandish noticed that there was no sign of transportation. When questioned, Vee answered there wasn't enough room for the transports and the fumes would fill the tunnels possibly poisoning the air.

He noticed that Vee kept his face carefully averted from his view as they stopped at the assigned rooms. Each utilitarian in décor and space, there were no windows because of the depth they now resided. Behind the metal and wood, were thousands of tons of rock. Slowly each member peeled off as they entered each room until it was just Brandish and Vee standing alone in the long corridor.

"If I need to contact you before our meeting in the morning how should I get in touch with you?" Brandish's voice jolted through Vee's system like electricity. Steeling himself, he raised his eyes and met the deep green of the taller man.

“My suite is down the hall thirty meters, I am the last door on the right at the end of the corridor.” The words automatically spilled from his lips and Vee wanted to curse at letting the information slip. He could have given Brandish the access codes to the communications panel in his room, allowing him to contact Vee through the vid link. He could have given him a personal communicator that would call a guard to relay a message. Now the man would know where he stayed, his personal haven.

Brandish merely nodded his head, accepting the direction, stepping into the sterile room that had been assigned to him. Vee remained standing in the corridor until the door slid silently shut behind the upper-worlder. Only then did he allow himself a breath of relief, his shoulders slumping as he gave into the need to weave his hand through the space where Brandish had been standing just seconds before. Graceful fingers wriggled through the space, but startlingly he felt nothing. No emotional residue that he felt most of the time. Backing up a step he hesitated, eyes on the door half hoping Brandish would open it and invite him in.

His shoulder slumped even more as he turned and strode back towards his personal suite. At the end of the corridor where he was sure to remain alone, isolated and at somewhat peace. He hadn't made his way but ten meters before he felt the emotions flooding back into his psyche. Standing stock still Vee flinched, turning to look down the vacant corridor. Even down here, at the end of this passage, he still felt the pull of emotions from the thousands that resided in Undernagra. It was impossible to totally escape the pull. But in his suites, Vee knew that the pull would be less than where he was standing now.

Stepping a few steps back the way he came, he felt the dampening relief of numbness invade his psyche. Nodding to himself, he just verified it. Brandish was the source of the relief, the dampener if you will. There was five meters between doors, and he had moved at least ten before the numbness left him. Shuddering with the realization that Brandish from Aergra had for the first time in Vee's life given him a measure of peace and respite from his gift.

Turning back towards his own suite, Vee reluctantly left, trying to ignore the flood of emotions that once again flooded him. Within minutes he was in his own room,

laying face down across the silken sheets of his bed, clutching a pillow to his face, unable to stop the constant trembling that came from his gift.

Brandish listened, standing right inside the door, for Vee's footsteps as they became fainter then pausing as if in indecision then finally retreating all together. Placing his hand on the door, he wanted to feel the heat that rose off Vee's body as they moved together. He had been so silent, still, unless he was called upon. Otherwise Vee had moved with a quiet grace that few could manage. He had felt the confusion, understood the shyness coming from the man. It had been a strange hour since meeting Vee in the council chamber.

Brandish had never been empathic, that would have meant immediate expulsion from the guards. But from this one man, Vee, he could feel every emotion as if it were his own. He felt the heat at their first meeting from Vee. The man had been instantly attracted to him, and had been too shy to say or look at him.

Even now, Brandish felt the hardness of his cock beneath his regulation black pants, filling the front in a length of hard steel. Hissing under his breath, he leaned forward, his hand bracing against the wall as his free hand went to the buttons that fastened along the front of his pants. Freeing his cock from the stiff material was easier said than done. His hands trembled and fumbled with the fastenings until he wanted to curse with frustration. Finally he turned and slid down the wall, landing in a heap against the metal, both his hands fighting both the material and his own self control. He was unaware of the harshness of his breathing, heavy and thick as he finally released the last fastener. His cock, hard and heavy fell forward, balanced in the V of the opening. It pulsed with the blood flowing through the flesh, veins standing out in harsh relief as he slicked up his hands with his own spit.

With a heavy groan he wrapped his hand around the thick meat, hissing at the feeling. Immediately the vision of the shy silent Vee appeared before him as his eyes fell closed. At that instant he forgot where he was, what his mission was, and lost the ability to think as his hand moved tight and fast, jacking up and down his cock as his eyes bored into the vision that was Vee behind his closed lids. Instead of a clothed Vee, Brandish

now saw a nude Vee, skin smooth and dusky, that red hair flowing over his body as he posed before him.

In those short moments, just the fantasy vision was enough to bring him to a harsh climax. His balls drawing up sharply as he choked on his own scream, Brandish shot. Come falling hotly to the floor between his spread legs, the harsh material of his pants rubbing against his balls as he panted, coming down from a climax that had drained his brain and emptied his cock.

Chapter Five

After entering his rooms, Vee stripped his shirt and vest from his body, laying them neatly on the chair by his closet, stripping off his boots and placing them in their customary place on the floor. Only then did he allow himself to fall onto the bed, clutching a pillow to his body as he fought the urge to run back to Brandish and fill his arms with the man. The suddenness of the vision flung him from visions of Brandish in front of him to the black abyss of pain and emptiness.

Vee rolled over onto his back, arms flung across the bed, palms curled lightly. The pupils of his eyes contracted and then stilled as he stared unseeing at the ceiling as the vision overtook him.

At first it was just harsh whispering, words overlapping as they spoke. He could tell that they were in the lower levels, the abandoned tunnels miles away from the thriving city beneath the rock. A cavern, he could see the stalagmites and stalactites growing, hear the steady drip of the water from melting snow from above. Hand made torches were perched in cracks along the walls of the cave, casting an eerie glow around areas leaving shadows in the main area.

“Things are progressing nicely.” The voice was more of a hiss; the words garbled together so that Vee had to strain to hear and understand.

“I was almost discovered!” Another voice this time more of a whine, “Brandish was too close. As it is I have lost all of my research. It will take months to duplicate the serum once again.”

Vee felt his heart rate speed slightly, recognizing who was in the vision. This must be the scientist, Armon. Who the other person was, he couldn’t identify but it was clear they had a plan in the making.

“You worry too much.” The voice became clearer as if stepping closer to Vee. “By the time the Upper-worlders discover our real intent, it will be too late. I will have conquered both below and above. All will bow down to me before I am finished with

them!” More hissing filled the air and it took Vee a moment to realize that he was laughing, chortling really. The sound grated against his mind like stone on stone.

With a jerking move, Vee rolled onto his side, whimpering as he curled into himself, fighting both the sound and the feelings this vision brought. Suffocating, he felt as if there was not air in the room, his whimpers laced with gasping, tears filled his eyes as he closed them against the vision. His tears leaked out from under closed lids, soaking the silken cover beneath him. His body trembled and shook convulsively.

“I don’t see how, by now Aergran’s have discovered what I was working on in secret and will have taken steps to stop the serum from entering their water supply.” Armon groused, unaware of their eavesdropper.

“Oh but the serum isn’t going into the water supply dear Armon.” The words caused Vee to hold his breath, stilling even the trembling in the hopes he could catch a clue as to their plan. It was as if the being was aware of his watching but gave no hint of it, “with careful planning, every man, woman and child in Aergra will fall to the serum. Then it will be a simple matter of throwing evidence that it was Undernegra that started the conflict, no one will be able to investigate the matter and it will be Aergran against Undernegra. The fallout will be quite entertaining.” More cackling filled the cavern, echoing back and forth causing Vee to whimper and moan in pain.

Locked inside the vision he didn’t see or hear the door to his suite open, didn’t feel the bed dip or the hands turn him.

There was a jolt, a sharp agonizing pain that lanced through his head, crying out hoarsely, his body jerked tight he couldn’t stop the next part of the vision. Two figures came into view, the lights from the torches making them distorted. The human was clear, his blond locks falling about his face, making him look like an angel fallen from the skies. His white robes were smeared with dirt and grime from the caves but it was ignored. The other figure was much larger, darker and had an aura of complete evil.

Straining with the last of his energy, Vee tried to make out what the other being looked like. The way it swayed was hypnotic, almost mesmerizing. Finally at the last moment, its head bent, and unknowingly Vee cried out in horror. A basilisk! A serpent of legend! That one survived so deep in the caves unnoticed for so long! It was almost

more than he could comprehend. The sight alone sent Vee tumbling out of the vision, his body jolting as his eyes snapped open, seeing the ceiling above him for the first time since lying on the bed.

His body didn't give him time to relax from the vision instead, stomach roiling, head pounding, he was given mere seconds warning before his stomach heaved. Still unaware of his visitor he blindly rolled off the bed, crashing to the floor, whimpering in his pain. Scrabbling across the floor, as quickly as he could, he reached the facilities just in time to empty his stomach. Vaguely he felt as hands gently reached to pull his hair back out of the way as his own fingers gripped the seat of the commode, joints going white with strain.

After what seemed like an eternity his muscles relaxed and he slumped heavily against his arm thrust across the commodes seat, panting heavily.

"Can you stand?" Brandish's voice was a shock to his hearing, but exhausted as he was, Vee couldn't muster up the energy to move. He just leaned against the commode heavily, his breath sawing in and out, his mouth tasting foul. All he wanted to do was slip into the oblivion of sleep.

When he didn't answer, Brandish slipped his arms under his legs and around his chest, lifting him easily. With practiced moves and standing with Brandish's aide, Vee managed to rinse out his mouth, brushing away the foulness that almost made him gag. When he was finally done Vee leaned heavily against the muscled wall behind him, closing his eyes and relaxing believing that Brandish would be there to catch him.

Without saying a word, Brandish simply hefted him up again and carried Vee back to the bed, easing him onto the covering once again. Head cradled by the thick pillows, Vee tried to make sense of it all. The vision still remained in his memory in vivid detail, each second. When Brandish entered the room, he wasn't sure.

"What-," his throat was dry as dust and sore as he tried to raise his eye lids. Fatigue rolled over him as it usually did causing his voice to slur, "What are you doing here?"

He felt the bed dip from the other side as Brandish shifted his frame, "you are in no state to talk right now Vee." Just the tone of his voice soothed some of the pain away. Vee sighed with relief and sank deeper into the embrace of the mattress and covers

beneath him. Rolling to his side, facing Brandish, Vee kept his eyes closed and waited for the abyss of sleep to claim him.

Just before everything went blank, Vee felt Brandish's hand smooth the hair away from his face, and then cool, dry lips pressing against his forehead.

Chapter Six

Vee woke up and realized two things at once. Number one, his mind was completely clear albeit sluggish. And number two; there was someone in his bed, a large someone who took up most of the mattress, snoring lightly. It took a moment for the previous nights events to catch up to his mind, but when he did, his head turned and identified the large form of Brandish turned away from him, his body rising and falling with his breaths.

Feeling gritty from sweat and slightly hung-over from the previous nights events, Vee cast one last soft look at the unconscious man in his bed and rolled away silently. The bed barely made any movement as his feet hit the floor. Walking into the facilities, he slid the door shut and reached into the shower stall to turn on the water. Facing the mirror, Vee looked at his haggard face before the steam fogged the reflection. His dark red locks were limp and tangled. Grimacing as he thrust his fingers through the tangled mess he realized he would need to use something after washing the mass, otherwise it would be hell brushing it dry.

Unbuttoning his pants, he peeled the leather down his hips, revealing the smooth unblemished skin of his ass. Who knew what caused it, but from long before reaching puberty, all the hair that other boys had grown Vee waited in vain. His legs and chest were hair free. Nary was a hair anywhere on his body except on his head, much to his dismay when he was so young, now and it was more of a relief than an embarrassment. Stepping into the hot cascading water Vee couldn't suppress a moan of utter enjoyment. Hot water always soothed him in a way that nothing else could. The steady beating of the water against his head as he closed his eyes and submerged his head in the spray was like a thousand fingers massaging his scalp. Placing his hands against the cool surface of the walls of the shower, he remained motionless for several minutes, allowing the water to clear his murky brain and soothing his senses still smarting from the jolt he had received at the visions end.

Because of the water muffling all sound, Vee didn't hear as the door opened and Brand stepped inside, closing the door so the heat wouldn't escape. The sight of the younger man standing like that with his back towards him, hair caressing his ass wetly, was a temptation he couldn't withstand.

Vee jumped and strangled a shout at the feel of Brand's hands on his ass. When he tried to turn, Brand just simply leaned into him, his chest against Vee's back, "Stay there."

The voice was liquid sex; those hands were magical as they kneaded his butt cheeks, spreading the crack wider at each press. With his thumbs, Brand circled and nudged against that wrinkled hole, all the while his mouth was busy sucking water off Vee's skin. Everywhere he could reach and still keep the smaller man pressed against the smooth tile.

The water made his hands and fingers slippery but that only went so far. Not wanting to hurt Vee, Brand reached for the jar of conditioner, slicking up one hand before moving back to that ass.

"Do you realize how utterly gorgeous this ass is?" his voice moved through the stall like the steam, all heavy and cloying. "Even sick as a Ragondog, I still wanted to strip those pants off you and squeeze."

"What?" Vee's voice was thick with want, just the sound of his voice turning off every brain cell so he couldn't even think about the words, just feel from the tone.

Brand bit down gently, his sharp teeth barely making an impression on the skin of his shoulder blade. The bit sent a lightening sharp tingle down his spine, straight to his cock. Filling, the flesh was almost burning against the cool tile. Gasping harshly, Vee ground instinctively back towards those massaging hands.

Brand started once again with his thumbs spreading the hole a bit more each turn, the slight burn had Vee clenching instinctively. Brand whispered soothing tones, just sounds, and no words.

"No one..." Vee grunted as those thumbs went slightly deeper, "no one ever..."

"Of course they haven't." Brand's gentle amusement was clear, "You never let anyone close. Sex on a stick and yet everyone is kept at a distance. I bet there are at least twenty men in this city that would beg to touch your gorgeous body. But I'm not

gonna stand back like the others.” Brand grunted, his teeth nibbling on the skin over his spine. “I take what I want.” With that harsh statement, his thumbs left him and suddenly there was a thick long finger thrusting gently but persistently inside him.

Vee tried to arch back, his mouth opening on a sharp cry of surprise. Brand shoved a little harder, firmer so that Vee’s chest remained in contact with the wall. With something like a soft snarl, his teeth latched onto skin and he worked another finger along side the first. Vee’s fingers groped at the wall, fingernails scrabbling against tile as he went up on his toes with a grunt.

“Do you know how tight you are?” Brand’s voice was deceptively soft, almost as if he was talking about the daily run of the mill things. “It feels like a vice around my fingers. A warm, wet, throbbing vice, I can’t wait to feel you around my dick. Do you want to feel me? Inside you so deep I can feel your heartbeat.”

Vee heard the words as if from a long tunnel. He could feel the slight burn fading as Brand worked those two fingers in his ass, coaxing the ring of muscles to loosen for him, to ease the way. His head fell back, water pouring over his hair so that it covered Brand’s wrist.

With a quick move Brand gathered as much hair in his free hand as he could; fisting his hand before replacing his forearm firmly against Vee’s back, holding him in place once again.

Up until now he had been gentle, simply opening the muscles, loosening them for the width of his prick. Now he was on a mission to bring Vee to orgasmic completion before he had his way with him. Releasing his hair Brand used his free hand to wrap around Vee’s waist, his chest replacing the arm that held the smaller man firmly to the wall. Leaning in hard, grabbing a hold of the prick that was hard and pulsing he used the fingers deep in Vee’s ass to brush against the gland that was nestled deep inside. With deliberate manipulation, one hand hit the gland as the other jacked firmly up and down in a slow continuous motion. He wouldn’t last long, Brand knew.

Vee had never even pleased himself, much less had another person in his bed. The things that Brandish was making him feel were, while foreign to him, overwhelmingly blissful. Never had he thought to put anything where Brandish’s fingers were now sliding in and out. The first thrust had been surprising but not harmful. His

brain short-circuited as he added another finger, pushing insistently deeper each stroke until he felt the rest of that hand brush up against his balls. When he reached around to grab a hold of his cock that was when Vee went totally frozen with an overwhelming urge to thrust but at the same time fearful of even moving. The firm hold Brandish had on his cock was just a touch off brutal.

“You feel the urge to move?” Brand’s voice had grown impossibly deep, blowing hot against his skin as he spoke next to his ear. “Move Vee, feel the pleasure another person can bring to your senses. Feel the way my hand grips your cock, feel it pulse under my hand.”

Vee couldn’t hold back the whimper of arousal, his instinct was to move with the motions, but his fear overrode his instincts. Brand felt the internal war going on inside Vee through his emotions, felt the conflict. *Move, no don’t move! It feels too good! No don’t move!* With a feral feeling of possession, Brand took the choice out of Vee’s hands and started thrusting more forcefully with his hand in Vee’s ass. Each thrust pushed him forward through the tunnel of his other hand.

It was more than he could bear. A harsh choked cry was wrenched from deep in his chest as come shot from deep inside his balls, coating the walls before the water washed it down the drain. His panting was laced with whimpers for a few minutes before he realized that Brand’s fingers were still deep in his ass, moving slowly, gently. “We’re not done.” The whispered words confirmed his suspicions before Brand released his cock, moving his hand back to that fall of hair. “Nowhere near done.” His lips latched onto Vee’s neck, working the skin as he sucked, pulling up a mark. The smaller man wasn’t ready for marks from his teeth yet, he would need to be gentle for the first time in his life. Well, at least more gentle than he ever had to be before.

The way Vee clenched tight around his fingers as he shot made Brand’s dick jolt hard. It stood hard and firm straight out from his groin, hard enough to pound through the wall, he had no doubt. “The smell!” He inhaled deeply, “when you come, it’s overwhelming.” Vee’s reply was an incoherent moan, lost in the feelings Brand’s touch evoked.

Smearing more of the conditioner over his cock, Brand moved closer, plastering his chest against Vee’s back as he used his hand to guide his cock towards that now

pulsing hole. The pressure to just thrust hard and deep was there, at the base of his spine but he managed to take it slow. The muscles parted, accepting him like a long lost lover. Rumbling deep in his chest, Brand savored the wet heat that surrounded him as he pushed persistently forward. Vee grunted, ass clenching around him unused to the erotic invasion.

“Just as I thought,” he purred as he seated himself, balls hitting Vee’s ass before stopping, allowing Vee to get used to his girth. Perching his chin on Vee’s shoulder, his words blowing softly in that ear so close to his lips, a temptation. “So tight,” inhaling noisily, “you are such a temptation Vee.”

Vee couldn’t respond, the burning was slowly fading away, but still his eyes were blind to anything but the heat and passion rising up slowly inside him once again. He wanted to struggle, but with the heavy weight against him, pressing him into the wall, all he could do was clench his hands and just try to breathe. Brand’s hands made a leisurely trail up and down his skin, rubbing and caressing spots he hadn’t ever contemplated before now. A rub there had him jerking with surprise; a caress there had him gasping with anticipation.

Brand knew the minute Vee was ready, just by watching those muscles clench in his arms, the way his hands clenched and released against the wall body trembling in harsh jerks every once and a while, “Now the real fun begins.” With a soft laugh, Brand gripped Vee’s hips with a firm hold as he pulled out, ever so slowly, almost to the point he was free of the confining luscious heat. He could hear Vee breathe a bit more easily before he plunged back in, causing Vee to choke and rap his fist against the wall. Changing the angle with the next stroke, Brand made sure he hit that gland again, knowing he met with success when Vee tried to rise up on his toes, crying out, his body shuddering around him.

Soon Vee began to try to thrust back in time with his own thrusts, trying to meet him half way, but with Brand pressed so intimately against his, holding Vee against the wall it was almost impossible. Animalistic growls poured from Brands mouth as he latched onto the same spot he marked just moments ago. A groan worked its way up through Vee’s chest, so deep, sounding delicious to his ears.

Brand could feel the warning signs of his pending orgasm. Lightening traveling from the base of his skull, down his spine setting his body shuddering as he tried to maintain the pace and not jackhammer into Vee's ass. His balls drew tighter, impossibly tight as he choked and lost his rhythm. With the last ditch effort, Brand reached around and grasped Vee's cock once again, wrapping his fingers around that hard flesh again, pulling firmly with the thrusts, determined that Vee come again.

All at once Vee erupted, fists pounding on the wall, cries close to animalistic pouring from his mouth as he came, ass clenching impossibly tight around Brands cock. It was impossible to stop his own orgasm, erupting in that tight channel, shooting come deep inside, emptying himself completely.

The water pounded over and around them as they both panted, trying to regain the strength enough to stand. Brand was first to rouse, straightening and gently turning Vee around so that his heated back met the cool wall. He noticed that Vee's eyes were still unfocused, vague, blinking up at him. Those black orbs surrounded by a band of the color of ice. Brandish knew that he could watch those eyes for hours and be totally happy.

"Up you get." With a pull, he had Vee in his arms and with one hand he quickly and efficiently washed that long mass of dark hair, letting the water rinse away the soap. All too quickly the water started to cool and Brand rinsed both of their bodies before shutting off the water.

On the drying mat Brand had to fiddle with the buttons for a few moments before the heated air blew up from the vents in the floor, drying their skin and hair with quick efficiency. This would be something the people in Aergra would enjoy having that was for sure. Carrying Vee back into the bedroom, Brand lowered him back among the sheets, enjoying the way the bed undulated under their movements, settling gently beside the still dazed man.

Leaning over him, his elbows at Vee's shoulders he peered down into that face. "Are you with me?"

"Huh?" That voice was gravelly, like the rasp of rocks tumbling together. Clearly he was still recovering. Leaning down, Brand swept his lips against Vee's in a soft

caress. “Need to sleep I would guess. We can talk more later.” A smile curved his lips at the befuddled look he got in return.

It took a moment for the words to sink in. Sleep, yes Vee’s body cried out for sleep and peace, but the vision reared its head and he stiffened, “C-cant sleep.” Trying to push Brand off his chest and disgusted at his inability to do so. “Talk to the council.”

“The council can wait, unless your “vision” gave you the location of Armon?” Still looking down at Vee he openly grinned at his inability to move the mountain that was Brand.

“No but...,” Vee’s tongue swept out, glistening and pink, to wet his lips nervously.

“Then it can wait.” Bending down once again, he took possession of those lips that begged for his attentions. Turning his head slightly he aligned their lips more closely and slipped his tongue out to brush along the seam of Vee’s lips, silently asking for entry. Vee parted his lips under the pressure from Brand, but since he had never been kissed either, he lay there stunned as Brand’s tongue swept in, taking long delicious licks. Brand never took his eyes off Vee’s as he consumed and mentally mapped that cavernous mouth with his tongue. Vee’s eyes remained opened and dazed even as his lips clung to Brand’s.

Vee whimpered at the loss when Brand lifted his head, “Sleep.” He murmured brushing the hair off Vee’s forehead before settling beside him, pulling Vee close so that he could rest his head on Brand’s shoulder. It wasn’t long before those muscles went boneless, the breath brushing his chest went slow and even, and the bed was only moving slightly under their combined breathing.

The only light in the room was coming from the facilities which cast a small glow in the corner of the room. Finally relaxing completely into the gel bed, Brand allowed his eyes to slide closed, allowed sleep to claim him without dreams.

Chapter Seven

The next time Brand woke, it was hours later, despite being underground and not seeing the sky, he could gauge the time even through the layers of rock above his head. Vee was making small movements in his sleep, shifting here, sighing there and it was cute the way he burrowed into Brands side, his nose stuck into his neck. That fall of dark red hair fell across Brands chest, shifting and caressing as Vee moved.

He had to admit, it was nice waking up with someone for once instead of waking to a large cavernous barracks that echoed with each cough or groan of the men and women housed inside it. Usually he woke to a cold room, colder coffee and the basics for breakfast. Speaking of, Brand grinned slightly, rubbing his short dark hair as his stomach growled viciously.

He felt the exact moment when Vee woke to the sound of his hunger rousing. That lax arm that had been flung over his stomach tensed. At the same time a knock at the door had the man jerking straight up, the sheet dragging along with him, pooling at his waist.

“Come...,” he coughed, clearing his throat before continuing, “Come in!”

The door opened to yet another guard with a message, “Your Communications port is malfunctioning.” Thankfully the guard didn’t bat an eye at the sight of two obviously naked men residing in the same bed together. Vee took hold of the message and read it silently, his shoulders hunching as his brows furrowed.

Looking up still looking troubled, “Inform the Council I have information, and request someone to come fix my unit please.” Already his mind was back in his vision, replaying it over and over again. It was either that or concentrate on the man in bed beside him, casually running his hand up and down his back. Arching slightly, Vee tried to dislodge Brands hand, but he just chuckled and followed the movement.

“Of course,” the guard bowed and left as quickly as he arrived.

“Stop it!” Vee snapped as he quickly climbed from the bed, retreating to the privacy of his closet so he wouldn’t be able to look at that man in all his naked glory.

Brand could feel Vee’s unsettled emotions as if they were his own. That alone was strange for him since he had never experienced anyone’s emotions until now. Yes, he was able to read body language to his advantage, look for warning signs in the way a person moved or spoke, but never had he felt emotions as if they were his own, coming from another person.

Sliding from the bed, he pulled his pants on, knowing that the covering would help a little with Vee. “What did you see last night?” he stepped to the doorway of the closet and watched as Vee pulled out some clothing, mostly leather.

Vee’s voice was muffled as he dug deep in the clothing, “I saw something that shouldn’t even exist anymore. It’s been over a century since a case was documented, but what I saw was unmistakable. Your Armon was with a Basilisk.”

“What the hell is a Basilisk?” Frowning, Brand leaned against the doorways frame and watched as Vee pulled on the black fitted leather over his long legs, shaking away the memory of how they tangled with his when they slept. “Could you tell where they were?”

“A Basilisk is a creature that is part lizard, part human. They are able to shift between each form from what I remember. We will need to speak to the tome keepers for more research. I do know their bite is poisonous. God I hate snakes.” He muttered to himself as almost an afterthought. “And no I don’t know where they were.” Putting a hand to his head Vee felt the pressure headache starting at his temples, running down to his jaw. It reminded him he hadn’t had food in over twenty-four hours.

Moving back towards the main room, he ignored Brand and approached the replicator. Hitting several keys he waited for the machine to activate and materialize the meal he requested. Within seconds a plate piled high with fluffy eggs, crisp bacon and a mound of potatoes appeared along with a mug of steaming coffee. Without a word, he held out the offering to Brand before programming his own meal.

With Brand sitting on the edge of the bed, watching Vee while he ate, silence reigned as they tucked into their meal. Vee was mentally going over every second of the vision, trying to remember pertinent information that would be needed at the meeting,

Brand formulating his questions so they would know how to proceed. Another knock announced the arrival of young Doctor.

“I wondered where you had gotten off to.” Edmund walked further into the room, the door closing behind him. “How’d you get breakfast?” Looking hopefully at Vee, who silently stood and programmed another meal for the young doctor.

“What do you know about Basilisk, Edmund?” Brand asked finishing off his coffee, carrying his plate and cup to the table beside the unit.

“A Basilisk?” Edmund looked confused for a moment then as if accessing files his face cleared, “in ancient texts, the Basilisk was a creature that was part lizard, part cock. It’s said that the bite was poisonous and many of the Basilisk stood larger than fifteen feet.”

Vee looked up, his eyes vague, still recalling the vision, “How tall is Armon?”

“Six foot even,” Brand looked intently at Vee from his seat on the bed.

“Then what I saw was at least ten feet easy.” His voice faint, as he closed his eyes, letting his head fall back even as he shuddered from the memory.

“What did you see?” Edmund, confused, looked first at Vee, then at Brand.

“Later Edmund,” Brand glared at the young doctor. The problem with Edmund was that he was single-minded in his search for information and data that he didn’t see the emotion or reaction from others.

Edmund growled in frustration but fell silent.

“Go get the rest of the team,” Brand grunted, standing up to gather the rest of his clothes. “We’re waiting to meet with the council. You and Drake will need to meet with their tome-keepers. Research anything you can about the Basilisk and how to fight it. Get one of the guards to take you to them.” He rattled off the commands all while he was pulling on the rest of his clothes, looking fresh and crisp despite having them lay in a pile on the floor all night.

Edmund left quietly while Vee still remained in his seat, head back resting against the edge of the chair, his legs splayed as the leather of his pants framed his groin ever so nicely. Brand wanted nothing more than to kneel down between those legs and free that long, delicious cock for him to taste. To run his lips and tongue up and down the veins that pulsed ever so deliciously as the passion rose higher and hotter.

Shaking his head of the fantasies of what they could do, realizing they didn't have the time and the fact that Vee would probably jump out of his skin if he touched him again so soon after last night. It was clear that Vee was unused to being touched at all, used to being alone in his silent room so far away from the rest of the underground city. Brand had never been so isolated. Coming from a large family with seven brothers and three sisters, Brand had never had a quiet day in his life until he left home. Even now he still spent a great deal on the families homestead outside Aergra.

Watching Vee with his face so calm and remote made Brand wish to take him out, take him to his family and lavish so much attention and love on him, he would never feel alone again. Shaking his head once again at the fanciful notions, "Come on."

"Hmmm," Vee jerked up, eyes wide but unfocused. "Sorry." He straightened up in the chair. He had totally forgotten that Brand was in the room, lost in the soothing muffled emotions. He was now certain that it was Brand who had made the feelings and emotions less intense on his psyche, whether he knew it or not.

"We need to get moving." Brand stepped back clearly full of energy and ready to get moving. Vee almost snarled at his ability to get up and moving so early, clearly he was a morning person, total opposite of Vee. Reluctantly Vee roused himself to put on his boots, allowing his hair to fall forward as he secured the buckles.

"How much longer is it until we meet with the council?" Brand watched Vee lean forward, the fabric of his shirt stretching over his back.

"They will not be available for a few hours." Vee's voice was low, quiet. "They will be in meditation right now. For now there are some we need to go see. It would be easier if I went alone," looking up at Brand strangely, "but that can't be helped."

"I'll follow your lead then." Brand nodded, stepping back and allowing Vee to take the lead.

Chapter Eight

They were in an older area, most of the doors not yet upgraded to the new computerized metal. Wood and brass covered doors here. The lighting was dimmer, the halls more quiet as their boots rang on the halls. Brand remained quiet because Vee had yet to say a word since leaving the apartment. He had felt Vee's rioting emotions since leaving the rooms, jumping from confusion, to fear and back again. Hoping to calm Vee down, Brand had remained silent, allowing the man to lead him wherever he needed to go.

Stopping outside an unidentifiable door Vee raised his hand and knocked, his knuckles rapping against heavy wood. There was no sound from inside but the door opened allowing admittance.

"Dargo?" Vee's voice was just slightly above a whisper as he closed the door behind them.

"Ahh, Vee." The melodious voice beckoned them forward, deeper into the room. Lush carpets covered the floors; subdued lighting sprouted here and there but kept the room cast in shadows. The furniture was sparse, a few chairs, a long couch and a long table. "It's been a while since you came to see me."

"Dargo, I've brought someone I wish you to meet. Possibly explain something troubling to me." He hesitated bringing it up, his tone plain.

Stepping into the light, Dargo was revealed to them. Younger than Vee by at least ten years, he was young. No more than twenty years. That much was clear in the youthful lines of his face, and body. But it was the eyes that arrested Brand. Solid blue, like the ice flows of the north. Slightly darker than Vee's, but no black centers like everyone else he had ever seen. Dargo motioned to the chairs waiting for them to be seated.

"I sensed your emotions this morning. What seems to be the problem?" Holding out a hand, Dargo simply waited for Vee to make a move.

Brand watched as Vee slipped a hand, trembling with effort into the younger mans hand. Silence reigned. Dargo frowned in concentration, his black eyebrows converging on his forehead as he thought. Every once in a while he would grunt, or nod his head. “I see.”

Finally Vee sat back, more like collapsed against the cushions of the couch, closing his eyes drained of energy. Dargo merely looked satisfied, fully in control.

“Your vision is correct Vee.” Dargo stood, moving about the room and returning with a pot of tea. Pouring three cups, he added cream to one, setting it in front of Vee before pouring a second and adding sweetener as well as cream and setting it before Brand without asking for a preference. Finally he picked up his own tea, undisturbed. Sipping for a moment, “I have sensed the Basilisk before, but was unaware of what it was so disregarded it. You will know what to do when the time comes.” Enigmatic if ever there was a statement. Brand glared at the younger man who merely smiled at him.

“If allowed, the Basilisk will use his powers and that of the human Armon to complete his plan. The future is cloudy right now. I see many paths opened to you. I do see your companion with you in all of them, so I would suggest you keep him close to you. I have felt his ability and it is gratifying to see one of his ability around again.” Sitting forward, Dargo eyed Brand intently. “You come from a large family. I would see your kin if I could. More than one of you has this gift. It would be very beneficial to a few of us.”

“What gift? What ability? What the hell are you talking about?” Brand moved to get up but Vee’s hand on his thigh stalled him.

Dargo laughed outright at the anger, “Oh such passion. Vee you didn’t tell me what delicious visitors we had. I have never had the pleasure of meeting an upper-worlder.”

“In answer to your question,” Drago sat back, nestled in pillows, “you have the ability to ease the burden that Vee and some of us carry. He is the most powerful empath of our kind at this present time. You have the ability to muffle, if you will, the emotions that bombard Vee on a daily basis. Why do you think he lives so far away from everyone else? The constant emotions’ pouring over him is overwhelming.” Frowning at Vee, who still lay back, still and quiet, “You feel his emotions do you not?”

Brand reluctantly eased back during the speech. “I feel something,” Came the grudging reply. “I came to his room last night because I felt something... a sense of urgency, of panic. By the time I got to his room, I couldn’t remember how I got there.”

“Yes, this is the relationship. It is somewhat symbiotic if you look at it logically.” Dargo nodded, sipping his tea, “Vee absorbs your calming energy, your buffer, if you will, and in return you can sense his emotions, help him when he greatly needs it. There haven’t been many with your ability for many centuries from my research. You are the first one I have met in a long time.” Sitting back Dargo simply looked at them, letting the silence settle.

“They will never understand.” Vee looked up before returning his gaze to his cup.

Without clarification, Dargo understood, “It has been a long time,” taking a sip, “perhaps they have evolved in their thinking. That is a question better answered at a later time, my friend. Do not go borrowing trouble. We have enough coming our way soon enough.” Sitting the cup on the table, Dargo stood and moved to a cabinet, “I will come with you to the council meeting.”

Vee watched Dargo, “are you sure?” The hesitation was plain, even as he looked over to Brand. “It has been awhile since you left your rooms.”

“Ahh, yes,” Dargo bowed his head briefly, his fingers caressing the wood of the cabinet. “Thirty-seven years, four months, eighteen days, I won’t bore you with the hours and minutes.” He flashed a small smile, “It’s about time I left these rooms for new things, yes?”

Vee’s relief was almost palatable. “You are welcome to join us! I know many on the council have missed your insight.”

“Perhaps,” Dargo nodded before returning to his chair, this time, holding something close to his robes. It was a small volume, a book with well worn pages that spoke of many readings. “I want you to read this.” He held out the book to Vee. “It may shed some light on your confusion, clear your thoughts.”

Vee accepted the book without comment.

“For now, go and finish your rounds. I imagine you are going to see Jon next?” at the affirmative nod he smiled, “let the old rascal know I will see him later. We have much to discuss.”

Outside the door, Brand waited for Vee's next move. Instead of walking away Vee looked torn. "Dargo looks to young to be closed up in his room for thirty seven years Vee." The questions hovered unspoken.

Vee smiled ruefully. "I knew you would catch that." Taking a cleansing breath, "There are many things in Undernagra that are kept secret, so deep that not many even here realize it." Looking up, meeting Brands eyes, there was a solemnness about him. "Things here move differently than from above. The longer you stay, the more you will understand but we do not talk about it. Let me just say that Dargo is older than he looks."

"How much older is he?" Brand looks suspicious. "Vee?" he pressed when his question wasn't answered.

Reluctantly he replied, "Three hundred and forty-seven."

"What!" Brand couldn't believe it. Leaning against the wall, his back supported, he looked at Vee.

"That is impossible." Flatly, Brand waited for Vee to admit he was lying.

Shaking his head, Vee sighed, "Not impossible here. Many of the first residents, after being thrust from Aergra and finding their way here," his voice trailed off, his eyes vague. "Those first years were hard. Harder than you can imagine."

A warning shiver worked its way through Brands spine, but he managed to keep silent.

"Come," Vee turned away, his head bowed as if waiting for Brand to turn on him. "Jon will be able to explain it better than I can."

The trek took only minutes. Further down into the shadows, the lighting even lower than before, Vee stopped at another door, almost identical to Dargo's and knocked softly. A gruff voice bid him enter and Vee opened the door.

"Vee," The answer came low and gravelly, deeper than Vee's own.

"Jon," Vee said quietly, approaching the figure laying on the couch. "I've brought you a visitor from Aergra."

Jon laughed low, the sound ending in a violent fit of coughing. Vee knelt at his side, lifting that heavy body up to ease the cough. "The medicine isn't working?" He was gentle with the ailing man.

“It gets better, it gets worse.” Jon sighed as the coughing fit faded. “Don’t worry about it. My time is just coming to an end. The maker takes us all at some point.” Total acceptance of his fate laced his words.

Vee bowed his head, sadness weighing on him like a cloak. “There is never enough time.” The words were whispered harshly.

“We’ve had too much time, boy.” Jon barked. Looking up over Vee’s bent head, the giant beckoned with a wave. “Come closer, Upper-worlder.” He motioned to one of the chairs.

Brand silently sat in the chair, watching Vee as he straightened the blanket covering Jon.

“Jon, Brand has questions about us. I thought you could tell him about the early days. But I see you aren’t up to a long tale.”

“Nonsense,” Jon shifted so he was partially sitting, partially reclining against the arm of the couch. “I have had too much time, laying in wait for the inevitable. If the rumors I heard this morning are true, then he should know.

It was clear to Brand that Jon was an old man. Grey hair fell around his head in soft waves, cut chin length. His eyes told Brand that he was tired, deep in the bones tired and ready to take the final journey to the other side. The mantle of age did not set easily on this man before him, but he was graceful in his acceptance of it.

“So you are from Above.” Jon smiled softly, “I remember Aergra well, even though I was a young when my family was cast out, only twenty four. It was ages ago. I imagine the city has changed much since then.” Memories clouded his vision for a moment. “But that was then, you are here for answers. If you met Dargo, then I imagine you have quite a few.”

Brand merely nodded.

Settling more comfortably, “To start, do you know the real reason some were cast out?”

Brand shifted uncomfortable with the man’s stare. “No one knows for sure, but if someone is found to be different... manifesting strange abilities, they are taken away and we never see them again. All evidence is wiped from the mainframes and soon people

don't question it anymore." To hear himself explain it, Brand thought it harsh and unwarranted. To be taken away, erased like you were never alive, was too much.

"That is only part of it," Jon sighed. "In the early days, some of those who manifested strange abilities were frightening. The rest of us agreed for all those concerned that we should be separated, for the good of the populace. It was a frightening time, a time of anger and of fear. The "normals", as I call them, feared what they didn't understand. Some of us who were cast out were angry that the "normals" had so little compassion for our plight. So we disappeared." Sipping the water that Vee brought him, Jon made a weak sound, grateful for the cool liquid. "We found a cave, and from it we started building Undernegra. It took years to carve out the first tunnels but finally we had a start."

"Yes it was a good start." Vee agreed as he smoothed the blanket covering Jon.

Brand said nothing just listened and forced himself not to pull Vee into his arms and sooth away that sad faraway look in his eyes.

"It was Dargo who discovered the deep pools deep beneath the cave, so deep in the catacomb of rock. He was the first that drank from the pool. Both Vee and Dargo were around the same age, so young and innocent, barely out of training pants." Jon smiled fondly at Vee. "Both boys had always displayed the empathic ability. The water they drank merely intensified it exponentially. It took us a long time to discover the real purpose of the water."

"Was it corrupted?" asked Brand, his eyes hard, worried.

"No." Jon smiled, patting Vee's hand. "The water was filled with minerals and healing herbs growing in it. The doctors that came discerned that the water was slowly healing us. Reducing the effects of aging; strengthening our bones, muscles, brains. Making us even more different than before, this spring of eternal youth, changed our growth. What would take a normal life span; ours lengthened to two hundred times that. Each resulting offspring brought into the world has the benefit of that water, lengthening their lifespan, making them stronger. It seemed prudent that we monitor who had access to the water, but it was too late. The minerals and herbs are in our food, our homes, the very rock around us. There is no escaping it. I was but twenty- four when the first ones were cast out. I am now three hundred and seventy four." He laughed at the look of utter

shock that fell over Brand's face. "Yes you see the ramifications, we live too long. Both Vee and Dargo are over three hundred years old. Many of the adults you see around the city are over three hundred years old. And now that your team has arrived, who knows how long until the minerals, the very air you're breathing, starts to work on you. It's something to think about."

"Shit!" Brand was stunned. Scientists had been searching for ways to lengthen the life span of men and women for hundreds of years and everyone in Undernegra had it just by living in the rock! Then something else comes to mind. Vee had never had sex before last night. Shit, Fuck! He was over three hundred years old and had never slipped between the sheets with anyone, man or woman? His eyes zeroed in on Vee and seemed to burn a hole in the man's back.

He noticed that Vee purposefully kept his face averted, possibly because he was ashamed at being so unaware that he was built like a god, or maybe he was just confused, Brand didn't have time to think about it.

Chapter Nine

Vee walked silently beside Brand. Thoughts so chaotic swirled through his brain as they made their way finally towards the council chambers. Between the unwanted visions and Brand's presence in his bed last night, he really wanted to just have some peace and quiet alone to try to figure out just what had happened between them. Was it real? Or perhaps it was just a dream that never happened except in his mind. The stretching of his muscles around his ass told a different story, one he didn't want to believe at this moment. Until Brand, there had never been anyone that had attracted his attention so completely. Even now he could smell the clean musk of Brand's skin beneath the leather and cloth that covered him.

"Where are we going now?" Brand's voice brought him out of his thoughts.

"The council chambers, once we know how to proceed it will be easier to plan." His words were soft; almost a whisper as if he didn't want to speak about what was going to be coming. The vision still played over and over in the back of his mind. The Basilisk so large but graceful at the same time and the power! He had never felt the like until the strange reptile had tried to force his way into his mind.

Guards standing outside the Council room doors stepped up smartly and opened the door without comment. Both men entered and the door was shut behind them. Everyone was assembled, Vee noticed, as well as a few familiar faces. Shy timid Daniel with his books and research materials sat off to the side at a single desk while Tory, their resident excavation expert bent over plans of the city.

Vee swallowed and squared his shoulders, knowing that things were about to get more intense after this meeting.

"Vee, please tell us what you saw last night?" The head of the council, The Black, nodded his head.

Sighing Vee approached and sat in the chair before the table. “What I saw was Edmund’s... that is the doctors, kin Armon abetting himself with a basilisk. Though I could not see, plans were definitely being made. The creature plans to take over not just Aergra but Undernegra as well. It would be in our best interest to have a combined effort between both our peoples to ensure this creature does not carry out his plans.”

The Black nodded as did most of the others. “Did you recognize where they were? Can you narrow the field of the search?”

“I could describe the cavern,” Vee shrugged, his shoulders tense, as he relived the visions once again, “That is all I remember.”

Tory spoke up, his small lithe body coming forward. “The rocks know this place. They recognized the Basilisk but are unable to tell if he still resides in the cavern or not. We would have to go there and see.”

“Thank you Tory for your input.” The Black nodded his thanks. “How soon can you gather a team to make the attempt on locating this Basilisk?”

“A day possibly three.”

“Then you had best prepare.”

The night was subdued. Vee and Brand paced around each other like caged tigers in the small apartment. Unspoken they had both agreed to try separating, Brand going to his apartment, Vee in his. That hadn’t lasted long before Brand had showed up at his door, shaking in a cold sweat, eyes showing his frustration. He had pushed his way in and had remained silent in his regard.

They watched each other covertly, trying hard not to notice the others gaze. Meal time became an event in frustration. With only the small table serving as a kitchenette, they constantly bumped knees while silently wolfing down the food in front of them, trying to finish quickly separating as soon as possible.

Vee couldn’t keep still; his hands ached so that he kept flexing them, imagining those fingers tracing bare skin. The minutes ticking away tormented him. His skin felt tight, itchy. Something or someone was going to break soon and Vee sincerely hoped it wasn’t going to be him.

He sat there watching Vee with a predatory intensity, eyes watching his every move. Vee couldn't escape the heated stare and, if he were honest with himself, didn't want to. It was almost a tangible thing, that heat coming from those eyes, as if given the chance he could reach out and run his fingers through it, wrap it around him and never feel the cold again. He trembled at the poetic musing and then again as if trying to shake off the tension, the itchiness. But nothing would make it go away; it just kept building and building until Vee thought he would snap from the pressure.

One moment he was standing in the middle of the room, trembling with the strain of the silence, the next flat on his back, the cold floor beneath his head as his hair spread out. Brand snarling above him, those eyes hotter than ever boring into his own, hands clenching in cloth, then a rending of that cloth echoed around them dragging a surprised gasp from Vee at the restrained violence behind it.

"What..." His voice choked then cut off all together as his lips were smothered by Brand's.

It became a battle of wills as the passion erupted around them, through them filling the room with choked moans, harsh breathing and urgent grunts. Vee tangled his hands in cloth and pulled sharply, no knowing if it was Brand's clothes or his own, only knowing that he needed to reach skin, his palms itched to feel that connection.

With a sharp thrust hampered by leather both of their cocks came close to contact, Vee grunting at the sharp pressure before Brand growled something and released his lips. A violent flip and Vee was staring at the floor beneath him, too dazed to react to the rending of his pants.

Everything tightened into focus at the feeling of those hands on his bare ass, fingers digging in, nails scraping skin as the ruined clothing was pulled down to his ankles and off. Muttered cursing could be heard just beyond the ringing in his ears before more clothing was ripped away. Finally! His breath caught sharply as the cool air around the skin of his back was replaced by the scorching hot skin of Brand's chest. That thick organ slapped and settled right in the crack of his ass, pressing and sliding with his movements.

Vee felt Brand's hand wind its way through his hair just before his head was jerked harshly back, wincing at the sharp pull he closed his eyes at the restrained violence behind the move.

"I'm through with the dance." Words were pushed through gritted teeth.

"What dance-" Vee choked out as that other hand wrapped around his cock, pressing them together as Brand tightened his fist.

"You've been dancing around me for the past three hours, just getting close enough to touch, then dancing away. You're a tease, Vee." The words were soft, subtle, just camouflage.

"I haven't." He tried to deny but choked on a cry as Brand latched on to his neck with strong suction, lips and teeth were employed with just the right amount of pain, just this side of passion. Vee gave himself up to that feeling. Something inside him needed that violence. He thought he would shatter in a million pieces if Brand showed tenderness now.

On hands and knees, Brand was leaning over him heavily as he fought to maintain his balance as cock shoved against his backside hard and heavy, the tip leaking fluid constant easing the way. There was no gentleness in the movement, but a harsh pounding rhythm that he felt deep inside waiting to be unleashed.

Brand could feel the pulse thundering under Vee's skin. All night long the heat had burned, increasing each passing hour. He couldn't stand it anymore ... every instinct told him he had to have Vee... now! The rending of fabric barely penetrated the haze that enveloped him. Something was happening to them that much he could comprehend. It was as if he had been brought down to his baser instincts, the need to claim his mate overpowering all else.

Hissing he felt a pain burrowing deep in his mind, tendrils of sensation spreading through the lobe obliterating all thought, leaving only instinct. With a snarl, he tightened his hold on Vee, his teeth going for the shoulder that curved so sweetly in his vision.

Vee felt the change, his empathic gift narrowing suddenly so it just affected both him and Brand. He felt the instinct to submit to his mate suddenly overwhelming in its

intensity. Relaxing every muscle except those keeping him upright he gave everything over to the man above him. “Brand,” His voice came out on a sigh, liquid warmth filling every pore of his body.

More heat poured from Brand above him until he burned uncomfortably. This was not more than a passion's heat, it was something they hadn't anticipated nor could Vee even hope to understand. Reaching out with his empathic gift, all he felt was instinct, no thoughts no emotions.

A particularly brutal shove sent him to the deck, his hands sliding along the floor until he was almost crushed under the weight of Brand. “Mine alone!” The words were snarled, almost unrecognizable. Still the heat rose up inside his body, answering the unspoken command. “Yours,” He murmured, struggling to turn over so he could face his mate with everything he had.

Brand loosened his hold long enough for Vee to turn over. Once on his back he was able to look up into the face of his lover, seeing the inner battle waging in his eyes. The instinct to take without thought to his mate was overwhelming but Brand was fighting it with everything he had.

With a gentle hand, Vee cradled his cheek. “Only yours,” he whispered, bringing his head up so he could lay his lips on his mate. Just that touch was the thing that turned the tide. Brand relaxed into him, devouring his mouth like a starving animal. Whimpers and groans filled the air as they became one desperate entity, desperate to get closer... to become one.

Their cocks slid together, creating a delicious friction that painted their stomachs with pre-come easing the way.

“I need you in me. Please Brand.” His words were desperate as he pleaded, fingers digging into Brand's hips, “I can't wait anymore.”

Nodding, his mate did the only thing he could. With an arch of his spine he levered himself up and away, Vee's legs opening to make way for Brand's hips. Sweat slicked their skin causing it to glow in the light of the room.

Brand stuck two fingers into his mouth; Vee saw his throat work as he wetted them, slicking them up for the breaching that would come in moments. Vee felt his ass clench at the thought of that huge organ burrowing into him, tingling at the thought.

When Brand pulled his fingers out, they were glistening with saliva, dripping in front of his eyes before slowly lowering the wet digits between those cheeks to delve in deeper. Brand watched as Vee arched slightly at the first breach. Air hissed out of his teeth at the first burn, slowly turning into a low humming groan as his neck arched against the floor.

“That’s it.” Brand murmured, scissoring his fingers stretching that delicate tissue. “Feel the burn. It flares hot at first, doesn’t it?” Vee nodded quickly, whimpering at the penetration. “But it melts into the most delicious heat.” He purred, leaning forward to lick the long line of Vee’s neck. He could feel the pounding pulse just beneath the skin, felt Vee jerk as he nipped sharply before resuming his position.

Moments passed with only the sound of harsh breathing, punctuated with soft moans and whimpers. When Brand pulled his fingers back Vee curled his ass, trying to follow the penetration, eyes closed as he relied solely on feeling. Brand thought he had never seen a more beautiful sight, Vee laying there panting with need, skin glowing with sweat as his head thrashed softly from side to side.

Gripping Vee’s thighs firmly, Brand thrust forward slightly, the head of his cock lined up perfectly with that wrinkled hole twitching and clenching with need. Vee’s eyes flew open wide, the whites of his eyes showing as they rolled at the feeling of penetration. Hands gripped at him urgently as Brand pressed slowly but forcefully into the waiting sheath.

He had to grit his teeth at the overwhelming pleasure that gripped him like sharp teeth. His head fell back as he seated full inside Vee. Both groaned at the feeling of being consumed. It was like being thrust into a bonfire, one he never wanted to leave.

Vee groaned at the fullness as Brand froze, trying to give him a moment to adjust. He wanted to thank him for that but the words wouldn’t come over the tightness in his throat. Lifting a hand he ran it softly over Brand’s chest, grazing lightly over that small nipple twitching at his caress. Sighing he felt the pressure ease slightly, relaxing more fully into the position, feeling a little of the tension dissipate.

Brand must have felt it because eyes met his just a second before he began to move, sliding out almost all the way before thrusting back in, slow and measured strokes.

Vee felt the connection click, his mind opening, unfurling like a billowing cloud until all he could see, feel or think was Brand.

It was like overlapping sensations all at once, both his and Brand's. He could feel that cock shuttling in and out of his body, creating a delicious pleasure that rocketed higher and higher with each movement, while at the same time he could feel what it was like to thrust deeper into his own body. The combination of both sides pressing in on him had him jerking uncontrollably, screaming his release as thick ropy pearls of come shot out of him, painting his chest in cream. Vaguely he heard Brand shout of release seconds after his own but was unable to move.

He could feel the initial merging remain steady as Brand slumped exhausted against him, their hearts beating the same staccato rhythm. Weakly his hand landed heavily on Brand's back, fingers twitching as he tried to sooth his partner.

Chuckling weakly when Brand chuffed out a breath at the caress, he could do nothing but try to settle his own heartbeat and breathing with the weight of his partner on his chest. Closing his eyes he allowed sleep to claim him, all the while he could feel another presence in his mind, comfortable and safe, warm and soothing.

Chapter Ten

When they woke the next morning, it was to have the same sharing of minds. Both could still feel each other, hovering in the background, connected. It was a strange sensation and a little disorienting. Neither one wanted to test the limits just yet, but quietly moved together, almost mimicking each others movements, anticipating what the other wanted even before they did, tempers flared in short bursts before their connection smoothed things over and it started all over again.

“What the hell is happening?” Brand growled, pacing the length of the room.

Vee lay on his side across the width of the bed, his head pillowed on his arm, hair loose around his shoulders and falling to the blankets beneath him. His eyes followed Brands route back and forth but for all purposes he looked lazy and content. “I don’t know. This is a strange feeling. I have felt others emotions all of my life, this is the first time I have been connected in such a way that I can sense yours as if they were my own.”

“It doesn’t scare you?” Brand looked sideways at him as he moved like a caged animal. Shoulders bunched and relaxed in time with his movements.

“As I said,” Vee shrugged, “I am used to feeling emotions from everyone around me. What’s new is that you can feel mine too. You do, don’t you?” He sat up, bending one knee under him, the other leg stretched out as he supported himself with one arm. The pose was unconsciously graceful, and unbearably hot. Vee felt the flair of lust at the back of his head as Brand took in his pose.

Brand shrugged as if irritated but he nodded and went back to pacing.

“Who knows what started this,” Vee started, “But it’s happened. It could fade today, tomorrow or never.”

“So? I just learn to deal with it?” Brand snarled, closed his eyes and took a deep breath as he reigned in his temper.

“Is it that uncomfortable?” Vee raised an eyebrow looking at him fully.

“It’s just ...disconcerting.”

Vee moved off the bed, sliding along the fabric of the blanket until his feet touched the floor, “perhaps if we did something normal? For you that is.”

“We need to make sure plans are progressing for the mission. I have a request into command at Aergra for re-supply and more personnel. Roman was on vacation when we departed, he should be back now. I want him here as soon as possible.”

Vee felt a small tingling of jealousy spear through him, “Roman?”

Brand smiled as he felt that emotion coming from Vee. “He is one of my best men. He is a beast of a man, who can run the most delicate laser with a gentle touch. I would trust him with my life if it came to it. Roman has the skills and the muscle for what we need to do, you tell him what we want, and he will figure out a way to do it.”

Nodding, Vee remained silent but the sensation of envy left him in a rush. Just another soldier, there was nothing to worry about. He lowered his head, turning away, hiding his relieved expression, missing the knowing smile on Brand's face as he did so.

The door chimed, alerting them to a visitor. Vee edged around Brand, still hiding his expression and answered the tone.

“Alexander.” Both his voice and emotions showed his surprise at the visitor. Stepping back he admitted the man. Quiet and solemn the visitor entered and nodded to Brand, sliding gracefully into the chair offered.

“It's alright to come?” Alexander looked around nervously, light green eyes, the color of the youngest moss growing on the walls deep in the caves, peered around.

Vee's voice took on a soothing quality that Brand felt connected to him all the more. “You are always welcome to visit Alexander. What can I help you with?”

“The visions have started again.” The younger man looked around nervously, as if something was going to pop out of the walls. Leaning forward, his voice dropped to a whisper, “Scary visions. They hurt.” His hand rose to rub absently at his temple.

Vee nodded, seeming to understand, looking over at Brand, “Alexander is an empath like me, but he has the added burden of visions to deal with. His recall of the visions is totally accurate from what we have been able to determine.” Looking back at Alexander, “What have you seen?” Tipping his head to the side, his eyes gentle as he watched Alexander fidget for a moment, before his eyes went even lighter and milkier falling into a trance.

“A lot of shadows,” Alexander’s voice went all whispery, “Hissing, not like you hear from the steam generators, this is more like...” his voice faded in indecision.

“An asp?” Vee’s voice deepened. “The hissing of a snake.”

“Yes. There is movement inside the rock and destruction of anything that comes in its path. I saw a form, cast in shadow. Whatever it is does not want to be seen yet. It’s biding its time, but there is malevolence about it. Sinister, as it comes closer to Undernegra. It wants to harm us, to demolish us. Once it is done here, I feel it will proceed to Aergra.”

Vee looked up at Brand and felt both the rising tension and the understanding. Their eyes met and each nodded in agreement. It was the Basilisk.

Alexander’s hand trembled as he whipped at his face, eyes clearing, silvery hair falling around his face, into his eyes but he ignored it. “The vision has left me feeling drained. I must go back to my room.” He made a move to stand, but shakily he fell back into the chair, his arms and legs useless.

Vee stooped and picked up the smaller form, “You will rest here my friend.” Transferring him to the bed, Vee swept that silver hair out from a deceptively youthful face. “Just rest here Alexander. We will go to the council with this news.”

But he needn’t have worried, Alexander had already fallen asleep, his hands curled under his chin, body curled slightly like a child. Vee threw a blanket over his inert form and motioned for Brand to follow.

Outside the door Vee sighed, his hand searching for Brands which was taken quietly. “We must inform the council. Alexander is never wrong and I have never seen a vision overtake him as that one did.

“He wasn’t in the last meeting. Who is he?”

“Alexander works in the library. Too many people around him is not comfortable for him. He can’t seem to raise the necessary mental shields to help him like I can. No doubt he finds comfort in books rather than people. We find it better to meet with him in short one hour sessions, to lessen the emotional load.”

The walk to the council chambers was blessedly quiet and uneventful. No one stopped them, nor walked along the same corridor. It was a blessing, that emotional and physical silence. But as they approached the council chambers, more people started

showing up around them, and Brand was given his first glimpse at what Vee had to deal with on a daily basis.

The emotional bombardment was a continuous hum. Like an irritating wave of bees buzzing around them. Only physical contact between both of them seemed to lessen the sensation.

Nodding to the guards who stood at the council room entrance, Vee pulled Brand along, knowing what he was feeling, suddenly understanding Vee's world and how he learned to cope. He could feel Brand testing the mental walls that he had slowly built over the years, poking and prodding learning how he did it. Smiling to himself he had to admit that he enjoyed having Brand there, just in the back of his mind, hovering where he could always feel him close.

Everyone was there, except quiet Alexander who was now sleeping comfortably in their room. Easing through the group, nodding in greeting but saying very little, he led Brand over to a set of chairs off to the side.

Just as they reached for their seats, a strange oily feeling roiled over his mind, spreading agonizing pain bringing him to his knees. Only a sick evil laughter could be heard over the roaring in his ears as his knees hit the floor beneath him.

Through the connection they now had, Brand felt it the instant Vee's mind was invaded, the pain was shared equally between the two and he couldn't help but bring his hands to his head as he fell beside his lover, mouth opening in a soundless scream.

People in the room started scrambling, shouts could be heard vaguely but as if through a wall of water.

"What the hell!" He thought and was shocked when his question was answered.

"Hell indeed young human." The voice was a hiss, almost intelligible. "Your kind has yet to come to grips with your mortality, using your science," it spat, "to lengthen your lifespan, encroaching on territory that wasn't yours to begin with. I think its time someone taught your kind a lesson in humility."

Even in his mind, his words were gritted with the pain he was feeling, "We encroach on nothing! Humans have been here for millennia and will continue long after your bones are nothing but dust Basilisk."

The silence was telling, clearly Brand has surprised the serpent. “So you have gathered that much information. Clearly I have underestimated you pitiful humans.”

“And you are so superior? Using a human as your lapdog? My cousin... has he given you information on our kind? You both have different skin but clearly you are cut from the same cloth. Death and destruction are your tools, while we live for life and peace.”

“Peace?!” A barking laugh had them jerking in agony, “even your own kind separates those they feel are undesirable. Force them to live under the ground, out of sight out of mind. I have watched your kind for so long.” His voice trailed off almost as if contemplating their future. “But even while you hide them away you can never forget them can you? They are of your flesh, your blood. Their names can be whipped from your history, but even members of their line can remember them, in hushed whispers behind closed doors. Oh I know your secrets young human.” He chuckled knowingly.

“So what, your our judge, jury and executioner? You’ve already found us guilty of what ever crime you believe we have committed?” He gritted the words out through painfully clenched teeth.

“Your history speaks for itself, young human.” Was it’s only reply.

“As powerful as you seem, I doubt you can kill all of us. We will defend ourselves.”

“Ahh, but am I alone?” the basilisk seemed to slither closer, filling his mind even more. Vaguely he heard Vee cry out hoarsely, living the same experiences.

“We have never encountered anything like you in our explorations of the planet.”

“I am but a sentinel... a guard if you will. When I call my brethren, the rest will come and swarm over this planet, reclaiming it for our own once again. It will be child’s play.” He seemed to gloat as Brand was filled with immense dread.

“Enjoy your time left young human,” laughter bubbled, echoing in his head making him writhe, “It has become considerably shortened.”

With that last word the pain vanished, the oily blackness dissipated and he lay there panting vaguely aware that everyone was shouting questions. His body remained collapsed at an odd angle; legs tangled with Vee’s, his dominant hand gripped tightly in the fabric of Vee’s shirt, arm bent strangely to keep the contact.

“He’s gone.” Vee’s voice came out choked as he was slowly embraced. Automatically Brands arms obeyed the unspoken command even though they were numb, wrapping around Vee, crushing him to his chest as the other man buried his face in his neck and began to cry from the pain and stress of the encounter. He wasn’t feeling too hot himself, but he cleared his throat.

“Our timetable has been shortened.” He managed to get out while his throat wanted to close off his air from holding off his emotions. He wanted to wail his anger; he wanted to beat something with his bare hands.

“How long?” the words came off to the right but he didn’t turn his head, just closed his eyes and sighing and clutching Vee tighter.

“I don’t know. But he apparently has the means of calling for reinforcements. Others of his kind, I don’t know if they are here, or somewhere else but he insinuated that he was merely a guardian, a sentinel. If he calls others here, we’re fucked.”

Silence settled with a new horror at his words. “Then we will call for our own reinforcements.” The Black murmured stepping into his line of vision. Kneeling down the man placed a soothing hand on Vee’s back and Brand felt Vee flinch before relaxing further into the embrace. “For now we have a reprieve. I suspect he’s toying with us, looking forward to our next move. We shall have to plan carefully. In the mean time we will contact your government and request further support and relay what information we have gathered.”

“No.” Brand shook his head. “I will contact them. Or better yet, you go through your channels. I will go through mine.” His eyes hardened, went cold and dead, “I have friends in higher places, darker places and I can contact the heads of the original houses.” One way or another, he would fight this thing. He would kill it before he had the ability to call the other basilisk from wherever they were. Just as suddenly as his anger boiled, it was soothed away with warm mental fingers tingling at the back of his head. Bending his head, he buried his nose in Vee’s neck. He had a future to fight for, Vee was his future and he would do whatever it took to keep them both alive and together.

“I know you will.” Vee’s words were whispered in his ear, filling him with confidence despite the undercurrent of terror running through them. “Together.”

The End... Or is it?

Look for the next installment in the continuation of the Basilisk Tales.