

Cosmic Cops: Dark Pleasures

B.J. McCall

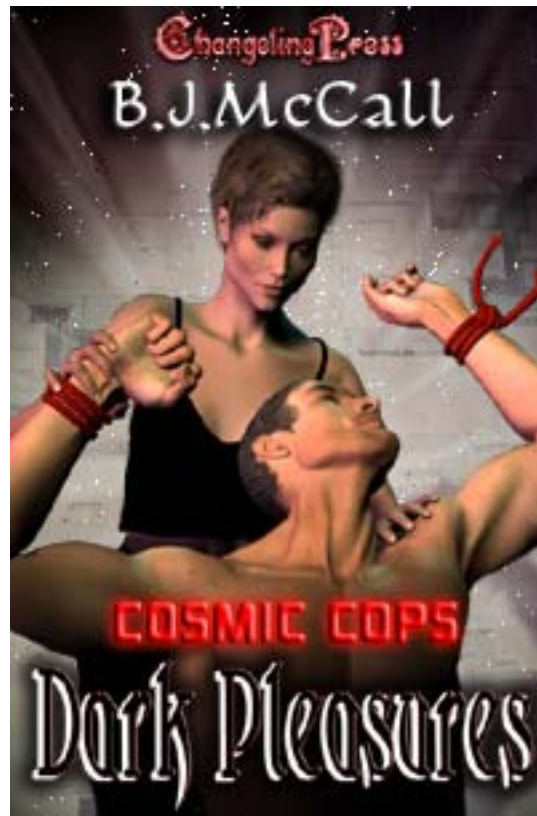
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Chapter One

Sada Prentiss spotted her boss, Brace Ryn, sitting at his favorite table at the far end of the lounge. Beer in hand, he stared out the window at the shimmering desert landscape of Bezal Moon Six. Ryn, the commander of the Galactic Enforcement Agency outpost, had requested a transfer without so much as a hint of his intentions.

After serving a couple of years stationed in the Bezal quadrant, any sane officer would request a transfer out of the blazing heat. Spread out between ten outposts and a command center, two hundred officers served in the sector they'd nicknamed Hell. No surprise the lieutenant wanted out.

Before Sada got within six feet of him, Ryn lifted a booted foot and shoved a chair away from the table. "Join me for a drink, Sergeant?"

Although the lieutenant had had his back to her, he'd sensed her approach. Maybe he'd felt her anger.

She dropped into the seat. "What gave me away?"

He turned away from the reinforced plastic capable of deflecting laser strikes and pulse mortars as well as keeping the intense surface heat at bay and looked at her. A slow sexy grin curled his lips. "Your perfume."

At least he'd noticed. "You're shit-faced, Lieutenant."

"Not yet, but on my way. What gave me away?"

"You only grin at me like that when you've been drinking."

"Like what?"

"Like I'm a woman and not your second-in-command."

"There isn't a man on this station that isn't aware you are a woman." His gaze drifted to her mouth. "You make it damn hard to forget."

Like she wasn't aware of him as a man. Even shit-faced, Ryn exuded confident, alpha male sexiness. Since her assignment to Moon Six, Sada had wanted Ryn. She'd waited for the respected commander to give her an indication the attraction was mutual. Although he'd only grinned at her once or twice while in his cups, that rare grin had given her hope. Day-to-day he addressed her by her rank and treated her with respect. As the months passed Sada had managed to keep her focus on the job and tried to ignore her growing feelings. It hadn't worked.

Why hadn't he transferred months ago? No, Ryn had to wait until her feelings had slapped her hard across the face. Nothing like a close call to bring you nose-to-nose with your emotions!

"Want a beer?"

Over the last few years she'd acquired a taste for the Earth brew. Ryn loved the stuff, but his offer surprised her. As the station's commanding officers, Sada and Ryn had a standing agreement. While one relaxed the other acted as watch commander. She glanced at the empty shot glasses lined up alongside the empty beer containers. "I'll have the same."

Ryn raised his arm and extended two fingers. Within seconds a serving droid slid silently toward them and deposited two cold beers and two shots on the table.

Sada downed the shot and slammed the glass on the table.

"You've got something to say, Sergeant, so say it."

The anger rose inside her, hot and heavy. She loved him and he'd decided to transfer without giving her a heads-up. The fact that he had no idea how she felt about him didn't excuse his actions. As his second-in-command, she felt he owed her an explanation.

Holding onto her emotions with a razor-thin edge, she asked, "Why didn't you tell me about your transfer to Special Ops?"

He took a long pull on his beer before answering. "I thought you wanted a promotion. Congratulations, Lieutenant, Bezel Six is your command."

"What?"

“Rescuing the daughter of the Riidan Prefect from the Ibathians made HQ stand up and take notice.”

“HQ should have slapped a security silence on the details of the raid instead of broadcasting our actions throughout the galaxy. Men like Kradic don’t take kindly to losing ransom. Putting our team front and center on the news reduces our effectiveness. The bad guys watch and learn.”

“I don’t like the media attention either, but seeing you in action resulted in a twenty percent increase in new recruits.”

And let Kradic know where I am.

“HQ rewarded both of us.” He pointed his index finger at her. “Part of Hell belongs to you. Didn’t HQ notify you?”

She hadn’t gotten past the first paragraph announcing Ryn’s transfer. Sada had requested assignment in Hell sector. The Bezal wormholes served as galactic crossroads. Officers assigned to Bezal hated the heat and loved the action, but Sada had personal reasons for wanting to work in Hell.

Once on Bezal Six, Ryn had become one of those reasons. She’d wanted a promotion and getting it after one year put her ahead of the game, but she also wanted Ryn. “Thanks for the recommendation.”

“You’re a good cop and the team is lucky to have you. But you work too hard. Sleep is a good thing.”

Since the raid, sleep had eluded her and Kradic had haunted her dreams. Her anonymity had disappeared in a thirty second broadcast. “When are you leaving?”

“I’m hitching a ride on the supply transport.”

“But that’s in four hours.”

“Make me a promise, Sada.”

He’d never called her by her first name.

Sada figured his request would have something to do with his team. The Bezal Six Tactical Assault Team had the best hostage-saved record in the quadrant. Many pirates found hostages more profitable than stealing cargo. Political groups had

adopted hostage taking as a preferred method of funding their causes. While under Ryn's three-year command the team hadn't lost an officer. She intended to maintain that record. "Name it, it's yours."

He leaned toward her and curled his hand around her neck. The caress of his thumb against the skin beneath her ear sent shivers down her spine. "Promise me you'll remember this."

Her anger melted away, but the heat inside Sada intensified as his lips touched hers. Answering his kiss, she opened her mouth. Slow and tender, his lips melded to hers, exploring, tasting, testing her response. A moan eased from her throat as his tongue performed an erotic slide against hers. His fingers tightened and the kiss ended with a deep, throaty moan. Opening her eyes, she met his gaze. The hunger in his dark blue eyes told her he wanted her. How long had he held his desire in check? "Why now?"

"You don't work for me, Sada. It's a technicality, but for the next four hours the commander's quarters belong to both of us."

She hadn't thought about the loophole created by her promotion and his reassignment. Picking up his untouched shot, she downed the liquor. "I've never been one to waste time."

Sada's anticipation built as she and Ryn marched out of the lounge and headed for the commander's quarters. He didn't touch her until they were locked inside. Finally, the moment she'd been waiting for had come, but the packed bag sitting by the door reminded her of the cost. "I'll miss you, Ryn."

Grasping her by the waist, he pushed her back against the door and pressed his muscled frame to hers. His broad chest crushed her breasts and the hard ridge of his erection poked her belly. Every cell in her body reacted and every nerve came alive. "Think about now, not tomorrow."

The taste of his lips, the demand in his kiss, and the heat of his hand on her breast pushed all thought from her brain, leaving only need and tactile sensation. Sada

wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him back. By the time he let her come up for air, Sada burned as hot as the Bezal sun.

Ryn pulled at her sleeveless shirt and shoved his hand beneath it.

The touch of his hand against her bare breast sent a shock of heat straight to her pussy. Beneath the stroke of his thumb, her nipple tightened. When his mouth replaced his hand, she couldn't breathe.

Hot and wet, his tongue raked her nipple until she wanted to scream. If she did a dozen cops would rush to her aid. The urge rose, but she held her expression to a painful moan. His lips sealed around her aching flesh, suckling deep and lush. Sada pounded her hand against the door to keep from screaming out his name. "Naked. I want you naked," she managed.

Ryn lifted his head. "I've waited too damn long for a fast fuck. I've been planning this since the first day you arrived. Baby, you're gonna remember this."

"I'm gonna die first."

"Yeah."

He yanked her shirt up and over her head. A low groan came from deep in his throat and blue fire lit his eyes as he gazed at her tits. Sada wanted to shove one into his hot mouth. She didn't have to. Ryn swooped down on the breast he hadn't sucked. Fire shot through her, burning all the way to her toes. Her panties went damp.

She closed her eyes as his hand slid between her legs. The combination of his hot mouth on her breast and the friction of material against her wet pussy had her shaking with need. After serving months on an all male outpost the touch of a man, any man, would have had her primed and ready to climax, but Ryn wasn't about to give her quick satisfaction. And Ryn wasn't any man. He wanted her to ache for him and Sada welcomed the sweet pain.

Pushing her pussy against Ryn's big hand paid off. She came, the heat and the friction giving more pleasure than her imagination and her favorite vibrator had provided. After tonight how could she ever be satisfied with a sex toy again? "Damn, Ryn. Why did you make me wait so long?"

Leaving a hot, wet trail with his tongue, Ryn licked her from breast to neck. He reached for the waistband of her uniform trousers. "I'll make it up to you."

With Ryn's hands as their guide, her trousers and panties slid to her ankles. Ryn kneeled before her and his heated gaze focused on her pussy. A low throaty groan signaled his intentions. His hot tongue lashed her aching flesh. One lush lick and several slow thrusts had Sada ready to scream her pleasure. Ryn knew his job and executed it with finesse. Fisting the short strands of his dark brown hair, Sada held on for the climax building between her legs. Ryn dug his fingers into her butt cheeks and buried his face in her pussy.

Sada wanted to throw her leg over his shoulder and bring him closer still, but her trousers kept her booted feet anchored. When Ryn latched onto her clit and suckled, her heart went into double time. Seeing stars, she climaxed.

Sweet Mama!

Ryn rubbed her ass, his long fingers soothing the flesh he'd gripped with such intensity. "Water," she managed between deep breaths.

Between the liquor, the heat, and the sex she'd dehydrate before getting Ryn naked. Always efficient, the sexy lieutenant turned his attention to her boots first.

"Don't touch the socks." He cocked an eyebrow and looked up at her. "The heat," she explained. "My feet are a mess."

"I don't care."

"I do," she said, grabbing a handful of his shirt.

He pushed aside her hands and within a few seconds, he'd stripped her of every stitch of clothing except her socks. Without taking his eyes off of her, he retrieved two plastic bottles of ice water from the cold unit. "Drink," he ordered as he thrust a container into her hand. "I'll watch."

"Watch?"

"I've imagined you naked for months. Now that you are, I intend to get my fill."

He downed the water in several gulps and stared at her while she drank. In Hell, water was essential for survival. Having no natural source for water on Bezal, the

officers stationed in the sector were dependent upon monthly shipments. The heat barely dropped at night and the outside temperature averaged between one hundred fifty degrees to two hundred on a bad day. Outside it was Hell. Inside it was hot.

Standing naked before Ryn she sizzled.

Sada tossed the empty water container aside. "You're going to miss me, Ryn."

Closing the short distance between them, he cupped her buttocks in his big hands. "If I do my job right the result should be mutual."

Sada grabbed a fistful of his tee shirt, pulled it up high, and kissed his bare chest. His skin was slightly damp with perspiration and tasted salty.

"Then do a very good job."

She nipped a flat nipple. Getting her message, he released her ass and grabbed the hem of his shirt. Muscles bulged in his arms and shoulders as he stripped. Sada had seen him shirtless before, but hadn't been able to touch. Now she intended to indulge herself. Placing her palm against his chest, she planted kisses down his breastbone to his belly.

Wanting him naked, Sada dropped to her knees and released the seam of his trousers. A low husky grunt exploded from his throat as she wrapped her hand around his length and pumped his hard flesh. Beneath her palm, heat penetrated the soft material of his underwear.

"Sada."

Like a husky caress she felt the way he said her name. Her love for him washed over her, making her heart thump hard. If she had only these few hours, she wanted them memorable. Hooking her thumbs in the waistband of his underwear, Sada eased them over his lean hips and down muscled thighs. His thick cock sprang free. Eager to touch him and make her erotic dreams come true, Sada grasped the hard length of him. Hot and silky, his flesh jerked beneath her fingers.

"Suck me."

Molding her lips around him, Sada tugged on his hot flesh. The sharp intake of his breath encouraged her to take him deeper. She laved him, swirling her tongue around his hard length down to the root and back to the tip.

His hands cupped her head and his fingers curled around the short strands of her hair. Pumping his hips, he communicated his need. Wanting to give him pleasure, Sada took him deep, suckled harder. The salty taste of his climax hit her tongue.

Releasing him, Sada looked up at Ryn. His features were strained and his breathing labored, but the grin on his face said it all. While he caught his breath, Sada removed his boots and relieved him of his trousers and underwear.

"I dreamed about you, Sada. How it would feel holding you. How sweet you'd taste."

"You didn't dream about me on my knees?"

"Ohhh, yeah. And in a few other positions."

Leaning down, he grasped her by the upper arms and drew her to her feet. As she rose, Sada's fingers glided over his sweat-dampened torso.

"I wanted to taste you, taste my climax on your tongue." His lips brushed hers. Then his tongue slid between her lips and the tastes mingled and merged.

Sada pressed her breasts to his chest and rolled her hips against his. She wanted him inside her. His kiss deepened as he lifted her up and placed her back against the door. Wrapping her legs around his waist, Sada anchored an arm around his neck. Reaching down, she grasped his cock and guided the broad tip to her pussy.

Wet and ready, Sada waited for his first thrust. Thick and deliciously hard, he entered her, withdrew and pushed deeper. Then he stilled and lifted his head. When their gazes met Sada's heart banged against her chest wall. She loved him so much she hurt.

"If I move, I'm gonna come."

She grabbed a fistful of his hair. "If you don't move, I'm gonna die."

A sexy grin curled his lips as he granted her wish. The tempo increased with each thrust, deeper, harder, faster. His cock pounded her pussy, the driving strokes giving Sada what she wanted, needed. Hot, sweat-slicked skin slid against skin.

Riding the sweet edge, Brace dug his fingers into her fine ass.

Grunting, he thrust into her, hard and fast, burying his cock to the root. She held him tight, grasping and milking him until her breathing became as ragged as his and the rising heat sucked the air from the room.

Unable to hold back, his climax shot from his balls. She cursed him as she came.

Brace sucked in a deep breath and exhaled. Damn, it was hot. "Getting on that transport is gonna hurt."

When she didn't respond, Brace figured she hadn't heard him. He'd wanted Sada from the first moment he'd laid eyes on her. Although he never voiced his feelings and had refused to acknowledge all the warning signs, he'd fallen for her. He'd told himself the jump in his heart rate when she entered the room and the sleepless nights filled with explicit dreams were a normal reaction to months without sex. Finally, he'd realized it wasn't a lack of sex at all. It was Sada. Love had knocked him off his feet and he welcomed the pain.

Just the thought of leaving her tore at his heart. Leaving the sexiest woman he'd ever known in charge of forty horny cops wasn't the brightest idea he'd had, but at least she'd know how he felt about her.

It was selfish of him to want to act upon his desire and need before he left, but Sada belonged in his bed, in his life. He'd intended to seduce her and declare his love. Exit like the hero vowing to return and pray she'd wait for him. Dumb idea. Given the mission, returning in one piece was a stretch. Still, he needed her to know how he felt, how much she meant to him.

Releasing his grip on her ass, Brace slid out of her. Holding her by the waist, he brushed his lips against hers before stepping back. A contented look gentled her angular features and her eyes opened. Dark brown and framed in long black lashes, her eyes dominated her beautiful face. From the first moment their gazes had locked and

his heart had twisted in response, Sada had haunted his dreams. As the weeks passed, his admiration of her brains and abilities had grown. The job demanded stamina and Sada held her own. Her body was fit and lean, her legs long. Okay, her feet were big, but so what. "I love seeing you this way."

She grinned and pushed damp curls off her forehead. "Naked and slick with sweat?"

"Our sweat," he corrected. "Naked with my come running down your thigh."

"Aren't you the romantic."

As she moved past him, Brace snagged her by the waist and turned her toward him. He cupped her face in his hands. "What just happened between us was the best. You're a beautiful woman, Sada."

"You've been stationed out here too long."

He kissed her hard and fast. "I could make love to you forever."

"How about a drink of water and we'll work on the next few hours."

While Sada used the facilities Brace retrieved water containers from the cold unit. He drank, emptying one container, and stretched out on the bed.

Sada joined him. "Why Special Ops?"

Brace handed her a container. "Time for a change. Ops Command is putting together a special team. They needed someone with tactical assault experience, so I requested a transfer."

"I'd say time for a change would be a stint as a teacher at Tac Training or a desk job at Command. Depending on the mission, Special Ops is either personal, a calling, or suicidal."

Protecting his team was a calling. Kradic, the ruler of Ibatha, had sworn revenge upon his Bezal Six crew, specifically mentioning Sada. When HQ had formed a special team to capture him, Brace had volunteered. As the leader of two effective raids thwarting Kradic's hostage-for-ransom schemes and another resulting in the capture of an Ibathian slave transport, Brace had offered to serve as a decoy and lure the prince

from his stronghold. Brace intended to capture Kradic before he attacked Bezal Six and followed through on his vendetta against Sada. Yeah, the mission was personal.

"You're not coming back, are you?"

Her question surprised him. Did she think he planned to make love to her and walk away?

Rolling onto his side, he splayed his hand on Sada's belly. The softness of her golden skin sent a sweet ripple of desire through his middle. "Not to this sector. I've had enough of Hell, but at the first opportunity I'm coming for you."

He slid his hand to her breast and palmed her softness. Beneath his hand, her heart thumped. "I'll be waiting for you. Don't break my heart, Lieutenant."

Gently, he thumbed her nipple. It peaked to an inviting taut nub and her heart rate jumped. She arched her back and pushed her breast into his palm. Rubbing and caressing, Brace teased her soft flesh.

"I love the feel of your hands. Even when you touched me during contact drills, I loved it."

"I had to cut them short when I started getting hard-ons."

Sada laughed. When he rolled her nipple between his thumb and forefinger, she moaned.

"How about my mouth on you?"

Leaning down, he touched his lips to hers. Moist, hot, and so inviting, her lips molded to his and sucked lushly on his tongue. Need spiraled, heating his blood. When she pressed her belly against his swelling cock, Brace answered by arching his hips. He released her breast and slid his arm around her narrow waist. Holding her tight, he crushed her soft breasts against his chest and pressed his groin to hers. He loved the feel of her, soft, naked and hot.

Brace had never known such utter contentment, such aching need. The sheer sensual joy of holding her shook him to the core. Deepening the kiss, he poured out the love he'd held inside for months.

Sada curled her arm around his neck and ran her fingers through his hair. A slow gyration of her hips told him she wanted him.

Shifting his weight, Brace rolled on top of her. He planted soft kisses along the column of her neck, moving slowly to her breast. Capturing her nipple between his lips, he circled the hard nub with his tongue, once, twice then suckled deep and strong. She arched her back and whispered his name.

A breathless moan came deep from her throat as she wrapped her legs around his waist. Against his belly, her pussy was hot and damp. Releasing her nipple, Brace traced a wet trail down her torso, pausing briefly to nip the soft flesh of her belly before burying his face in her heat to taste her.

Soft and wet, her hot pussy trembled. She fisted his hair and lifted her hips. His cock hardened to the point of delicious pain.

Capturing her clit between his lips, he suckled deeply while sliding a finger inside her contracting pussy. Adding a second finger, he fucked her and sucked her until she cried out with delight and came.

Easing his fingers from her pussy, he licked off her cream before rising to his knees. Damn, she tasted good. Sada opened her eyes, fastened her gaze on his straining cock, and grinned. "Is that big thing for me?"

"Roll over, baby, or I'm gonna embarrass myself and come."

When Sada granted his request and presented her sweet ass to him, Brace's balls contracted. So hard he hurt, Brace grasped her by the hips with one hand and his aching cock with the other. Positioning the tip to her wet center, he thrust his hips and slid inside her tight heat.

With each stroke Brace pushed deeper until she held all of him inside her slick, inviting channel. Her hot pussy grabbed at him and he nearly came. Balls humming, he withdrew almost to the tip and began to thrust. Slow and deep, he measured his strokes, holding back his climax.

"Uh! Ohhh." Her needy moans and gasps were heady music.

Slick and wet, her pussy clutched his cock, driving him mindless. With each stroke his heart banged against his chest wall and his lungs screamed for air. Wild with need, he pounded her until his climax wrenched free of his balls. A cry tore from her throat as she joined him.

The room temperature had risen, soaking Sada and the bed in his sweat. On Bezal hot sex came with a guarantee, unless one fucked in the food locker. Brace sucked in several quick breaths. Sada's breathing sounded as ragged as his. Instantly exhausted from his climax, Brace withdrew and stretched out on the bed. Her body glistening with his perspiration, Sada sank onto her belly beside him.

Swinging his legs off the bed, he stood and grabbed the last water container from the cold unit. Returning to the bed, he shared the water with Sada.

For several minutes neither of them spoke then Sada curled up next to him and rested her head on his shoulder. Her thigh slid over his. Wrapping his arm around her shoulders, Brace held her tight and prayed he'd survive. He needed more than a few short hours. He wanted a lifetime with Sada.

"We shouldn't have waited. You shouldn't fuck a girl and leave."

"I don't want to leave you." He hooked his forefinger beneath her chin and raised her head. Their gazes met. "Don't ever think you're just a fuck. This is beyond fucking, Sada, and you know it."

"What is it, Ryn?"

"I don't know, but it's real."

"I feel it, too."

He cupped her face and raked his thumb across her full lower lip. "I shouldn't ask. Given the situation, I haven't the right to demand."

"Demand, Ryn."

"I don't want you to fuck anyone but me. Forever."

She brushed his limp cock. "For the rest of my life, I belong to you. No matter what happens, believe that."

"One day we'll be together. Once this operation is over, I'll make it work."

Brace rolled her on top of him. Her breasts were soft against his chest and her skin silky beneath his hands. Closing his eyes, he explored the sleek slope of her back and the taut curve of her buttocks. In the days ahead, he'd use this moment to remember why he had to survive. "I want us, Sada."

Soft as wings, her lips brushed against his. "Just stay alive, Ryn, and come back to me."

She laid her head on his shoulder. For a long time, Brace listened to the rhythm of her heart. Nothing was more important than keeping Sada safe. Kradic's threat against the outpost had specifically mentioned Sada and offered a reward for her capture. As long as Kradic remained free Sada had a price on her head.

Perhaps Kradic had targeted her because she had interrogated the Ibathian slavers. The fact that she had spoken the uncommon language had stunned Brace. Although her linguistic abilities were impressive, Ibathian wasn't listed on her official record. Had she tangled with Kradic before?

A beep from his wrist unit warned Brace the supply transport departed in thirty minutes. Sada lifted her head. "Is it time?"

Brace ran his fingers through her short, dark curls. "I have about twenty minutes."

A smile curled her lips. "Let's not waste a moment."

The gleam in her eyes promised everything.

Their lips touched. Her tongue slid into his mouth and her lips fastened to his, demanding and hungry. Fisting her hair, Brace answered her kiss with his own demands.

She reached between their bodies and grasped his cock. At the touch of her hand, his blood heated. The knowledge that time ran short pushed Brace to draw from every reserve. Aching to be with her once more, his cock responded.

When she positioned him for penetration, Brace dug his fingers into her taut ass.

With each slow thrust of her hips, his cock slid deeper into her wet heat. She held him tight, letting him experience each gentle squeeze of her pussy. The desire to thrust,

fast and deep, threatened to overtake him, but Brace concentrated on the provocative motion of her hips.

He wanted to please her, satisfy her every need. If only he could rein in his own needs.

Concentrate.

Pushing off his chest, she straddled him. When she began to ride him, Brace nearly came.

A sultry smile transformed her face and for a second Brace forgot the climax threatening to explode from his balls. Her beauty, her sensuality stunned him. He couldn't believe this amazing female wanted him.

Her gaze focused on him, but her hips never missed a beat. Her pussy clamped down on him, holding him tight as she took her pleasure. "You're mine, Ryn," she managed between harsh breaths. "Don't ever forget that."

His climax poured into her. "Never."

Reluctantly Brace disengaged himself from Sada's arms and stepped into the sonic shower for a two-minute cleansing.

Remaining on the bed, Sada watched him dress. When she started to rise, he shook his head and sat on the edge of the mattress. "Promise me one thing. You won't take point on missions. You have several well-trained eager cops ready for the responsibility."

"You always took point."

"But you had my back. Promise me, Sada."

"I promise."

He leaned down and kissed her. "Take care of yourself, for me."

"I'll dress and walk you to the transport."

"I couldn't handle it." He slid his fingertips along her cheek. "I'd rather remember you like this."

As he started to rise Sada wrapped her arms around his neck and held him tight. The intensity of the brief hug grabbed at his heart.

He shouldered his bag and opened the door. Before leaving, he turned to look at Sada one last time.

"Don't you dare get your ass killed, Ryn."

"Women who love me call me Brace."

"Who loves you?"

"My mother and my sister."

Although she smiled, her eyes shimmered with tears. Those tears tore at his heart. Until this moment he had no idea the true meaning of love. He'd do anything for Sada. Anything.

"Come back to me, Brace."

Chapter Two

"Sorry to interrupt your meal hour, Lieutenant."

Razell, her second-in-command, never bothered her with trivial matters. "I'm finished, Sergeant. Report."

"A ship has entered our sector. She's not responding to any recognized intergalactic codes."

Sada jumped to her feet and spoke into her com-unit as she rushed toward the operations command center. If her experienced watch commander wanted her in the ops center, the situation required her attention. "Be there in three. Any distress signal?"

"No emergency beacons. No life forms aboard. Robotic crew."

Distant GEA stations had discovered ships with dead crews operating on autopilot. The human crews usually died from lack of oxygen caused by malfunctioning air scrubbers or generators. Robotic crews were required to respond with identification codes. When they remained silent, odds were the mission or cargo was illegal.

"We're receiving a transmission."

Sada waited for Razell to continue. "Sergeant?"

"You should listen to this, Lieutenant."

"Explain."

"The man is speaking Ibathian. We've translated the message, but it doesn't make sense. Except for the last part. I think Lieutenant Ryn is a hostage."

Her step faltered, then she ran. With each thud of her boots, Sada prayed. *By all that is holy, no!*

Focus.

Her blood thundered in her ears. "Any visual?"

"Visual communication receivers are open, but the ship is transmitting audio only. It's a repeating loop."

Sada burst into the command center. Razell acknowledged her arrival. "Station commander has watch."

Whenever she heard those words, Sada immediately thought of Brace. His arrival in the command center brought an aura of authority. Every cop in the station straightened his shoulders and stood ready to perform. Now that authority and the responsibility rested on her shoulders. Ready for action, she dropped into the commander's seat and poised her fingertips over a bank of communications discs connected to every section of the station and GEA Bezal Command Central.

Razell snapped out orders. "Scan and specs on screen. Play the translated message."

"Forget the translator. Play it as received."

The possibility of a ghost ship dissolved as Sada listened to the message.

Saditha. Come back to me.

The few seconds of silence tore at her heart.

Ryn. GEA8729R.

Like the military, GEA assigned each officer a serial number. The voiceprint of every officer was on file for identification purposes.

"Stop transmission." Sada turned to Razell. His dark eyes burned with anger.

Before she could ask the question, he said, "The analyzer has confirmed one of the voiceprints. It's Lt. Ryn. We haven't a match on the other."

Brace captured? How? Why? Then it hit her. *Why didn't you tell me! I would have warned you. Stopped you.*

"Continue transmission."

If you want the cop to live, board alone and come back to me.

A fist closed around Sada's heart. Unable to breath, she lifted her hand to her throat.

"We're running a records check on the name Saditha. The analyzer is running the voiceprint for identification."

Several officers stared at her. Razell moved closer. "Lieutenant? Are you all right?"

Sada knew the voice. If she lived a thousand years, she'd never forget Kradic's voice. Anger swelled in her breast, replacing her fear. The bastard had Ryn. Her Ryn.

Why hadn't he told her Kradic had been the mission?

Rising to her feet, Sada turned to Razell. "I'm fine, Sergeant. Advise me if another message is received. Discontinue records search and analysis."

Although Razell kept his expression in check, his eyes revealed his shock. From her first day on Bezal Six she'd followed procedure to the letter.

Turning to the com-officer, Razell said, "Contact Bezal Command."

"Negative."

"But Lieutenant, procedure --"

Refusing to alert Command about Ryn's abduction would bring about a serious reprimand at best. At worst she'd be dismissed. Now wasn't the time to reveal the past she'd worked so hard to conceal to her subordinates and Bezal Command.

"You have your orders, Sergeant. I'll be in my quarters."

Sending in an assault team would accomplish nothing more than assuring Ryn's death. Kradic had found her and he'd kill anyone who got in his way.

"As you command, Lieutenant."

Turning on her heel, Sada headed for her quarters. She knew one day she'd face Kradic again. The prince had vowed to search the galaxy until his dying day to find her.

He'd found her and taken Ryn hostage to guarantee she wouldn't run.

Activating the communication unit in her quarters, Sada contacted the one person who would understand her need to handle this on her own.

GEA Commissioner Asel Prath had served as her mentor since she'd escaped Kradic. When she'd applied to the academy, he'd sponsored her. Although Asel had

protected her past by creating a new identity and they'd remained in contact, she'd had to make her own way as an officer.

Using a pre-determined emergency sentence that would appear as gibberish to anyone else, Sada sent an encrypted message to the commissioner advising him of the situation and queued another to Bezal Command resigning her position. She had to board that ship alone and rely on Asel to act.

After changing out of her uniform and dressing in black pants, black tank top, and boots, she touched her wrist unit. "Sergeant, meet me at the rover dock."

Ten sleek rovers sat in the bay along with three well-armed assault frigates. Razell waited beside the commander's rover. He took one look at her and shook his head. "I don't understand."

"I need to board the Ibathian ship. I've filed the proper documents giving you full command of the outpost upon my departure."

"You can't go after Lt. Ryn without us. Bezal Six is a team. Rescuing hostages is what we do."

"If you want Ryn to survive this, you'll have to trust me, Razell."

She'd deliberately called him by name, letting him know she was asking his support as a friend and not as a commander.

"What do I tell Command?"

"Refer all questions to Commissioner Prath."

Razell's eyes widened a fraction. After a long moment, he nodded and opened the rover's doors. "If you need us, your team is willing and able."

Once the rover had left the moon's gravitational field, Razell set course and turned to her. "Lieutenant, what can I do to help?"

Sada stared down at the Bezal Six Outpost. Although fortified with a section buried beneath the surface, the base appeared small and fragile. If she ran, Kradic would think nothing of blowing it to bits. "Trust me."

"You speak Ibathian. You know who has Lt. Ryn?"

The ship loomed before them. Although it looked similar to a hundred vessels traversing the sector, Sada knew once she stepped aboard the past would dictate the future. "Yes. Ask nothing more, Razell. Sometimes knowledge can be dangerous."

"He doesn't want Ryn, he wants you. You're walking into a trap. Lt. Ryn wouldn't approve."

"No, but if the situation were reversed, Ryn wouldn't hesitate to take the action I'm taking."

"Is this because of the raids against the Ibathian ships?"

Directing Razell's attention to the docking portal on the starboard side of the ship, Sada sidestepped his question. An airbridge extended from the docking portal. "Take her in."

Razell aligned the rover's hatch with the extended airbridge and docked.

"As soon as I enter the airbridge, secure the hatch. Once the airbridge retracts, return to the outpost. Don't hesitate. Do not follow me. Do not act. Understood?"

Jaw clenched, Razell didn't respond immediately. Finally, he nodded. "Understood."

While the sergeant completed the docking procedure, Sada waited at the hatch. Brace needed her. Every skill she'd acquired as a cop would help her to save the man she loved and destroy the man who had betrayed her people.

Determined to free Brace, Sada left the safety of the GEA rover and entered the airbridge connected to the Ibathian ship. As soon as Razell secured the rover's hatch a series of lights flashed along the length of the airbridge. The Ibathian droids had activated the expected weapons and identity scan. The scan finished and the airlock to the Ibathian ship opened with a low hiss.

A lone biped droid with glowing yellow eye orbs greeted Sada. She squared her shoulders as the hatch sealed, cutting her off from Bezal and her team. No retreat. No surrender.

"Captain Grat awaits you on the bridge."

Familiar with the sleek cruiser's layout, Sada headed for the command center. After ten years with GEA there were few vessels unfamiliar to her. The door slid open.

More biped droids manned the control center. Slender arms and long-jointed fingers, designed for precision tasks, hovered above the several banks of controls. One droid rose from the captain's chair and approached her. "Your Highness." The droid bowed. "I am Grat. Your quarters are ready."

Inside, Sada shuddered. She didn't acknowledge his bow or his use of the title she'd renounced ten years ago. "I wish to speak to Kradic."

"His Highness is unavailable."

The coldness of failure swept through Sada. Although she'd escaped, her people remained enslaved. Although she had Commissioner Prath's support for her cause, GEA never invaded sovereign planets without the Intergalactic Council's authorization. But once Kradic's slavery operations had moved beyond Ibathian space, the galactic court had tried the prince in absentia and the GEA had placed him on their wanted list. If ever caught outside Ibathian space, Kradic was subject to arrest. That he'd sent a droid crew to retrieve her testified that the prince remained cautious.

The commissioner had promised her a part of any action taken against Kradic and she'd waited for Prath's summons. But Brace's capture had forced her hand. She had to act without GEA authorization. "I must insist."

"I cannot grant your request. Once we enter the wormhole contact is impossible."

The Bezal wormholes led to several galaxies. Although the Ibathian ship had entered the sector through the Tante galactic wormhole, once it disappeared through another tracking it would prove difficult. Would Kradic be so brazen as to hold Brace on Ibatha and open the door for the Intergalactic Council to authorize an invasion?

Home. The possibility of setting foot on Ibatha both thrilled and frightened Sada. Kradic controlled the entire planet and her island country of Nacrina. Once she freed Brace, Sada intended to bring Kradic to justice or die trying. This time, running wasn't an option. "I'll see my quarters now."

Sada followed Grat through a narrow, gray-walled passageway past several doors until he stopped before an unmarked one on the right. The droid punched a secure-code and the door slid open with an audible hiss.

"Ship destination?"

"Unauthorized information."

"ETA?"

"Unauthorized information."

Without knowing the ship's destination or time of arrival, Sada had to wait and react to whatever situation she faced. Her training called for rest and sustenance. The days ahead promised neither.

Grat waited until she stepped into the functional cabin common to Ibathian cruisers. The familiar hum of the ship's water heating unit greeted Sada. Directly across the room a door led to the washroom facilities. Unlike the arid surface of Bezal, Ibatha had an abundance of oceans, lakes and rivers. As the only passenger Sada had no need to conserve.

The door slid shut, cutting her off from all contact. Even Grat and the droids would ignore her until they completed their programmed mission.

Once she'd pulled off her boots and socks, Sada removed the bindings from her toes. After so many years, she'd gotten used to hiding her feet. On Bezal, she'd had to wrap them in a damp towel once a day. Eager to feel water on her skin, Sada stripped and stepped into the shower. In preparation, she denuded her pussy of hair. Kradic found her dark curls detracted from his viewing pleasure.

The warm spray drummed against her skin until the tension in her body eased and her muscles warmed and relaxed. Water pooled around her feet. Slowly, Sada stretched her toes wide, fanning the thin membranes between them.

Her thoughts turned to Brace and the challenge ahead. To save him, she must once again become Saditha and beat Kradic at his own game.

Saditha knew the game well.

Chapter Three

Uncertain of her fate and Kradic's reaction, Sada drew on her GEA training before traversing the airbridge between Grat's transport and the royal flagship. If the prince caught so much as a whiff of her true feelings for Brace, he'd have the upper hand. Wishing she had a laser gun with a two thousand round capacity tucked in her boot, she flexed her empty hand and lifted her chin. Unarmed except for her wits, her experience, and sheer determination to save the man she loved, Sada stepped onto Kradic's ship. Four royal guards flanked her and escorted her directly to the prince's private quarters.

Kradic's penchant for white dominated the room. White carpet covered the floor and white fur adorned the huge bed. The walls and ceiling were draped in fine white gauze. Soft amber light filtered through the gauze, illuminating the room in a golden glow. After so many years of living and working in the cramped, functional quarters on various moons and space stations, Sada had forgotten the luxury of a royal lifestyle. She stepped into the room, aware of the plush carpet beneath her black GEA issued boots.

As was his custom the prince wore white pants and a tunic spun with golden threads. Gold slippers covered his feet. Fierce gray eyes dominated his angular face and silver-blond hair fell well past his broad shoulders. Once she'd thought him handsome, but that was long ago. When the prince raised one arm, the guards made a hasty retreat.

Lips curling in disgust, the prince gave her a thorough once-over and stared at her feet. Sada expected his displeasure with her choice of color, style of clothing and boots, but she hoped the tight tank top and fitted pants might flame his passions. She needed him to see her as a challenge. In this game she couldn't afford to appear as a submissive or humbled Ibathian female.

The prince had had years to work up a mighty anger. Braced for the worst, she waited for Kradic to speak or to strike. "You dare not to kneel before your master?"

Sada remained standing. In the past her resistance was a delicious part of the game Kradic relished. The prince loved the foreplay. "I have no master."

His slow appraisal continued as he circled her. Stopping behind her, he fisted her hair. "Cutting your hair is forbidden."

"I don't live by your rules."

"Your feet are bound."

"I'll let you remove my boots and lick my toes."

Sada felt the warmth of his breath before his lips settled onto her neck. "You are mine, Saditha. I should kill you for your treason. Others have done far less and died praying for my forgiveness."

"If you had wanted me dead, I would be dead."

Slowly, she reached up and cupped his head. Beneath her fingertip, at the edge of his hairline, was a small metal node. That was new.

She forced a breathy tone. "That isn't what you want, is it?"

He buried his face in her neck. "Saditha."

She slid her fingers across his forehead and found an identical node. Had the doctors discovered a solution to his problem by using some sort of pulse stimulant? Decades ago the medical profession had begun using a multitude of rays to correct a number of neurological problems. Perhaps the nodes were used to control Kradic's violent mood swings... or to achieve an erection.

The heat of his breath on her neck brought her thoughts back to the job at hand. She fisted his hair.

He snaked an arm about her waist and pulled her tight against him. Already heat poured from his chest, seeping through her clothes. "Your purpose is to please me. You live at my pleasure."

"Saditha makes the rules. She decides your pleasure."

Kradic slid a hand beneath her top and cupped her bare breast. Groaning, he thumbed her nipple to an erect peak. "I will keep you in chains for the rest of your life if necessary."

Despite grinding his groin against her ass, Kradic's cock remained flaccid. Thankfully, the doctors had not resolved his inability to achieve an erection. Saditha still controlled the game. "You are the one in chains. No other can give you the ultimate pleasure. Only I can please you."

"Killing the cop would give me immense pleasure. And letting you watch, far more."

By all that is holy, no. Beneath his hand her heart pounded as a frisson of fear raced the length of her spine.

"Does his death excite you?"

Redirecting his thoughts, Sada rubbed her ass against his groin. "Sucking his hard cock excites me. Having you watch makes me burn."

Kradic drew an audible breath. "The cop is a fine specimen."

"On Bezal Six I caught him pleasuring himself. His hands are big and rough. His cock is long and thick."

He clenched her breast to the point of pain. "Did you pleasure him?"

She'd tossed out the lure, now to draw him in. "Sucking his cock was forbidden. Conduct unbecoming to an officer."

"Did he let you watch?"

"He didn't know I was there. Not at first. I'd forgotten the sheer pleasure of watching a man climax. I couldn't breathe."

Easing his hold on her breast, he began a gentle massage. "Forgotten?"

"Saditha cannot perform without her prince." Reaching down she caressed his thigh, digging her fingers into his weak muscles to emphasize the tale she spun. "Watching him made me remember how it was, how it used to be between us."

He pinched her nipple. "But you deserted me on Phinis."

"Never!" She had to make him believe the cover story she and Asel had concocted after her escape. Although well hidden in the thousands of GEA cops operating in hundreds of galaxies, she'd lived with the possibility of being discovered and captured by the Ibathians. "I was taken hostage by a group of Phinian rebels. The GEA rescued me, but refused to let me return to you."

"You wanted to come back to me?"

"Of course. You cannot know the joy I felt when we raided your transport. I knew you'd come for me. The day I heard your message, I deserted my post." Lifting her chin, she turned her head and looked into his eyes. "I've missed performing the *Forbiddens*."

"The priests use your name as a means to rally the people to support the strictest interpretation of the *Diktat*. Fathers and husbands are encouraged to save their wayward daughters and wives."

"Are you going to turn me over to the priests for punishment, or will you choose my method of rehabilitation?"

His lips skated along her jaw. "What do you think?"

Closing her eyes, Sada slid the tip of her tongue over her upper lip. "I think you want to watch me suck GEA cock."

Low in his throat, Kradic moaned.

"That day I caught the cop with his cock in his hand, I thought of you, of the pleasure of you watching me while I performed. I couldn't control myself. I came and he heard my cry of pleasure."

"What did he do?"

"He ripped open my shirt and pulled down my trousers. I was naked and exposed. His eyes were filled with lust and temptation."

Kradic spun her around. His fingers dug into her upper arms. "Then what?"

"He told me he wanted to plunge his tongue deep inside me and taste the cream of my pleasure."

Conflict between what Kradic wanted and what was forbidden contorted his face. He closed his eyes and his lips moved as he silently repeated the *Forbiddens*.

Only celibate priests would concoct a list of forbidden sexual acts and try to enforce them upon a healthy population. At the top of the list was oral sex. On Ibatha, the priests held far too much power.

Finished with his prayers, Kradic asked, "Did he taste you?"

"No. Someone interrupted us, but after that day he let me watch and let me lick the come from his fingers."

Kradic moaned.

"I imagined I was in the barbaric position and he was fucking me hard. You were watching, watching us perform the forbidden pleasures." Now it was Sada's turn to pray. "Now that we're all together, we can indulge in the Dark Pleasures. Who would know?"

Shuddering, he shook his head.

Sada wasn't sure whether he was denying her or answering her question. If only the royal guards were on board then she and Brace had a chance of taking over the ship, but the Confessors, an elite group of religious zealots dedicated to enforcing the *Forbiddens*, were protected by the best security Ibatha had to offer. She pushed a strand of hair out of Kradic's face. Her fingertips slid over the matching nodes. She had to discover their purpose. "Is there a Confessor aboard?"

He opened his eyes, but didn't raise his gaze to look at her. "No. I didn't tell the priests I had found you."

Relieved, Sada smiled and caressed his face. "It will be our secret."

He drew her close, so close she felt the thundering of his heart. "I've missed the Dark Pleasures, Saditha. I've missed you."

Running her fingers through his long hair, Sada probed for the most important piece of information. "The cop, he's capable of performing?"

"Yes, he's alive and healthy."

She touched the nodes. "What are these?"

"I can feel what he feels."

"The cop? Explain."

"Yes, the cop. I can feel everything he feels, his excitement, his climax. His pain."

She hadn't anticipated this. Had Kradic experimented on Brace? "How?"

Like a child eager to show his favorite toy, Kradic took her hand and hurried to the door. Sada straightened her tank top and together they hustled down the passageway.

Stopping before an unmarked door, Kradic placed his palm on the lock. The door slid to one side.

"This is my viewing room. I had it built just for you."

"For me? When?"

"As soon as I saw the broadcast, I started construction."

After closing and locking the door, Kradic took a seat on a padded white chair attached to a curved track facing a dark wall. He ran his fingers over a set of controls built into the arm. The setup reminded her of an opulent captain's chair. "I can see everything from here."

In the past Kradic had watched through a one-way mirror, but he'd updated his viewing facilities. "I don't understand."

He pressed a button and a narrow slot opened on the left armrest. Plucking a thin metal circlet out of the slot, he said, "You will."

Lifting the circlet, Kradic placed it like a crown on his head, attaching it to the implanted nodes. "The impulses from his brain are transmitted to mine. I can feel what he feels."

"And the purpose of the track?"

He grinned and pushed a button. Slowly, the chair began to move laterally along the track. "So I can change my angle."

Kradic had constructed his viewing area around the pleasure room. Had he updated that room as well? "Show me the pleasure room."

The chair stopped and moved toward her. "You are eager. I like that."

"When do I get to see?"

"Soon, my wayward one. Soon." He climbed out of the chair and took her hand.
"Now you must eat and rest."

Without further explanation he escorted her to his quarters. Kradic loved surprises. When he chose, he treated his subjects with respect, even tenderness, and gave expensive presents, but just as easily he took pleasure in cruel words and acts. Anticipating his moods had challenged her and his staff on a daily basis.

"I've ordered your favorite meal. The wine is superb. Enjoy. Sleep. I'll awaken you when I have prepared."

Pressing her palm to his cheek, Sada thanked him. He'd pray for hours and perhaps whip himself to atone for the pleasure of watching her perform. For a brief moment she felt sorry for him. Although Kradic had suffered much in his young life, he'd done nothing to change the stranglehold of the religious extremists on Ibatha.
"Don't be too harsh on yourself. I've waited so long to please you."

His silver eyes burning in anticipation, he kissed her briefly on the lips and hurried out of the room. Sada worried for Brace, but had no choice but to wait for the prince to return.

To her disappointment, a droid delivered a light meal. She'd hoped to engage a servant in conversation while she ate but Kradic's use of a robot had robbed her of an opportunity to learn about the ship's security.

After removing her boots and the cloth bindings around her feet, Sada stretched out on the carpeted floor and closed her eyes. Drawing in a breath, she released it slowly, practicing a relaxation and rest technique she'd learned in basic training. Focusing on her breathing, she slowed her heart rate and relaxed her muscles, but all the GEA training in the universe couldn't override the fear she might fail to save the man she loved.

Breathe in. Count. Release. Count.

* * *

When the door to Kradic's sleeping quarters slid open, Sada opened her eyes. The prince had returned much sooner than she'd anticipated.

"Why are you on the floor?"

Sada stood. "GEA beds are not soft."

"With time, you will adjust." Excitement for what lay ahead burned in his eyes. "It is time for you to cleanse and prepare."

Kradic crossed the room and as he approached a gauze-draped wall, a series of panels slid open to reveal a spacious, sparkling white bathing room. Eager to see Brace, Sada stripped out of her clothing and dropped them onto the carpet. Naked, she strutted past Kradic and stepped into the open shower.

Standing beneath the soft spray, Sada stretched her webbed feet. From head to toe, her skin tingled as the warm water sluiced over her body and pooled at her feet.

Kradic stood in the doorway and watched as she washed. "Your sex is bare. I like you exposed."

"I remember. The first thing I did when Grat showed me my quarters was to prepare for my prince."

After rinsing beneath a cool spray, Sada moved to the drying space. Gentle jets of warm air caressed her skin as she raised her arms and stretched her lean body.

After a quick brush of her hair, Sada picked up a bottle of golden body oil. She looked at Kradic.

He stared at her as if mesmerized. "Icak said you were the most beautiful girl on the planet."

Icak. Sada pushed the memories away. She couldn't change the past. "What does Kradic say?"

Stepping forward, he held out his hands. "You still are."

Sada poured golden oil onto his open palms. He rubbed his hands together to warm the oil and cupped her breasts. His breath hitched at the contact. Slowly, almost reverently he massaged the oil into her skin, moving from her breasts to her belly. His fingertips brushed her bare mons. "Lick my pussy."

As anticipated, Kradic's hands trembled. "You know it is forbidden."

"Touch me, rub my pussy. Fuck me with your fingers."

His touch feather-light, his fingers brushed against her, once, twice. Then he pulled his hand away. "I cannot."

"The cop will have to do it for you."

"Yes."

Smiling, Sada turned and offered her backside. "If you cannot pleasure me, then oil me."

The prince moaned as he kneaded her ass. The process continued in silence until her entire body gleamed from the fine oil.

His pale cheeks flushed and eyes flashing, Kradic asked, "Does the cop know who and what you are?"

"No. He knows nothing of Saditha or the Dark Pleasures."

A smile tipped the corners of his mouth. "It is time for Saditha to perform. Are you ready?"

Finally, she'd see Brace. "Yes."

Chapter Four

Pain sliced through Brace's skull, bringing him to full consciousness. Pain like he'd never felt before.

Where am I?

Forcing his eyes open, Brace looked around the room. Trapped in a force field, he hung suspended a couple of feet off the floor in a barren room.

Kradic! The mission.

Traveling alone in a GEA transport, Brace recalled slipping in and out of Ibathian sovereign space until Kradic's forces had engaged him. After a wild chase well beyond Ibathian space, he'd surrendered. As anticipated the Ibathians had surrounded his transport, jammed his communications, and escorted him right to Kradic's flagship. Having taken the bait, the prince had set the trap for his own capture.

Pain sliced through his skull.

Uninjured during the encounter, Brace tried to account for the intense pain. He recalled several interrogations. Kradic had questioned him at one point, but after that his memories were vague. Perhaps they'd drugged him.

He had to survive until the Special Ops team arrived. Hopefully, the Ibathians hadn't destroyed his transport and the tracking devices implanted in its hull.

A door slid open to his right and the prince marched into the room. Dressed in loose white pants, gold-colored boots and no shirt, Kradic stopped directly in front of him and planted his feet. He folded his arms before his chest.

Using the commercial galactic language required for treaties and trade agreements and used commonly by businesses and governments, the prince spoke softly for a man known to behead his enemies in public executions. "What is GEA's purpose for entering Ibathian space?"

"I was traveling in the free zone."

"You are lying." The prince placed his fists on his hips. "The GEA has no authority over me. I do not fear the Cosmic Cops. Tell me, satisfy my curiosity before you die."

Cosmic cops! Thanks to the intergalactic press, the GEA was stuck with the unflattering name throughout most of the universe. "Ryn. GEA8729R," Brace managed.

A smile tipped the corners of Kradic's mouth. Brace's heart raced. The smile signaled a shift in the man's demeanor. Before Kradic had shown frustration and anger when Brace had given only his name and his badge number.

The memory of the prince spraying something into his face flashed in his mind. He'd blacked out then awoken suspended in this force field with a fierce headache.

"Your mission is no longer important. You've achieved my purpose."

Two guards dragged a white-robed figure by the arms and dropped the inert prisoner at Kradic's feet. A hood concealed the identity of the captive.

"Leave us and release the force field."

As soon as the door closed behind the guards the force field vanished. Dropping hard and fast, Brace's legs crumpled as he hit the floor. His muscles contracted in quick, violent movements for several seconds. Heart racing, he trembled until the contractions ceased. Breathing hard, Brace forced his arms to hold his weight. Unable to stand, Brace remained on his hands and knees.

"How's your head, Lieutenant?"

Brace reached up to rub his forehead. His fingers brushed over a metal node at the edge of his hairline. Gasping, he explored the smooth bump. Kradic grinned. Sliding his hand over his head, he felt another on the opposite side. Brace had no idea when or why the nodes were attached. Had they performed a brain probe on him?

He shut his eyes tight as pain shot through his skull. "It hurts."

"The nodes are harmless and the pain will subside. I have a surprise for you, Lieutenant."

Not good. Brace opened his eyes.

Kradic reached down and pulled the hood from the captive's head. Fear shot through Brace's heart.

Nooooo!

Grabbing Sada by the short strands of her hair, Kradic pulled her to her knees. Pain contorted her beautiful face. How had Kradic captured Sada? Had the prince's army attacked Bezel Six? Why hadn't the team protected her?

"You wish to tell him, Saditha? Or shall I?"

Saditha? Sada! Look at me!

Her gaze remained on the prince.

Cold anger laced Sada's response and Kradic's hold tightened on her hair. Although he was untrained in the Ibathian language, the short interchange between Sada and Kradic told Brace the two had history. Brace forced himself to his feet.

Before he lunged at the prince, Sada raised her hand. Her gaze remained on Kradic. "No! Do not challenge him."

Again Kradic spoke to Sada in Ibathian.

"Brace." Instead of addressing him in the galactic language, Sada spoke in Earth dialect. She did not look at him. "Trust me. Drop to your knees."

Standing down challenged Brace's basic need to protect the woman he loved, but the months on Bezel Six had taught him to trust Sada's instincts and abilities in a critical situation.

Once Brace dropped to the floor, Kradic released Sada. The sly smile he bestowed upon Brace promised bad news. "Your insignificant raid ended years of searching. A wayward wife must be brought to justice."

A fist encircled Brace's heart. *Wife?*

"She didn't tell you she was married?"

Beyond her GEA performance file, Brace realized he knew little of Sada's personal life. Did she love him? Or were those short hours they'd spent together nothing more than momentary gratification?

Pushing his doubts aside, Brace decided to stay as close to the truth as possible and buy time. "She didn't tell me she was Ibathian."

Damn! No wonder her feet were large!

Kradic looked down at Sada. "You wound me, wife."

Had Sada loved this madman?

"By what name do you call her, Lt. Ryn?"

Brace wondered why Kradic asked a question to which he already knew the answer. The prince had to have seen the news broadcast about the raid. "Sada."

"Sada." The prince shook his head. "On Ibatha she is known as Saditha of the Dark Pleasures."

Dark pleasures? Brace's heart pounded against his chest wall as Kradic reached down and took Sada by the upper arms and drew her to her feet.

"A faithless woman skilled in the Dark Pleasures is a curse upon the man who loves her. One who indulges in the *Forbiddens* is condemned."

The prince's words filled Brace with fear. "Not everyone follows the rules."

"The *Forbiddens* are more than rules. They are the foundation of the *Diktat* that guides us in the path of life."

"Keeping a woman like Sada in servitude can't be justified."

The prince slid his fingers through Sada's hair and cupped her head in his powerful hands. Brace feared the prince intended to harm her. "You defend her, Lieutenant. Do you love her?"

Refusing to rise to the prince's baiting, Brace remained silent. The truth might provoke the man.

"Once she's fucked you, you will. All of her lovers do. My brother did."

Lovers? Brother?

A cruel smile curled the prince's lips. "Does her faithlessness bother you, Lieutenant?"

When Kradic cupped Sada's chin, Brace's heart lurched and every muscle tightened in fear. Anger quickly replaced his apprehension as the prince settled his

mouth on Sada's. The gentle, yet thorough kiss drove hot spikes in Brace's heart and left the prince visibly shaking. *He loves her.*

Sada's complete lack of response renewed Brace's confidence. What choice did she have but to submit?

The prince's mouth twisted into a smile. "You know what will happen if the Earther doesn't please me."

The erotic tone of the prince's voice and his threat disturbed Brace as deeply as his loving kiss. Having lost all track of time, Brace had no idea when the Special Ops team would strike. If Kradic had managed to cross into Ibathian sovereign space, all might be lost.

Heart hammering, Brace watched the prince move to stand behind Sada. He laid his hands on her shoulders. Grasping her white robe, Kradic drew the loose garment from her body. Instead of attempting to cover her nakedness, she stood before him like a proud statue.

Her skin gleamed like dark gold and her scent filled the space. At the sight of her webbed feet, Brace gasped.

When Kradic reached from behind Sada to cup her breasts, Brace fisted his hands. The prince stroked her flesh and flicked her nipples with pale fingers. By sheer force of will, Brace refused to rise to Kradic's baiting. He remained on his knees.

"Do you desire my wife, Lt. Ryn?" Closing his eyes, the prince moved his hands along Sada's torso to the slope of her hips. Kradic slid a hand over her belly, letting his fingertips skate along the edge of her denuded pussy.

"I'm honoring you with a royal privilege. Do not disappoint me, Lieutenant." Kradic slapped Sada sharply on the ass. "Kneel."

Sada dropped to her knees. Reaching down, the prince grasped Sada firmly by the chin. Brace started to rise to her aid. A quick cutting motion by Sada stopped him.

The prince lifted her chin until she looked at him. "This time there will be no escape." To Brace's shock, the prince picked up Sada's cloak and strode out of the room.

As soon as the door slammed shut, Sada scrambled into his arms. He kissed her, hard and fast. The need to hold her warred with the need to know how she'd ended up on Kradic's ship. Had the Ibathians attacked Bezal Six? Was she the sole survivor?

Before he voiced his questions she grabbed a fistful of his hair and yanked his head back. Pain shot through his head. "What the *fuck* are you doing here?"

Since she had asked in Earth dialect, he responded in kind. "I was about to ask you the same thing."

He grasped her by the upper arms. "Did he hurt you?"

"You first." Her hold on his hair eased. "Be warned," she whispered, touching her hand to her ear.

Drawing her tight to his chest, he felt the wild beating of her heart. Heeding her warning about the Ibathians listening to their conversation, Brace repeated his cover story.

"I was on my way to Fatis. An Ibathian warship attacked. My rover was captured and I was taken hostage."

"I am your ransom."

Did Special Ops know she was here? Did she know about the pending raid? Or had she come because the ship was no longer in the free zone? Questions tumbled in his brain. "My freedom in exchange for yours? You were supposed to remain with the team."

"GEA sheltered me, but once Kradic found me I knew he'd stop at nothing to force me to return. To allow anyone to pay for my freedom is unthinkable."

"Are you his wife?"

Sada had anticipated the difficulty of explaining her past to Brace, but she hadn't realized how much one word could hurt. "Yes."

A tremor moved through his body, telling her he shared the depth of her pain. Instead of releasing her, the muscles in his arms bunched and tightened. He buried his head in the crook of her neck.

"If you're his wife," he whispered. "Why are we together? Why are we naked?"

"For his pleasure."

His head came up and his eyes narrowed. "What?"

"Like others before you, you are his surrogate. He can't, so others must."

The recoil of his body communicated the reaction she'd expected. His chest heaved and his hands fisted. "He gets off watching. That's --"

Before Brace insulted Kradic, Sada grasped his chin and pressed hard. She shook her head in warning. "If not you, he'll choose another."

His jaw clenched and his eyes burned in anger.

She needed him to understand the workings of Kradic's depraved mind. If Kradic realized they were in love with one another, he'd punish them by forcing Brace to watch her perform with another man. "Your discomfort would enhance his pleasure far more."

The widening of his eyes told her he understood. "What are dark pleasures?"

"Oral sex or any position other than face-to-face, man in superior position. I bathian law holds the man harmless. Only the woman is deemed guilty."

"The husband decides the punishment?"

"Yes."

Pain contorted his handsome face. He touched the pad of his index fingers to the metal nodes affixed to his skull. "Did they perform a brain probe?"

"They're sensors. The prince has them attached to his skull."

"Sensors, for what?"

"So His Highness can not only *view* the Dark Pleasures, he can *feel* them."

He squeezed his eyes tight. "Right now all I feel is pain."

"I can remedy that." Sada helped Brace to his feet and hand-in-hand they walked to an unadorned wall. "Are you thirsty?"

A section of the wall slid open, revealing a bank of colored bottles and two drinking vessels. Sada chose a blue bottle and filled one of the drinking vessels. "Drink and ease your thirst."

Brace took the vessel. "What is it?"

“Something to erase your headache and *enhance* your enjoyment.”

His eyes widened, telling her he’d understood her. Most officers had visited Helos, the adult entertainment space station policed by GEA. Sexual enhancers were provided as a service. Logically, Brace had experienced the intense surges of sexual desire and the powerful climaxes. “I can handle it,” he whispered.

Choosing a rose-colored bottle for herself, Sada filled her vessel and looked at Brace. The heat in his gaze made her instantly wet.

He lifted his glass. “Here’s to captivity and dark pleasures.”

The vessels empty, Sada placed them on the shelf and took Brace by the hand.

“Now what?”

“It is time for the cleansing ritual.”

Another section of wall slid open, revealing an ornate bathing chamber. Floor-to-ceiling mirrors ran the length of the chamber. Guiding Brace to a tub of hot, soapy water, Sada bade him to relax.

Once seated in the deep tub, he groaned. Joining him, Sada picked up a soft cloth and began to wash his body. Before her escape she’d performed the ritual often. Behind a wall of mirrors, Kradic would watch.

Although the surrogate Kradic chose would change, the bathing ritual remained the same night after night. “Please rise.”

Following her instructions, Brace stood. Still kneeling, Sada slid her hands up Brace’s powerful thighs. Giving Kradic an unobstructed view, she washed Brace’s cock and gently soaped his sac. Although his body responded to her touch, the hard clench of Brace’s jaw told Sada he understood the purpose of the mirrored wall.

Rising from the bath, Sada moved slowly to a tiled circle. During the bathing ritual Kradic preferred graceful unhurried movements. “Join me so I may rinse your body.”

Once Brace joined her, Sada pulled a chain and drenched them in warm water. As the water sluiced over their skin, he leaned close. She seized on the opportunity to instruct him.

"In the bedroom, address me as Saditha," she whispered. "Dominate me. Hurt me."

"I can't. I won't get off on your pain."

"He does and you create his pleasure. Our lives depend on it."

She released the chain and stopped the water. He grabbed her by the hair and slammed her body to his. Her breasts met his hard-muscled chest and her belly pressed against his groin. He kissed her hard, the frustration of the situation demonstrated in the forceful pressure of his lips. Then the pressure lessened and his tongue slid between her lips. The lush kiss continued so long, Sada began to worry Kradic would suspect that the relationship between her and Brace went beyond fellow officers.

When she pushed slightly at Brace's chest, he yanked her head back and kissed her throat. Grabbing her ass with his free hand, he held her tight against him. Hard, thick and hot, his cock pushed against her belly.

His lips slid over her ear. "I'd rather die than harm you."

Releasing her as suddenly as he'd seized her Brace strode across the room and stood before the mirrored wall of the bathing chamber. Fearing Brace would challenge Kradic, Sada rushed to his side and dropped to her knees. Clutching his thigh, Sada licked the beads of water from his skin.

Brace turned away from the mirrors.

Relieved, Sada stroked his thick muscled thighs and calves. Moving to his ass, Sada followed each caress of her hands with a lick and nip until all the water droplets were gone.

The bathing ritual took on a new sensuality. She'd washed and dried the surrogates Kradic had chosen, but she'd never relished the process, loved the man she pleased. Love had eluded her until Brace had claimed her body as his own and touched her heart forever. She'd savor every caress, every precious moment.

Slowly, she circled to stroke Brace's chest. His eyes glowed with a heat that touched her. Despite the situation, they were partners, lovers, comrades in arms, ready

to take on the bad guy together. Reaching down, she stroked his jutting cock. "My efforts have pleased you?"

"My appetite has been whetted, not satisfied."

"It's time to activate the sensors."

Brace's left eyebrow shot up but thankfully he did not question her.

Turning to her left Sada bent to open an ornately crafted chest bearing the royal crescent. She removed a golden circlet identical to the one Kradic had demonstrated in his viewing room. Returning to Brace, she attached the circlet to the nodes on his head. He jerked violently at the contact.

When he reached up, Sada stayed his hand. "Look at me," she ordered.

His gaze locked onto hers, but his eyes flashed with anger and fear. She shook her head. She had to trust that the sensors Kradic had attached to Brace's skull were safe. "My husband, may I proceed?"

Sada waited for the prince's response. As usual Kradic had observed the bathing ritual. Sometimes he'd request the ritual be repeated.

"Yes, proceed. Proceed."

Excitement edged the prince's voice. As Sada had suspected, Kradic anxiously awaited her performance.

A section of the mirrored wall slid open, revealing a room indistinguishable from so many she'd experienced in her past life. Rooms designed for Kradic's viewing pleasure.

A large round bed draped in white filled the center of the room. Like points on a compass, floor-to-ceiling golden staffs provided a series of hooks, red ropes and golden chains. Above the bed, red ropes dangled. On all sides the walls were dark glass. Beyond the glass, Kradic would sit in his white chair and observe their lovemaking.

Although Sada had sworn never to return to wickedness, Brace's capture had forced her to break her solemn oath.

If she had refused, Kradic would have made Brace pay for every day, every hour she'd remained free. As a GEA officer she'd sought to redeem herself and managed to

live with the guilt of her past, but this cruelty she couldn't bear. Saditha would once again perform for her husband's pleasure.

Facing Brace, Sada uttered the words the prince expected to hear. "My name is Saditha, Princess of Dark Pleasures. Bestow upon me your purity. Honor me with the privilege of giving you pleasure and cleanse my soul of wickedness."

Dropping to her knees, she stroked Brace's cock. "Hear my cries as you replace the demons of darkness with your royal essence."

Reaching down, Brace took her by the arms and drew her to her feet. Grasping her by the hair, he kissed her hard then broke contact.

Eyes gleaming, he anchored her waist with his free arm and pulled her head back until her breasts were thrust upwards. Bending down he formed his lips around her nipple and suckled eagerly.

With each lush draw Sada moaned as much from the pleasure as the performance. Whether in pain or pleasure, her moans and cries were essential to Kradic's enjoyment.

"Am I supposed to speak?"

Barely hearing his muffled question, Sada moaned as his lips settled once again on her sensitive flesh. "Yes. He's listening and this is his fantasy. We are the puppets."

A grunt let her know he'd heard her whispered answer.

He released her distended nipple and flicked it with his forefinger. "I will suckle at your breasts like a demon child and draw the wickedness from you."

Latching onto her untouched breast, Brace suckled deeply. Grabbing her ass he squeezed her flesh. Although his actions were rough and meant as part of the show Sada wanted more. "I have ached for you," she uttered between teeth clenched in passion. "Make me remember why."

Although Brace responded to her plea by releasing her breast and twisting the distended nipple between his thumb and finger, Sada knew he feared hurting her. But the aggression he demonstrated did the opposite of frightening her. It made her hot.

When Brace grasped her by the waist, Sada didn't know what to expect. Being thrown onto the bed caught her off guard. She landed on her backside with her legs spread.

His heated gaze dropped from her face to her exposed pussy. Sada licked her lips and he rewarded her with a quick jerk of his fully erect cock.

Stroking his length, he grinned and said, "I can make better use of that tongue, Saditha."

He had spoken in the galactic language so Kradic would partake in their conversation.

Challenging him, she licked her lips. "There is nothing you can teach me, Earther."

Unsure of his next move, Sada smiled in approval as Brace jumped upon the bed and planted a foot on either side of her hips.

He leaned down, grabbed her by the base of her neck and drew her to her knees. Although his actions appeared forceful Sada had followed his lead. She kneeled before him submissive and ready to do his bidding. Kradic enjoyed her brazen behavior as much as he enjoyed her submitting. In the end, Saditha must capitulate to the surrogate.

"You exist at my pleasure and for my pleasure." His thick cock hung before her face. "You cannot teach your master."

"Time will tell who is the master and who is the slave."

Sticking out her tongue, Sada licked the broad head of his cock.

"You can do better than that."

Grasping his hard shaft, Sada took him in her mouth. Sliding the tip of her tongue along the crown, she teased the sensitive head. His grip on her head tightened. She wanted him to forget their audience and enjoy the pleasure.

Slowly, she drew him deeper. Moving her hand up and down his shaft, she worked his flesh. His moan warned her he was close to climax. Sada needed the show to last. She released his cock and placed her palms on his thighs. A thin sheen of perspiration slicked his skin.

"Don't stop."

The huskiness of his voice wasn't an act. Sada looked up at him. He'd anchored his body by wrapping a red rope around his hand. The inspiration of that rope and Brace restrained would have to wait until later. "Beg me."

"Please."

"You can do better than that."

"Suck me."

Fastening her lips around the broad tip of his cock, Sada suckled him.

"Suck me hard."

With each draw and release Sada took him deeper into her mouth, tugging firmly on his hard flesh. The tremble of his muscles beneath her palm let her know Brace struggled to hold back his climax. She released him and cupped his tight sac. Drawing one orb into her mouth, she suckled him until his hips bucked.

Primed and ready, his body shuddered and his breath came in harsh, labored puffs. Releasing his sac, Sada grasped him, working his hard flesh until hot come spurted onto her outstretched tongue and provided a voyeur's moment for the prince.

Brace's eyes opened, then widened slightly at the sight of her licking his come from her lips. Gripping her by the hair, he pulled her to her feet and kissed her in one swift moment. The taste of his pleasure slid over their tangling tongues.

Grasping her hands, he lifted them high above her head and looped the ropes around her wrists. He broke the kiss and caught her earlobe between his teeth and cupped her pussy with his big hand. "Hold on, baby. I'm gonna make you scream."

His whispered message filled her with confidence. His actions may have provided a show for the prince, but they were in this together.

The touch of his wet tongue on her neck, followed by a slow slide to her breast, sent rivers of hot need through her middle. Entertaining the prince didn't distract from the feel of Brace's mouth upon her aching flesh or her untamed reaction to his lovemaking. He moved from one breast to the other, nipping and tugging until her nipples were swollen and her pussy ached.

Slowly, he dropped to kneel between her legs and fasten her ankles with golden ropes. Pulling on the ropes, he spread her ankles wide apart and she hung before him, open and defenseless, completely at her lover's mercy. The way Kradic preferred her.

After securing the ropes, Brace ran his fingers up her legs to her thighs. Sliding one hand between her legs, he cupped her ass and drew her closer. Back arched and pelvis thrust forward, Sada anticipated the lush probe of his tongue, the heat of his mouth and molding of his agile lips upon her pussy. Instead, he blew gently, caressing her eager flesh with his heated breath.

"Please. Fuck me. Fuck me with your tongue. I need it."

Although Kradic loved to hear her beg, Sada's pleas were to Brace. After leaving Ibatha, she'd turned away from the delights of the flesh and hadn't allowed a man to touch her. Brace had brought her body back to life, awakening the sensual beast inside her, and made her feel again. Now the beast demanded satisfaction. She needed his mouth on her pussy, his tongue deep inside her. She needed it now.

Brace's tongue slashed between her labia, the touch hot and brief. He slid his tongue over his lips then gave her another lush lick.

Straining against the ropes, Sada begged again. The enhancers made her skin burn. The heat of Bezel was nothing compared to this. "Please. Now!"

Sada gasped as Brace buried his face in her pussy and thrust his tongue deep inside. The lush probing of his tongue combined with the erotic massage of her ass made her cream. A finger slid between the cheeks of her ass, teasing and stimulating, as he kissed and sucked on her pussy. Rolling her hips, Sada ground her pussy against his face. With each undulation, the sweet pressure built and her moans of bliss filled the room.

Heat poured from her body and her pussy gushed as she touched the edge. Trembling, Sada gave in to the sweet release. As she climaxed, her toes spread in an unmistakable display of sheer pleasure.

Brace grasped her fanned toes and whispered, "The *Diktat* be damned. No wonder you kept your socks on." He stood and touched his lips to hers. The taste of her

climax upon his tongue made the kiss all the more sensual, all the more tantalizing because the *Diktat* forbade it.

Beyond the glass, Kradic surely writhed in the forbidden pleasures he denied his own people. According to the *Diktat*, women were to pray during copulation, never to take pleasure. If Sada prayed for anything, she'd pray for her next orgasm.

The thick, hard cock pressing against her belly promised one.

Brace reached up and released her wrists. Before he dropped to his knees to unbind her ankles he winked at her. "On your knees. Assume the position."

Sada dropped to her knees and spread her hands wide upon the bed. Brace bound her wrists with chains. In the past she'd had to guide the surrogate to take her in the position Kradic called the barbaric pleasure. One he knew she enjoyed. She'd taught the surrogates to slap gently, but Brace needed no instruction.

He slapped her ass, rubbed the area with his palm then slapped her again. Kneeling behind her, he gripped her by the hips and probed her ready center with the thick head of his cock.

Again and again he pushed into her, stretching her to take his width and length. Sada held onto the chains eager for the next thrust, and the next. He caught her breasts in his big hands, massaging her flesh and tugging on her nipples.

Arching her back, she rocked on her knees. She wanted him to fuck her, to pound her wet flesh. Anchoring her hips with his hands, he withdrew his cock, then thrust deep. "Is this what you want?"

It was. It was. Sada screamed her pleasure. "Yes, yes!"

He drove into her giving her what she wanted, needed. The chains bit into her clenched hands, but Sada didn't care. She held on and rode out the erotic storm.

Heart pounding and muscles trembling, Brace climaxed. Heat poured off his body and perspiration dewed his skin. Although he'd experienced an enhancer driven climax before, the intensity of this one took him to the edge of blacking out.

"Ryn! Are you okay?"

Sada's shout pulled him back from the edge. He sucked in a deep breath. "Wow, I feel like I slid through a wormhole at hyper-speed and slammed on the brakes."

"That good, huh?"

If used improperly, enhancers were dangerous, but what a way to die. "Yeah, that good."

"This isn't over."

Heart still thundering in his chest, Brace withdrew. Despite his climax, he remained erect. "I think my heart's gonna explode. Or maybe my balls."

"Your balls are fine. Breathe deeply and release my chains."

Sada wouldn't push him unless the situation demanded it. He released the chains from her wrists and clutched his chest. "The enhancers, how much? Fuck, my heart's jumping and my balls are humming."

Kneeling before him, Sada cupped his face. "Stop talking and breathe."

The simple act of breathing slowed his heart rate, but his cock remained hard as stone. The enhancers were strong. So strong Brace couldn't will the damn thing down. "What now?"

The flick of her tongue over her upper lip warned him this wasn't over. "Can you stand?"

It took him half a second, but Brace decided the muscles in his legs were capable of holding his weight. Placing his hand on her shoulder, he stood.

Beneath his feet, the ship shuddered. Instantly, he and Sada locked gazes. Finally, the Special Ops team had arrived and the fuck show would stop.

Sada jumped up and grabbed a dangling red rope and wrapped it around his wrists.

"What the hell?"

Again the ship shuddered, prompting Brace to resist. With each pull the rope tightened. He shoved his face toward hers. "Release me. Now."

"No." She lowered her voice. "We must keep Kradic engaged, here. His guards are lost without direct orders."

She yanked hard on the rope. Jerking his arms up, the rope recoiled in the ceiling until his wrists were above his head. When he pulled against the rope, Sada slapped his face.

“What?”

She slapped him again. The open-handed slaps were meant to shock rather than render pain.

“He feels what you feel,” she whispered. “Keep him distracted.”

To his shock, Sada dropped to her knees and wrapped her hand around his erect cock. Now wasn't the time for the enhancers to control his brain. Urgently her hand squeezed and tugged his sensitive flesh. Two back-to-back impacts rocked the ship, but didn't deter Sada. Her agile fingers encircled his balls. “Concentrate.”

Despite the impact of another photon burst, she wrapped her lips around his cock, took him deep and sucked him hard. Reacting to Sada's energetic manipulations, Brace's heart rate soared again and jump-started the enhancers in his system. His heart pumped, his blood raced, his cock stretched to bursting and his balls ached beyond belief.

Much more and his heart would explode.

Restrained and unable to resist, Brace gave into the moment and concentrated on the heat of her mouth and the sensual motion of her lips and tongue. Right now he needed to come more than he needed saving.

Fuck! He was going to die hanging from a red rope in a madman's pleasure chamber and he didn't care. Moaning her name, Brace surrendered.

When she probed the crease between his butt cheeks, the only shudders he felt were his own. The gentle, yet eager press of her fingertip against his anus combined with the firm suckling of his cock caught him and held him in a force field of new sensation.

The pounding of blood in his veins and arteries roared in his ears, deafening him. Nothing else existed in the universe, nothing else mattered, only Saditha.

As he climaxed, his anguished cry of pleasure greeted the two GEA officers bursting in the room. Dressed in assault gear, the officers stopped dead in their tracks.

Sada released him as more officers filled the doorway. Ohhh fuck! Great timing.

An unfamiliar officer without protective headgear entered the room. The silver-haired commander ignored Brace and stared at Sada.

"Asel."

To Brace's shock, Sada flung herself into the officer's arms. When the officer removed his coat and draped it around Sada's bare shoulders, Brace spotted the commissioner's insignia on the collar.

"Asel, I'd like to introduce Lieutenant Brace Ryn. Brace, Commissioner Asel Prath."

Commissioner? Fuck me!

The corner of the commissioner's mouth curled, but he didn't smile. Thankfully, he didn't laugh. Several members of the Ops team were snickering behind their face shields. "Lieutenant."

"Commissioner. Sorry, but it seems I'm at a disadvantage."

Disadvantage didn't begin to describe the situation. Caught standing on a round bed, restrained by red ropes with a raging hard-on that refused to die guaranteed Brace a place in Special Ops lore.

Face shields retracted, his fellow officers moved around the room, fingering the ropes and chains. He wondered how long before every cop in the quadrant learned about this raid. He'd never live it down.

The commissioner turned to the officer on his left. "Cut him down."

Climbing on the bed, the officer stood to the side. His face shield retracted into his helmet. Brace acknowledged the Special Ops team leader. "Captain."

"Tough duty, aye Lieutenant."

With a flick of the captain's blade, the ropes gave way. Brace lowered his arms and covered his hard-on with his hands.

The captain's eyes narrowed. "What's with the metal thing on your head?"

Sada began speaking in Ibathian to the commissioner.

"Someone find the lieutenant's clothes."

The captain jumped off the bed, leaving Brace exposed. Shielding his cock as best he could with one hand, Brace climbed off the bed. Sada, dressed in the commissioner's uniform jacket, came to his rescue and stood directly in front of him. "Thanks."

Finally, an officer rushed into the room with a white robe. With Sada shielding the front of his body, Brace tossed the robe over his head. He managed to squeeze into the tight fitting, too-short garment. "Couldn't find my uniform?"

The officer shrugged his shoulders. "Sorry, we're still searching. We found women's clothing in the prince's quarters. Shall I escort you, Lt. Prentiss?"

"No need," Sada said. "I know the way." Giving him a quick wink, Sada left the room.

The commissioner turned his attention back to Brace and offered his hand. "Well done, Lt. Ryn. Captain Sikka, transport the lieutenant to the infirmary on my ship. And find the prince's physician."

"Thank you, sir. What about Lt. Prentiss?"

"She'll remain aboard. I'll need her to interrogate Kradic."

Although reluctant to leave Sada, Brace wanted the transmitter nodes out of his skull. Eventually, Sada would come to him.

Chapter Five

Sada kicked toward the light above and surfaced without a splash. Overhead sea birds cried and the sun burned brightly reminding her of childhood days spent playing in the warm sea. On shore, high on the cliff, the walls of her ancestral home were bathed in brilliant sunlight. Despite the pain in her heart, she had needed to return and let the memories, both good and bad, come. Those of her parents soothed her. Those of Kradic and Icak tore at her soul.

She'd survived. The prince was in GEA custody and Brace was the hero of his Ops unit. Mission accomplished.

She should be happy, but Sada faced the future with a heavy heart. For years she'd worked toward returning to Ibatha and freeing her people from Kradic and the priests. She hadn't given much thought to her life beyond bringing her husband to justice and returning to her home by the sea. Falling in love hadn't been part of the plan.

Love complicated everything.

The Ibathian operation assured Brace a bright future in Special Ops and his career would send him to the far corners of the universe.

Turning toward shore, Sada saw a man walking down the sea stairs to the beach. Given the distance his face was indistinct, but she knew that stance and the set of his shoulders. Arms and legs slicing through the water, Sada swam toward him.

Heart pounding, she reached the beach.

Jaw set, his lips thinned. "You left," he said as she walked toward him. "You left me."

She had. She'd returned to her home on the island of Nacrina.

"I needed to come home." She shoved her fingers through her wet hair, pushing the wet strands off her face. "I needed --"

"To be alone? I thought --" He paused and drew in a slow breath. "I thought you loved me."

"I do."

"I thought we were a team."

"A past such as mine is a burden to a team."

Shaking his head, he placed his hands upon her bare shoulders and slid his thumbs over her wet skin. She wanted to lean into him and take comfort in his arms. Instead, she resisted the urge to cling to him.

"When I look at you, who do you think I see, Saditha or Sada?"

"I hope you will always remember Sada."

"You are Sada. Saditha --"

"Exists. The press, and our fellow officers, will never forget who and what I am. They will never let you forget. I can't erase my past."

"Any more than I can erase mine."

"You're not notorious."

"Then you've been out of touch. Someone transmitted the raid footage. I'm the butt of every joke from here to the outer sectors. I've received over a hundred proposals of marriage and hundreds more not so honorable. I found a red rope hanging in my quarters last night."

Unable to suppress a smile, Sada told him she was sorry.

"Don't laugh. You were on your knees, remember."

"They didn't."

"Someone did. The way I see it, as long as we're together, the gossip can't touch us. I love you, Sada." His eyes changed. "I don't want to lose you."

He pulled her into his arms and hugged her tight.

She rested her head against his chest and listened to his thundering heart. For a moment, she gave in and hugged him back. "I'm still a married woman."

The muscles in his arms tensed. "Do you think of yourself as Kradic's wife? Is that what you want?"

She moved out of his arms, picked up the towel she'd left on the sea stairs and wrapped it around her torso. "No. Never."

All these years she'd hoped bringing Kradic to justice would redeem her actions, but reality had slapped her in the face the moment GEA had notified the Council of Priests. The fools had demanded Kradic's release.

"According to the Ibathian official records you went missing and are presumed dead."

"How?"

"At the cruel hands of Phinian rebels. The priests knew you'd escaped and ended up in GEA custody so they concocted a story to explain your disappearance."

"So that's why Asel chose the hostage cover story."

"I imagine it is. But before the priests officially declared you dead, they quietly dissolved your marriage just in case you'd decide to return to Ibatha. Which means you're free to marry me."

Marry. Sweet joy wrapped around Sada's heart, then vanished at the memory of what she was, what she had done. If Brace knew the number of surrogates she'd pleased, he'd never ask her to become his wife. "My past will always haunt us."

"The past can't haunt me if I know about it. You lived here with your parents. Tell me about them."

Sada looked up at the two-story house. Behind each window a memory: the scent of her mother's fresh-baked bread, the over-stuffed chairs in her father's library and a room filled with girlish treasures. "My father was a scholar of languages and my mother loved to cook. Every day we swam in the sea. I loved them very much and I miss them."

"What happened to them?"

"I believe Kradic killed them. He never admitted it, but the moment I learned their boat had sunk, I swore revenge and started planning my escape."

"Why did he want your parents dead?"

"On Bezal water is precious. On Ibatha wealth and power are measured in land."

Sada wondered how many times she'd run up the long flight of stairs to the house built by her ancestors. "Kradic wanted me, and the islands of Nacrina. My father refused to approve of my marriage."

"Tell me about Icak."

She closed her eyes and hugged the towel tighter to her bosom. Why did he wish to open that old wound? "You already know the story."

"I know Icak and Kradic were sent to Nacrina to learn the galactic languages used in trade and commerce. The official records say Icak died here. After meeting Kradic, I question whether Icak's death was an accident. Was it?"

"Kradic never admitted anything, but I don't think it was."

"Why?"

"Icak loved to dive for sea pearls, but Kradic was still recovering from his accident and remained in the boat. One day Kradic returned alone. He claimed Icak had dove but never came up again. Unable to use his legs, Kradic couldn't search for his brother."

"There's nothing in the file about an accident."

"He was severely maimed in a rover accident. His whole lower body had to be reconstructed. His genitals appear normal, but even the best surgeons couldn't make him whole. Although Kradic was the older brother, the king declared Icak the heir apparent."

"Did Kradic kill his brother for power or because of you?"

"Icak and I were lovers. Is that what you want to hear?"

He leaned forward and clasped his hands. Although he appeared relaxed, his knuckles went white. "I want to hear the truth from you."

The time had come to confess, to speak of the secrets never shared. The price of her youthful sins measured by the one person whose love and respect she needed more than life itself. "We were lovers."

"Was he the first?"

"Yes."

"Did you love him?"

"The islands of Nacrina are isolated. He was older, handsome and a prince and I was flattered by his attention."

"Did he love you?"

"We were young and our blood ran hot that summer." He'd softened her up with questions, made it easier for her to confess. Now he'd let her bare her soul. Sometimes the guilty just needed a confessor. GEA called it soft interrogation. "Icak enjoyed fucking me. Kradic enjoyed watching us."

True to his training, Brace didn't react.

"I liked the things Icak did to me and I began to entice him to do more, to explore, to perform the *Forbiddens*. Kradic began to call them the Dark Pleasures. Letting him watch became a game with us."

His eyes widened as the realization of what had taken place on Kradic's ship and his participation in their game hit him.

"As the time approached for the princes to leave, Kradic insisted I go with them, but Icak refused. The brothers argued."

"Did you want to go?"

"Yes. I wanted to go, but Icak was adamant. He feared the priests would discover our game. Breaking the rules of the *Diktat* is serious stuff for a prince. Icak was the one breaking the rules, not Kradic. He'd never touched me. The day before they were to leave, Icak decided to dive for sea pearls."

"So Kradic kills his brother and wins the girl. The Dark Pleasures continue."

The telling, the confession soothed her wounded soul. "I was a willful, stupid girl. I never anticipated Kradic's actions or his ambitions. I spun the sensual web that became my prison. I was responsible for Icak's death and I killed my parents."

"I thought Kradic had them killed."

"My father did not want Nacrina to fall into royal hands. Kradic wanted me, but he also wanted to own his own lands. I turned away from my family and left with Kradic. He and the priests ignored my father's wishes and allowed us to marry. My parents conveniently died the same time I was taking my vows."

"I'm sorry."

"I took everything my ancestors built and handed it to Kradic on my wedding day!"

"At least I understand why you worked so hard as a cop."

"I still can't change the past."

"You can forgive yourself."

She closed her eyes tight. "No, I can't."

"You could find those sold into slavery. We found the records, the names and destinations, on Kradic's ship. You could bring them home."

Her heart thumped hard against her chest wall. She looked at him. "I have no means, no funds. I no longer own this house or this land."

He rose and stepped toward her. "Commissioner Prath is forming a Level One task force to find Kradic's victims and bring them home. He's looking for an officer to lead the operation."

"I resigned."

A smile tipped the corners of his mouth. "It seems the commissioner has lost your paperwork."

"And what of you, Lt. Ryn?"

He shrugged. "It's Captain Ryn, but Special Ops has released me. I'm looking for an assignment."

No wonder she loved this man. He knew the worst about her, but saw only the best and despite a well-deserved promotion he was willing to let her lead the task force.

"You take the lead. I'll act as interpreter."

"This is your cause, Sada."

"I'm too emotionally involved to command the team. Asel knows that."

"I have to get used to the idea that you're on a first name basis with the commissioner."

"When I met him I was a princess."

He gathered her into his arms and removed the damp towel. It dropped at her feet. "You didn't have anything to do with my promotion, did you?"

She slid her arms around his neck and pressed her breasts against his hard chest. "Sorry to disappoint you, but you earned that all by yourself."

"I love you, Sada. Be my wife."

"The surrogates. There were many."

"You're forgetting I was a surrogate."

"You were the best and the only one I ever loved."

A slow sexy grin tipped the corners of his mouth. "I was pretty good."

Then he kissed her.

B.J. McCall

A multi-published author of contemporary and futuristic sensual romance, B.J. McCall is a West Virginia native now residing in Northern California. Thanks to an older sister who was a librarian, reading became B.J.'s favorite pastime. B.J.'s idea of the perfect way to spend a rainy afternoon or a day at the beach is reading a Romance novel. The phrase "Do what you love," applies to B.J. -- she loves to write and each story is special. She hopes her readers will enjoy each and every one of them. Visit her website at www.BJMcCall.com.