

ELLORA'S CAVE *Spectrum*



AVA ROSE  
JOHNSON

HUNTERS  
FOR HIRE

*Cyr's*  
Revenge

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Cyr's Revenge

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# ***CYR'S REVENGE***

**Ava Rose Johnson**

*Dedication*

*For D. There's no stopping us now.*

## **Prologue**

Welcome to the Devil's Pit. Home sweet home. My name is Ulric Vonner and I run The Web, the base of operations for Bounty Hunters, Inc. You need criminals found? We will find them. The crime doesn't matter. Remember that we don't work for free—our fees are high but we always catch our man, woman, or whatever species it is that you're after. Of course, catching them and bringing them in are two different things. We may be scoundrels but we aren't without conscience.

I started this business fifteen years ago. Hunters come and hunters go but that's life. No one lasts forever, not in this business. Each of my bounty hunters has his or her reasons for turning hunter. I don't ask what they are and I don't care. They war with their inner demons, carve out a living for themselves and then they move on—provided they survive their stint as a hunter. I don't get attached and I don't mourn their loss. I learned long ago not to depend on anyone but myself. Keep your friends close and your enemies closer, which is the primary reason I deal with the Amalgamation.

Behind every great power is corruption and the Amalgamation is no exception. However, they do pay well and I'm not without my own agenda. I fight to survive and to hold on to what little I have left. Bounty Hunters, Inc. gives me a purpose and a damn good excuse to move in the circles I do. It's said a man is judged by the company he keeps, so what does that say about me? In a galaxy fraught with danger, Bounty Hunters, Inc. will strive to satisfy all our customers—if it's in our best interests to do so. Though we may wear a veneer of legal process, we are bounty hunters and we hunt those we are paid to hunt. If in the process we bring down those who would do harm to others—so much the better.

What is a bounty hunter? We're just glorified rogues trying to make the best out of what life tossed our way. The galaxy is not without its flaws or its bad seeds and that's what we're here for—to do the jobs no one else wants.

The best way to learn about Bounty Hunters, Inc. and me is to first get to know the people who work for me. They are good people in their own ways but if you cross them, be prepared to face the consequences.

Let the hunting begin...

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## **Glossary**

**Aboolan:** The natural inhabitants of the Aboo System and its planets who moved on after beings from Earth moved in to mine the planets for their natural resources.

**Aboo System:** Home of the Aboo mining planets. Crystolium-rich planets located two Smith Gates from Earth.

**Aboo Two:** Second planet in the Aboo System where Amalgama, the capital city of the Amalgamation of Planets, is located.

**Aboolan War of 2112:** War that broke out when Earthlings invaded the Aboo System for the planets' natural resources.

**Abyss, The:** Section of The Web where prisoners are kept until transported to another planet or prison facility.

**Amalgama:** The capital city and chief headquarters for the Amalgamation of Planets. A large, dome-covered city located on the planet Aboo Two.

**Amalgamation of Planets:** The primary governing body of the galaxy.

**Amaya:** Cintealios capital city on the planet of the same name.

**Aurelie:** The Web's day shift cook.

**Azo Eta:** Planet very similar to Earth, located in the Secundus System.

**Bounty-hunter class:** Class of small ships, specially suited to carry and operate with only a small crew. Preferred mode of transportation of the bounty hunters, hence the name.

**Bounty Hunters, Inc.:** Organization of bounty hunters set up and run by Ulric Vonner. They work for large fees and at their own discretion and are neither good nor bad, though they will break the law when necessary in order to bring in a bounty.

**Bulkhead Disrupting Charge:** Fired from a normal missile cannon, the charge attaches itself to a target's shields, weakens the shields, opens a hole through the target's defenses and fires a concentrated charge into the target's hull. Inflicts major, concentrated damage to a ship's hull.

**Cintealios:** The warrior race. These beings are human/humanoid and live to conquer those who are weaker. Largest opposing force to the Amalgamation.

**Comm-tabs:** Buttonlike communication devices that are pressed to the skin behind the ear.

**Constance O'Rourke:** Supply handler for The Web.

**Control:** Small space station situated near the Smith Gate. Controls the energy field that operates the gates and determines where a ship will emerge from the wormhole.

**Copper Arrow:** Copper balls that expand into shafts of corresponding light; an arrow that explodes on contact.

**Devil's Pit:** Seedy neighborhood on Quartus Seven where The Web is located. Location chosen specifically for its rough appearance and dangerous atmosphere.

**Dexter Smith:** "Dex", The Web's computer geek. If it's electronic, he can figure it out.

**"Doc":** Holographic doctor in The Web's medical wing. He has numerous robotic shells that he can download himself into, to perform various functions.

**Executioner:** Ulric Vonner's personal bounty-class cruiser.

**Gold Arrow:** Gold balls that expand into shafts of corresponding light and act as a claw, anchoring target to whatever solid surface is behind it, such as a wall.

**Halcion Cartiere:** Top commanding officer of the Interplanetary Military Forces.

**Hub:** The heart of The Web, located at the very center. Also contains the Conference Room where meetings are held.

**Hunter Pack:** Small backpack that holds more than it appears to hold.



Icsantheze Dagger: Daggers created on the planet Icsanthia. Sixty-six centimeters total length from tip of the dagger blade to the end of the handle—fifteen centimeter hilt, fifty-one centimeter blade. The blade is curved like a serpent slithering across a surface, golden in color, with pale green streaks through the blade. Handle is wrapped in emerald leather.

Interplanetary Military Forces (IMF): The military power behind the Amalgamation that works diligently to protect the Amalgamation and everything it stands for.

Intergalactic Security Agency (ISA): The job of the ISA is to explore new worlds and collect critical intelligence on any alien species discovered.

Interplanetary Senate: Body of five hundred representatives from across the galaxy. Most major systems are represented in the senate—five representatives each—with a few exceptions.

Jacobi Smith (deceased): Discovered worm holes usable for faster travel times. The worm holes became known as Smith Gates in his honor.

Jiborui: Home world of Krys Xan, the Amalgamation of Planets' leader. Exotic planet that is home to humanoid, hermaphrodite beings who are tall and slender and have very sharp minds. Key in the production of many space travel inventions that have made traveling throughout the galaxy and colonizing new worlds easier.

Jump Drives: Allows the vessel to navigate through nearby worm holes, effectively reducing travel times significantly. (Note: Control must open the gate. Also controls to which neighboring system the gate connects.)

Krys Xan: Hermaphrodite from Jurgia and leader of the Amalgamation of Planets. He presides over the Senate and all its members.

Military Sciences Lab: Based on Earth, its purpose is to create and cultivate the ultimate soldier.

Nursotics: Robotic nurses.

Orbit Wisps: Spectral, universal snitches. They barter information for energy cubes.

PHD: Personal Holographic Device. When activated, it alters the hunter's appearance, aiding in acquiring a bounty.

Plasma Cannons: Can target an enemy ship's deflector shield and will drain the energy from the shield determinant to the size of the charge. If used on a small ship without a shield, it can slowly deteriorate the ship's hull.

Quartus Seven: Planet where The Web is located. Also known as The City Planet. seventy-five percent of the planet's surface is covered by one continuous metropolitan area. The remaining twenty-five percent of the planet is covered in water. No indigenous life forms or plant life exist here.

Replicators: Basic replication of items such as food and clothing. Complex machinery cannot be replicated, though the replicator can retrieve items from storage compartments.

Sa-Ro Five: Largest agricultural hub in the Secundus System. This planet supplies food rations to many planets, including some from neighboring systems.

Scanners: Allow the ship's crew to scan other ships, space stations or planets for signs of life.

Sealy Garrison: Constance O'Rourke's assistant. If Constance isn't available, Sealy is the man to see.

Secret Sciences Police (SSP): Formed to ensure that no one toys with time travel or biowar sciences, to protect the Amalgamation and its interests.

Secundus System: System to which Quartus Seven belongs. Similar to Earth's system, Secundus possesses nine planets, many of which are uninhabitable due to extreme atmospheric conditions, though the use of atmospheric domes enables limited habitation of some of the planets.

Silver Arrow: Silver balls that expand into shafts of corresponding light and only work as a piercing weapon.

Smith Gate: Device used to access worm holes. It is located near the largest, most advanced planet in the system and significantly cuts down travel times.

Smith Hole: Proper name for the worm holes used by Smith Gates.

Spectra-shades: Special shades used to see Orbit Wisps.

Super Soldiers: Bio-engineered super soldiers, produced on Earth as supreme fighting beings.

The Web: Base of operations for Bounty Hunters, Inc.

*Tomozava*: A blue fleshy vegetable that is a cross between a tomato and a *zava* vegetable.

Tranq-ring: Ring that administers a dose of tranquilizer to a bounty/person/being but does not affect the ring's wearer.

T-Sdei Delta: The party planet. Located in the Secundus System, neighboring Quartus Seven.

Ulric Vonner: President and founder of Bounty Hunters, Inc.

Vanquiguard: Wristband that, when activated, creates an energy shield to protect the wearer.

*Zava*: Blue, tomato-like vegetable that is indigenous to the planet Azo Eta. Also known as *tomozava*.

Zeri: Night shift cook for The Web.

## Chapter One

He was late.

The damning thought lengthened Smith's strides as he swept through the antique store, leaving a couple of dusty pottery pieces rattling in his wake. Damn it. He was never late. Fuck that goddamned alarm!

He shoved open the door and stepped onto Shady Avenue, nearly running down a fellow hunter in the process. He barely paused to nod a greeting, just kept on going, still cursing under his breath.

Damn it, he was tired – flat-out, sleep like the dead, bone-achingly tired. And after a month spent battling pirates on Earth, who wouldn't be? He'd come home expecting to get some time off, maybe head to T-Sdei Delta to visit his cabaret-singer mother. The last thing he'd wanted or foreseen was to be thrown this assignment only hours after returning to Quartus Seven. The journey back to The Web had felt longer than usual and the muscles in his legs ached after the cramped conditions in his ship. But Ulric had insisted. It had to be Smith. And you didn't argue with Ulric Vonner.

He was striding past the med unit on the corner of Collier Street when he realized he was getting wet. He glanced up at the gray clouds and tasted light drops of rain on his tongue. *Typical. Even the weather matches my mood.*

His nostrils flared as he stormed on and he caught the eye of a passing woman. She pursed hooker-red lips, arched one over-plucked brow and glanced pointedly at his crotch. The words "I don't swing your way, sugar" were about to trip off his tongue but then he followed the direction of her gaze. Hell, his belt still wasn't buckled.

He fiddled with the metal clasp and moved on. *I really need to get my shit together.* Not only was he late but he wasn't even fully dressed. After a hurried shower, he hadn't been able to find underwear or a clean t-shirt. He'd had to make do with this

stuffy button-down. And patches of skin on his arms and legs were still damp from the shower, making his jeans chafe. It didn't do anything to brighten his piss-poor mood.

Focusing on the street ahead, he took a right and tried to recall the facts of the job he was taking on.

*Amalgamation job, Ulric had said. Need a location on Drake Ivanof.*

*Know why?*

*He's causing trouble on Azo Eta. Smuggling drugs.*

It sounded simple enough. Drug lords were never hard to pin down. And Azo Eta's low crime rates would make it a cinch. All he had to do was find a junkie and the job was done. And afterward he'd hang around for a while, head to Platonina on Eta, maybe get laid.

Get laid. He grunted, his sour mood momentarily lifted by the thought of carnal pleasure. Too long had passed since his last fuck and boy, was his body feeling the ache. A couple of months at least, rare for him. There'd been a time when he'd had a different partner every night of the week. But lately, things had really slowed down. A warm body and a tight ass wasn't enough anymore. He needed more. And with his heavy workload, he hadn't the time to do any searching.

But soon. He'd take his hard-earned break and find a man who could bring him to his knees.

*Okay, now that's asking too much.*

At the end of the street, Smith came to a halt, his eyes rising to the large, run-down building on his left. This was the address Ulric had provided. He slipped a hand inside his jacket and felt for his weapon. After the chaos of this morning, he wouldn't be surprised if he'd forgotten it. But the unmistakable shape of his laser pistol bulged beneath the satiny fabric, pressing into his palm. He was ready.

Dropping his arm to his side, he pushed open the weathered door and stepped into the building's entrance hall. Dust attacked him, rising up his nostrils and itching his eyes. He blinked and cleared his throat. The sound echoed around the gray walls, walls

which were void of paint or wallpaper. How long had this place been deserted? Decades, maybe? There wasn't a sign of life, not even a chair.

He wove his way from room to room, his steps light and quick as he searched for his temporary employer. But there was nothing to suggest he wasn't alone. The air remained the same, laden with dust and no sound other than the echo of his rubber soles on the concrete floors reached his ears.

Huh. Maybe this guy was the one who was late. Or gal. Smith frowned. Shit. He didn't even know the name of the person he was meeting. A slip-up on his part. He liked to be prepared. And a name was pretty much vital to being prepared.

Goddammit, this really wasn't his morning.

He paused at the bottom of a set of rickety-looking stairs. His hand returned to his pistol. The tiny hairs on the back of his neck stood on end. The muscles across his shoulders tensed. What the fuck? He shrugged it off, whatever he was feeling. He didn't know why but a ball of trepidation had knotted tight in his stomach.

He raised one leg and placed his foot on the first step. The staircase creaked like a badly rusted hovercraft beneath his weight and he winced. Nothing like an old building to dash the hopes of a silent entrance.

He took a breath and dust tickled his tonsils. Swallowing a cough, he began to ascend the stairs.

There's someone here, he decided. Every nerve in his body screamed that he wasn't alone. And he always trusted his gut, it never steered him wrong. With each step, the air became cleaner and his hackles rose higher. By the time he reached the second floor, the sensation that nails were scratching his eyeballs had completely disappeared. But the lack of dust didn't remove his wariness. In fact, the clearer vision matched a clearer mind. His eyes darted from left to right as he memorized every centimeter of the place in case he needed a quick escape. He couldn't put his finger on it but something was off, like a missing piece from a puzzle.

The second floor was open-plan and showed just how huge the building site was. Hand still on his pistol, he turned in a slow circle to take in more bare surroundings. And then he stopped. Bingo.

A tall figure stood in the bottom right corner of the space beside a wooden table, the only piece of furniture in the building from what Smith had seen. The man faced the wall, hands stuffed in the pockets of his slacks. Broad shoulders, perfect ass. Smith licked his lips and stepped forward. Maybe this assignment wouldn't be so bad after all.

Getting closer, he noted the blond hair atop the man's head. Lightly waving and brushing the tops of those muscular shoulders. His fingers itched to touch it, to tangle in the silky strands.

But then a rush of déjà vu seized his mind and that knot of trepidation uncurled in his stomach, trickling into his veins with the chill of ice water. He knew that hair, he'd ached to touch those golden waves before. He stopped. His breath locked in his throat. His jaw clenched until a pulse ticked at the side. It can't be...

The man shifted, then turned fully. The barred-up windows allowed stripes of light to zigzag across the man's face, acting almost as camouflage. But Smith recognized the shape of those lips and the angles of those cheekbones. Most of all, he recognized the green eyes that stared right at him, imprisoning his gaze with their intensity.

*Fuck. Cyr.*

Cyr stood as still as his hammering heart would allow. In silence, he watched his old friend and one-time lover gather his thoughts. It was a shock, he understood that. Heck, Cyr had known he was meeting Smith today and even he was having trouble breathing.

Being face-to-face with the man who'd haunted his dreams for years was more knee-weakening than he'd anticipated. Raw emotion and relief to finally see Smith again—sure, he'd expected that. But this onslaught of lust, the desire which at this moment was surging through his veins...no, he hadn't prepared himself for that

reaction. And as he ran his eyes over Smith's hard body, he knew he should have. Because, though years had passed, the sight of Smith still held the power to suck the energy from his limbs and bring him to his knees.

Blue jeans hugged those long legs and a black leather jacket hung from a pair of wide shoulders. An arresting face of hard planes and angles—too masculine to be handsome. Lips, usually full and tempting but now pressed in a thin line. A tight jaw. Black, silky hair falling forward, tempting Cyr to reach out and brush it back. The combination was hypnotic, erotic. Cyr's cock was already responding and they were just getting started.

Smith cleared his throat, lifting his chin slightly in a move Cyr recognized all too well. The same lift Smith had given his mother before he'd told her he was going to college in Jurgia. Preparation for a fight.

"What are you doing here Cyr?"

Ah, that voice. Rich, gravelly, darker than the purest sin. Deeper than before but then again, seven years had passed since he'd last heard it. Seven years of hell.

"You know why I'm here." Cyr retrieved ID from his pocket. "Amalgamation business."

Smith folded his arms over his broad chest and his biceps bulged deliciously beneath the stiff cotton of his shirt. One brow rose. "You work for the Amalgamation?"

Cyr couldn't help but smile at the cynical tone, even though his mouth felt like sawdust after the muscle action. He held out the badge. "Yeah. We have a job for you."

"I know. Drake Ivanof. Should be easy enough."

Cyr's smile widened, even as his stomach twisted at the sound of that name. "You don't know Drake."

Smith opened his mouth as if to say something, then snapped it shut again. His dark eyes left Cyr's as he moved to one barred-up window and stared down at the street below. "You knew Ulric would send me."



It was a statement rather than a question. And he was right. Using his telepathy skills, Cyr had put the suggestion very firmly in Ulric's mind. Send Smith Knox. He'd known it would piss Smith off. But now, being so close to his old love again, he knew the hostility was worth it.

"Are you reading my mind right now?" Smith swiveled on his heel, once again locking Cyr's eyes with his gaze.

"You'd know."

"Maybe not." Smith began to pace, his eyes still burning into Cyr's. "It's been a long time. We don't know each other the way we used to."

Cyr begged to differ. Sure, time had passed. But he could still read the emotions flashing in Smith's harsh features. Anger, hurt, lust. All caged beneath a tough exterior.

"Why are we meeting here, anyway?" Smith asked, once again coming to an abrupt halt. "I don't usually meet the person who's hiring my services. I just get the job spec, jump in my ship and make sure it gets done."

"I wanted to show you this place." Cyr laid a hand on the wooden table and glanced around the massive space. Not too long ago it had been filled with machines, white lab coats, scientists. Now it was practically empty, though the phantom hum of electrical equipment still buzzed in his ears. "Drake used this building in the past. I thought maybe you'd seen him around here."

"Ulric gave me his picture. I didn't recognize him."

Cyr nodded. He'd expected as much. Drake liked to stay out of sight. No doubt he'd only entered and exited this building in the wee hours. At the time, Cyr had been too out of it to have any sense of time or space.

The memories tore down his spine like cold fire, burning his skin and chilling his bones. He straightened his shoulders and blocked the mental images from his mind.

"That's not the only reason I wanted to meet you."

Smith lifted his chin again. "Oh?"

"Yeah." Without focusing on the many reasons he shouldn't do what he was about to do, Cyr took one long step forward until his face was centimeters from Smith's. Urgent need flooded his body, taking charge of his mind. He couldn't hold off. "I was hoping we could...catch up."

They were almost the same height, Smith only a fraction taller. Cyr watched his ex-lover's thickly lashed eyes darken like clouds before a storm. The air was heavy, thrumming with sexual energy. Tension radiated from Smith's body, wrapping around Cyr and squeezing tight until he struggled to breathe.

"You want to catch up?" The words left Smith's mouth in a ragged whisper. His hot breath caressed Cyr's face while his body heat had Cyr's cock leaping against the front of his slacks.

"I want to catch up," Cyr affirmed stepping forward again. Their bodies fully aligned, Cyr's erection grazed Smith's very prominent one. A long breath hissed through his teeth at the contact. He'd only ever felt that cock inside him once before. He couldn't wait to feel it again.

Cyr reached between their bodies and let his fingers caress the front seam of Smith's jeans. So thick and large. He cupped his hand around the bulge, then drew his thumb upward to find the zipper. Just as he located the metal tab, Smith's fingers closed around his wrist.

"Turn around."

Cyr's breath choked in his throat when he saw the fire burning in Smith's eyes. He followed the order, turning until he faced the wooden table and Smith's erection brushed his ass. Long seconds ticked by as they remained in that exact position. Cyr bit back a groan. He had to be patient to get what he wanted.

Finally, Smith spoke again. A second sharp order. "Lose the pants."

With shaking fingers, Cyr undid the front button, pulled down the zipper and shoved his pants down around his knees. His boxers followed and his cock sprang free, his balls brushing the cool edge of the table.

He heard nothing from Smith. Closing his eyes tightly, he placed his hands on the table and waited. Agonizing. His cock throbbed, unbearably full. He itched to stroke it, to take matters into his own hands. But he had to wait.

A denim-covered erection pressed against the seam of Cyr's bare ass. He blew out a controlled breath, feeling a sweat break out across his brow. Smith leaned over him, his massive chest bearing down on Cyr's back. His breath tickled Cyr's ear as he whispered, "this is what you meant by catching up, right?"

Cyr let out a low groan and ground his ass back against Smith's crotch. "Yes," he gasped. "That's exactly what I meant."

"Good." Smith's hand reached between them, his knuckles grazing the skin of Cyr's ass. The rasp of metal on metal sounded in the air as a zipper was lowered. And then Smith's pulsing shaft sprang against Cyr. The heat of it burned his skin. He moved his buttocks against it in a silent plea.

He didn't have to beg for long.

One rough palm gripped his hip. He glanced over his shoulder and nearly lost his balance at the sight of Smith tracing the head of his huge, veined cock along the line of his buttocks. His mouth watered and a drop of pre-cum appeared on the head of his own penis. Smith's gaze snapped to his and gave a silent warning. Cyr faced forward once again, braced himself on the wooden table and howled as Smith's cock slammed inside him.

The initial pain was intense but quickly gave way to pleasure. He rose up on the balls of his feet while his arms collapsed on the table. Supported on his elbows, he focused on the sensation of Smith pulsing inside him. Every nerve ending in his body screamed. His heart pounded in his chest. He dropped his head to the table and fought for breath.

Smith withdrew slowly, then thrust inside again. The heat of his cock scorched Cyr's insides, stroked the walls of Cyr's ass. Behind his eyes, color exploded, bright and

dizzying. Cyr grunted as sweat beaded on his forehead. Catching up had never been so good.

Their fucking fell into a sharp rhythm. Smith's cock lunged into him over and over, stretching him open and filling him up. Cyr's cock felt ready to burst, his balls tight beneath the base. He pumped his hips in time with Smith's, pushing forward when Smith pulled back. And then he was coming hard, the force of his orgasm sucking him dry. Smith followed close behind, his chest vibrating against Cyr's back as a feral roar ripped from his throat. His cum shot into Cyr in white-hot spurts, his hips still thrusting until the last drop had been spilled. Then he collapsed over Cyr's back, his short breaths drying the sweat-dampened skin at Cyr's neck.

Cyr buried his face in the crook of his arms and savored the moment. Smith's body covering his, the scent of their sex hanging in the air, their hearts beating rapidly together. He'd waited for this since the night he was ripped from Smith's life – the night he was ripped from his own life – seven years ago.

## Chapter Two

Smith didn't want to get up. The desire to stay in this position, on top of Cyr, was strong. But the urge to save himself from the pain of the past was stronger. Fucking was fine. Holding each other after the act was asking for trouble.

Slowly, he pushed to his feet, aware of the delicious ache in his groin. Cyr's smooth, taut buttocks filled his vision and his cock rose to life again. He tore his gaze away and focused on his zipper.

*Damn it, Smith. Have you lost your mind?* He felt like he had, that somewhere in the last fifteen minutes, his common sense had been lost in Cyr's body. The shock of seeing him again coupled with Cyr's obvious hunger for his body... It had overwhelmed him, knocked him off balance. Now they'd fucked and damn, what a fuck! He needed to get out of here. As soon as possible.

When Smith turned back, Cyr had risen to his feet and was working on his own pants.

"I need to get going."

Cyr lifted his head. "You do?"

"I want to get started on this job." Smith backed up toward the staircase. "I'm sure Ulric will let you know when I get him."

Cyr chuckled and the deep sound tugged at Smith's cock.

"What's so funny?"

"You." Cyr's eyes twinkled with amusement. "Ulric didn't tell you that I'll be accompanying you on your trip?"

"Huh?" Smith shook his head. "No way."

"Amalgamation wants me on this because of my powers. Like I said, Drake won't be easy to track down."

"That's not how I work."

Cyr shrugged, stepped forward and slapped his hand on Smith's shoulder. "Tough shit." He cocked his head toward the stairs. "Let's get going. I think we both need a shower."

Cyr strolled away with his briefcase in hand, leaving Smith staring in his wake. This was bad. Very bad. But it made sense. Cyr's telepathy skills would come in useful on a job, especially if this Drake guy was as slippery as Cyr suggested.

But still...

Fighting the urge to punch the gray wall, Smith stormed after Cyr. They walked in silence back to The Web, a silence Smith was grateful for. It gave him time to seethe. He led Cyr through the antique store and into The Web. He didn't stop to introduce Cyr to any of the hunters on the way past the rec rooms, not even when Aurelie, The Web's day shift cook, called out a greeting. Their pace didn't let up until he and Cyr were standing in his dorm, away from prying eyes.

"The shower's through there," he said, canting his head to the door on the right. "Are you okay for clothes?"

Cyr held up his briefcase. "It holds more than you'd expect."

"Good." Smith grabbed some clothes for himself and stepped back into the corridor. "I'm going to track down Ulric."

"Back already?"

Smith turned at the sound of his droid's clipped tones. P.I.424 entered the room with an armful of bedding.

"Four-two-four, this is Cyr. He'll be accompanying me to Azo Eta."

The droid greeted Cyr, then returned his attention to Smith. "When will you depart?"

"Thirty minutes. I need to talk with Ulric first. Please see to it that everything I need is on the *Dragon*." Smith turned and headed down the corridor. Before he met Ulric, he'd take a shower. He marched in the direction of Jenna's room. Jenna—his friend and fellow hunter—would let him use her bathroom.

He rapped on her door and entered without waiting for a reply. She was stretched out on the bed, eyes closed. With her long black hair, slender curves and pouting lips, she was a beauty.

*If only I was into women. Then a few days spent in Cyr's company wouldn't be a problem.*

Jenna cracked one eye open. "Hey stranger."

"Hey." The bed dipped as he took a seat. "Is it okay if I use your shower?"

"Sure." She rose up on her elbows, dark eyes narrowing. "What's wrong with your own shower?"

He grimaced. "It's in use."

She lifted one delicate eyebrow. "Oh yeah? Spill."

"There's nothing to spill."

"Then why do you look like you just had the best sex of your life?"

Smith blinked, then got to his feet. Is it that obvious? "Can I use your shower or not?"

A wicked grin crossed her face. "I already said you could."

"Thank you." He strode into the bathroom and shut the door firmly behind him. It didn't block out Jenna's singsong words of, "I want all the details when you finish!"

He pulled his shirt over his head and made quick work of his jeans. Reaching into the stall, he twisted the shower knob. Hot water thundered onto the tiled floor, the sound heaven to his ears. He stepped beneath the jets and let out a moan of relief.

The relief was short-lived, however, as his mind dissolved into a jumble of painful memories. A lump settled in his stomach, a tight knot of emotions he didn't want to face. Seven years ago, he'd awoken to find Cyr gone from his bed. The devastation of

that morning had changed his life forever, ruining his happiness in life and his trust in the universe. Cyr had been his best friend, his soul mate. And the night before he'd taken off, Cyr had become his lover.

Smith swallowed hard and closed his eyes, fighting the memories. Friends since they were kids, they'd ended up as roommates at college. Living with Cyr had been a sweet agony. Only beginning to explore his sexuality, Smith had found it near impossible to keep himself from climbing into Cyr's bed at night. Little had he known that Cyr had been dealing with similar feelings.

One night, after a few hours spent studying at the library, he'd returned to their dorm to find Cyr waiting for him. Naked and fully aroused.

Placing his hands against the shower wall, Smith surrendered to the memories of that night, allowing them to run rampant in his mind. Not one word had passed between them. Everything that needed to be communicated was said through their eyes and their bodies. Smith had moved inside Cyr slowly, taking his friend's virginity with care, losing himself in Cyr's hot, tight passage. For what had seemed like hours, they'd rocked together, their mutual climax building to a crescendo Smith hadn't experienced since.

Until this morning.

Damn it. Smith slammed his palm on the wall, painfully aware that his cock was standing to attention, begging for the mercy of a hot mouth or a tight grip. Cyr was probably just as naked as he was right now, standing beneath the shower in Smith's dorm, using his shower gel, getting all clean. Smith ran his tongue over his lips and studiously ignored his erection.

He was giving in too easily. Seeing Cyr again had dredged up emotions he'd buried long ago. But he wouldn't forget the circumstances of Cyr's departure. Just a note on the bedside table to say goodbye. *I'm sorry. I can't do this.*

Rage bubbled thickly in his veins, anger acting as a convenient distraction from his lust. He'd seen that note as soon as he'd opened his eyes that morning. He'd scanned it



twice, then read it through slowly. After that he'd crumpled it in his fist and swallowed the bitter truth. Cyr had dealt him the biggest knock of his life. Who did he trust now?

The answer had been obvious. No one. So he'd packed his bags and searched for something that would make his life less empty. Bounty Hunters Inc. had been that something. It gave him purpose, something to get out of bed for. And it had made him stronger. That was why no matter how hard Cyr tried, Smith would never let his heart be touched again.

Slowly, Smith twisted the shower knob until the steady stream of water died. He grabbed a towel and stepped out of the stall. Now he had to face a frigging inquisition from Jenna, who'd probably already wrung 424 dry for information on Cyr's presence.

Smith sighed and rubbed the droplets of water from his chest. He'd dodge Jenna's questions, then track Ulric down. He smirked to himself. *Who knows? Maybe I'll get my ass out of this one yet.*

The smile quickly faded when another thought flitted across his mind. Did he really want to get his ass out of this one?

He wasn't so sure he did.

\* \* \* \* \*

Fifteen minutes later, Smith and Cyr were in the cockpit of Smith's cruiser the *Dragon*, hurtling through Quartus Seven's atmosphere. Cyr jolted forward, then a wall of pressure pushed him back against his seat. It lasted a few seconds before giving way.

Cyr ran his gaze over the many buttons and levers and he watched as a satellite map appeared on the screen in front of Smith. It dialed in on their location and pinpointed the city of Eta. The journey wouldn't last long.

A pity, Cyr mused as Smith's thigh rubbed against his and a bolt of electricity charged between them. Accidental, of course. They couldn't help but touch in this cramped space. *Which is why I wish this journey could go on forever.*

Smith clicked the comm-tab below his ear, ending the conversation he'd been having with his droid.

"Why didn't you bring him?"

"Who, 424?"

"Yeah."

"Why? He's not a pleasure droid, you know." A smirk curled Smith's lips and Cyr's cock stiffened in response. It was the sexiest smirk he'd ever seen.

Cyr swallowed and gave a shrug. "Too bad. Then we could really have some fun."

The smile vanished from Smith's face, replaced with a frown.

Okay. Maybe it's too soon for flirting.

"Did you talk to Ulric?"

"No," Smith grumbled. "I couldn't find him."

"It seems like a pretty big place. How many hunters are there?"

Smith shrugged halfheartedly. "That's like asking how many grains are in a sandstorm."

Cyr fought a grin. Smith really wasn't enjoying being stuck with him. He'd have to change that.

"How long have you been with Bounty Hunters Inc.?"

Smith's frustrated groan filled the ship. "Damn it Cyr, you ask a lot of questions."

"Just making conversation."

Smith exhaled loudly. "Fine. Six years. I've been there six years."

Cyr nodded as if he hadn't already known that piece of information. Since he'd escaped captivity two years back, he'd kept watch for any information on his best friend's life. Smith's career had been the obvious starting point. And it had been one heck of a surprise to find out his friend was a bounty hunter. Cyr hadn't seen that one coming. Not by a long shot.

"What made you join?"

Smith grunted. The low sound pretty much screamed "none of your goddamned business". Cyr let it drop. He couldn't have continued a conversation anyway. Not when a blinding flash of pain seared across his forehead.

He closed his eyes tight and breathed through the pain. It would get worse before it got better. The blood in his skull pounded against the top of his head, beating like the insistent drums of an ancient tribe. He swallowed the bile that rose in his throat. And then the pinpricks came—white-hot needles of pain that stabbed his forehead. He gritted his teeth and hissed. It would be over soon. Five, four, three, two... Yes. He exhaled a long breath and dropped his head back against the headrest. Over.

"What the fuck?"

Oh right. In the midst of the agony, he'd forgotten Smith's presence. Cyr opened his eyes carefully, allowing them a moment to adjust to the light. Smith was staring at him, reluctant concern evident in his gaze.

"What?"

Smith shook his head in amazement. "What just happened?"

"Migraine."

"Migraine?" Sarcasm drenched Smith's tone. "You ripped the damn cup holder off my seat. You're gonna blame that on a migraine?"

Cyr blinked and glanced down. His fist was wrapped around a piece of curved metal. Shit. "Sorry about that."

They were silent for a few seconds before Smith spoke again. "Tell me what happened."

"I already told you."

"Right. Migraine," Smith mumbled under his breath. "Like I give a damn."

Cyr turned to the right to hide a small smile. He'd seen the worry in Smith's eyes. *There's hope for us yet.*

Over the next few minutes, Azo Eta came into view. They swooped over the Divinity, a large body of water which separated the two cities, then headed in the direction of Eta. Cyr watched as Smith powered the ship over the buildings. *Damn him. He turns the simple act of controlling a ship into an erotic sight.*

Smith steered downward again when they reached a tall, flat-roofed building. He circled the ship a couple of times before landing with a jolt. A radioed-in voice confirmed that they'd arrived in Eta.

"What now?" Cyr asked as the ship's hatch slid upward, letting in a cool breeze.

"We're on top of Hotel Dmitri. A lot of hunters use it when visiting Eta. The ship is safe up here."

Cyr nodded and followed Smith out of the ship. He let his eyes rest on the flex of Smith's buttocks as the man stretched his arms above his head. Then turning away in an effort to keep himself in check, Cyr scanned the city's skyline.

At the sight of the tall, lean Etas going about their business, a buzz of anticipation zipped beneath his skin and the hairs on his arms stood on end. Somewhere in this city, Drake lurked behind closed doors, maybe below ground. Cyr opened his mind and tried to zone in on the bastard's location. But even as he concentrated, he knew it was pointless. Drake was the master of closing his mind, the master of holding his dark secrets behind the shutters of his silver eyes. Cyr clenched his teeth, a thirst for vengeance flooding his body. Drake didn't know that his time was about to come to an end.

He didn't know that his experiment-gone-wrong was in town and looking for payback.

"You coming?"

Cyr forced down the surge of sinister excitement and followed Smith toward the roof's exit. His eyes caught on the bulge at the side of Smith's jacket—a bulge which clearly outlined a laser pistol. He pictured the scene—him holding the deadly weapon in his grip, pointing it in the face of his nemesis.

Soon, he promised himself. It will happen soon.

## **Chapter Three**

One fucking room.

Smith stared at the singular keycard in his hand. Was the whole damn universe conspiring against him today?

He glanced back at the female droid behind the reception desk. "You only have one room?" he asked, his voice rising in incredulity.

She smiled politely and said in her clipped tones, "I'm sorry, sir. It is recommended that guests make reservations in advance of their arrival."

Smith glowered at the droid. She wasn't being intentionally irritating, she was programmed this way. But he still wanted to argue with her.

Instead, he turned away and stormed toward the elevator. He didn't look in Cyr's direction but the shuffle of feet in his wake told him Cyr followed. They rode up to their floor in silence. Smith fumed all the way.

Only one room available? Bullshit. He'd never booked a room at the Dmitri in advance before. In the few times he'd stayed here in the past, the place had always been practically empty. Obviously, Azo Eta's tourism levels had risen in the last few months.

At least it's big, he mused when they stepped into their room. Like every other room in the Dmitri, the room was circular and almost bare of furniture and decoration. Black leather panels lined the continuous wall, parting at the glass doors which looked out onto the city and allowed light to stream into the room.

Smith dropped his pack on the wooden floor and brought his gaze to the circular waterbed in the centre of the room. It was huge, a mass of black covers and crisp white sheets. Images, vivid and x-rated, assaulted his mind. Him and Cyr, rolling on that bed, not a scrap of clothing between them. Hot and sweaty. He swallowed thickly as his cock reared against the front of his jeans.

Cyr didn't seem to be affected at all by the giant sexual suggestion that took up most of the room. He strolled to the glass doors, hands set on his narrow hips as he stared out at the city. The muscles in his back were tense and Smith rubbed his palms on his jeans in an effort to stave off the desire to stride over there and massage the knots out of Cyr's shoulders.

"I'm going to head downstairs," he said, backing toward the door. "I want to get started on Drake."

Cyr didn't react, didn't even nod to suggest he'd heard. Smith furrowed his brow. He'd been so busy letting that droid receptionist raise his hackles, he was only now realizing that Cyr hadn't said a word since they'd left the ship.

"You coming?"

Finally Cyr turned, though the gaze that met Smith's was distracted. "I think I'll hang here for a bit."

Smith nodded. He wanted to ask what was going through Cyr's mind but that would make him sound interested. He couldn't do that. Instead, he opened the door and stepped into the corridor.

Tracking down a drug dealer in Azo Eta would be easy as there weren't many of them. He'd take a walk through the streets now and maybe he'd hear something. He punched the button for the elevator and glanced back at the door to the room. Cyr was right behind that door. Only a few meters separated them. Oh yeah and that goddamned bed. Smith stepped into the elevator, still watching the room until the elevator doors met in front of his face.

Would he ever get up the nerve to ask the question which had been burning his gut for seven years? Would he ever ask Cyr what the hell had happened that morning? Probably not. Asking that question would mean reliving the past pain. And he wouldn't do that. Not in front of Cyr. His pride wouldn't allow it.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Smith walked back into their room that evening, Cyr was sitting on the bed eating dinner. His mind had relaxed after a short nap and earlier feelings of anger and vengeance had dampened in the face of a growling stomach.

"Did you find anything?" he asked through a mouthful of steak.

Smith shook his head as he slid out of his jacket. "I talked to a few guys on Second and walked around the city. Either no one's talking, or this guy is lying low."

Cyr shrugged and offered Smith the plate of food he'd ordered up from downstairs. "I told you he'd be hard to find."

Smith shoved a slice of meat into his mouth and sat on the lone sofa opposite the bed. "What did you do while I was gone?"

"Ordered up a couple of pleasure droids and had some fun." Cyr winked. "You should have been here. The droids brought toys."

Smith raised a brow and the corners of his lips quirked in a smile. "Sounds like I missed a good time."

"You did."

They chewed in silence for a few minutes. Cyr watched Smith lick his fingers, then sink back into the sofa with a satisfied growl.

"You always did like your *bizon*," Cyr mumbled before he could stop himself.

Smith's eyebrows shot up and he gave a surprised laugh. "I guess you could say that."

"Are there a lot of gay bounty hunters?"

"More than you'd think." Smith scooted forward on the sofa and placed his plate on the floor. "Are there many gay Amalgamation workers?"

"A few."

"I'm sure they helped break you in."

Cyr's eyes widened. He couldn't decipher the emotion in Smith's tone. "I don't know. I think you were the one who broke me in."



Smith's eyes flashed as he rose to his feet. "Obviously, I wasn't enough."

Okay, he definitely sensed the tone now. Bitterness.

"What makes you say that?" Cyr found himself eye level with Smith's crotch and he couldn't tear his gaze away.

Another laugh vibrated in Smith's chest but this one lacked humor. "You're forgetting your silent departure. You know, after I broke you in?"

Cyr forced his gaze upward and faced the anger in Smith's eyes. But the anger couldn't mask the pain hiding in the depths of those dark eyes. Cyr knew him too well.

Getting to his feet, Cyr reached for his lover's arm. He wanted to say something to make Smith's pain and anger dissipate but his own emotions blocked his throat. So he did what his body told him to. He stepped forward until their breaths mingled together, then lowered his mouth to Smith's.

Smith didn't respond immediately but Cyr didn't hesitate. He brushed his lips back and forth, reveling in their closeness as they kissed. Bringing his hands to cup that strong jaw, he ran his tongue along the seam of Smith's mouth, probing it gently. After a few seconds, Smith opened and Cyr slid his tongue inside the warm cavern of his lover's mouth. Delicious. Cyr tangled his tongue with Smith's, caressing its velvety surface, sucking the point slowly until he felt a response. Like cooking the perfect steak, it took time and care and persistence. The end result would be worth the effort. He kept stroking and sucking until finally Smith gave in, bringing his large hands to Cyr's hips and digging his fingers into the flesh.

Cyr groaned into the back of Smith's throat, his cock swelling in his pants as the kiss deepened. Smith's tongue thrust alongside his and that hard chest melded to his own. It felt like heaven, the moment he'd been waiting for since he'd left their dorm in electro-cuffs all those years ago. Heat built between their bodies, thick and intense. Unable to stop himself, Cyr ground his hips against Smith and their clothed erections rubbed together. At the contact, Smith's kiss grew harder, stronger. His tongue warred with Cyr's, sucking and tasting, stroking the inside of Cyr's mouth.

His control was slipping. Cyr felt it unravel with every thrust of Smith's tongue. His cock ached to be freed, to be able to rub against Smith's without the double barrier of wool and denim. But the lust flaming between their bodies was dizzying. He didn't think he'd be able to get his coordination together for the simple act of undressing. For now, he'd just remain still, relishing every second of Smith's kiss, absorbing the heat of Smith's fingertips which seared through the cotton of his shirt to his skin.

And then he was abandoned, left gasping for breath as Smith took his kiss away and headed for the bathroom door.

"I'm gonna take a shower," Smith said, voice calm as if they'd been talking about the advantages and disadvantages of droids, rather than tormenting one another with their mouths. On legs that appeared to be steady, he sauntered into the bathroom and shut the door behind him.

Cyr gave his head a quick shake to clear it but his thoughts were a jumbled mess. Blood thundered in his veins and his cock pounded, desperate for some kind of gratification. The thrum of water hitting the shower's floor reached his ears. It matched the thrum of desire in his body. Smith was undressing right now, removing each piece of clothing from his sculpted frame.

Cyr growled. If Smith thought he could get away that easily, he was about to get a shock. Closing his eyes, Cyr focused on his lover, picturing him in his mind until every sinew and crevice came into focus. This was going to be fun.

Smith stripped off his boxers and gratefully stepped under the steaming jets of water. As the powerful spray pummeled his shoulders, he rested his forehead on the tiled wall and tried to breathe. Cyr's taste and smell still consumed his senses. His cock throbbed between his thighs and his lips tingled. He'd forgotten how good it felt to kiss that man, to feel those firm lips on his, pressing and molding together. Just one kiss had been enough to chase the sense from his mind. Aware only of Cyr and Cyr's mouth, it

was no small miracle that Smith had been able to pull away before things had really gotten out of hand.

Smith turned around and let the water fall on his erection. Reaching behind him, he twisted the dial to cold. But the icy jets did nothing to tame his arousal. In fact, with each passing second, his cock grew longer and thicker, pulsed harder. Desperate for Cyr.

He closed his eyes and fought the urge to wrap his fist around it and get his jollies by himself. *I will not give in.* But a telltale quiver behind his eyelids told him he probably wouldn't have a choice. Cyr was in his head and wasn't going anywhere.

He groaned low and long as the torture began. It started with featherlight strokes along the length of his cock. Ghost fingers ran from base to tip, a warm thumb flicking over the glans every couple of seconds. Smith peered down through the steam, almost expecting to see a live hand pumping his cock. But all he saw was the tight skin on his shaft moving with the rhythm of the phantom strokes.

The hand grew tighter on his cock, pulling harder. Beneath his body, his balls tightened. And then he felt it. A hot mouth licking one ball, then sucking on it gently. Smith slammed his palm against the wall and squeezed his eyes shut. *Block him out Smith, just block him out.*

But Cyr was too powerful. Fingers now cupped Smith's balls and that mouth was sucking hard on his cock. The warm flat of a tongue swiped over the broad head, dipping into the slit, drawing out a drop of pearly liquid.

*You want this,* Cyr's voice whispered in his mind. *Don't tell me you don't.*

The smug words gave Smith the bolt of control he needed. Anger flared within his soul, flames of rage licking from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Metal creaked as he turned the shower knob so hard, it almost broke off the wall. Then, without bothering to grab a towel, he stormed into the bedroom, ignoring the fact that he was dripping wet and imaginary fingers and mouth still tortured his cock and balls.

Cyr was standing naked before the bed. His hand was wrapped around his own erection, pumping up and down. Smith's mouth dried at the sight, his eyes absorbing the thick, ridged length and the plum-colored head which begged to be sucked. Damn the man was hung.

He lifted his gaze to Cyr's surprised one, then strode across the room and pushed Cyr back on the bed.

"Don't ever mess with my head again," he growled, climbing forward until he smothered Cyr's body with his own. "Do it again and I swear..."

Cyr's green eyes were glittering with desire but Smith knew he understood. So he turned his attention to the sinewy body beneath him. He slid downward until his knees were either side of Cyr's thighs and allowed himself a moment to drink in the mouthwatering sight.

Cyr's body was all corded muscle and smooth skin. Smith skimmed his palms over that hard chest, feeling the pectorals bunch beneath his touch. His cock jerked between his thighs in response, almost brushing the thick length of Cyr's. He swallowed, then leaned forward and flicked his tongue over one dark, tempting nipple. He sucked on the tiny nub, Cyr's moans of satisfaction reaching his ears and kicking up his desire a few notches. He moved his head to Cyr's other nipple, unable to stop himself from thrusting his hips. The action forced his erection against Cyr's and he choked on a moan at the contact.

*Goddammit, I'm not gonna last two minutes like this,* he thought, thrusting his hips again and feeling the scorching skin of Cyr's cock inflame his lust even further. If they kept rubbing together like this, friction building like wildfire...

He tore his lips away from Cyr's chest and slid off the bed. Cool wooden floor met his knees as he lowered his body. He opened his mouth and swallowed Cyr's cock until it brushed the back of his throat.

Yes. This was what he needed. He groaned around the thick shaft, savoring the salty taste of Cyr's skin and the sensation of the cock throbbing between his lips. The

skin was like heated velvet stretched tight around a cylinder of steel, the most delectable contrast he'd ever known. He pushed his head down further until he took Cyr inside right to the base. Wiry curls scratched his cheeks and he inhaled the thick musk of Cyr's scent. So masculine, it flooded his senses, making his blood sing with anticipation. Goddammit, he'd sucked cock before but never had he felt this level of hunger, this desperation to swallow as much of a man as he could.

Keeping his lips locked tight around the pulsing cock, he drew his head up and began a slow, aching rhythm. His grip tightened on Cyr's thighs as he sucked hard and scraped his teeth along the veined underside before swirling his tongue around the plum tip. The grunts he received in response had Smith's own cock pressing into the bed's curved edge. Time to give in. He reached between his own thighs and grasped his cock, pumping himself as he pumped Cyr.

The smell of their sex rose in the air and drew his balls tight beneath his body. He was going to come and he knew as Cyr's hips began to move in staccato thrusts that his lover was nearing the edge too. They came together, Cyr spilling into Smith's mouth and Smith erupting into his own hand. Even as his body shuddered, he held Cyr in place and drank him up until he'd swallowed the last drop of Cyr's sweet release. Then, gathering the little energy he had left in his body, he drew himself to his feet and headed back to the shower.

"I'm going to dry off and then I'm going out," he said, glancing back at Cyr's body. The smooth skin shimmered with sweat and that delicious cock was still half hard. He forced his gaze away from the erotic sight and stepped into the bathroom.

His breathing was heavy and his body burned for more. He needed to get away from Cyr as soon as possible or he'd wind up losing himself completely. And the consequences to that could only be pain.

## Chapter Four

Cyr tossed and turned on the circular bed all night. Thoughts of Smith and Drake jumbled together in his mind, eradicating any chance he had of drifting into a comfortable sleep.

By the time Smith returned to the room, it was nearly morning. He didn't join Cyr in the massive bed. Instead he stretched his large frame over the leather sofa and appeared to fall asleep instantaneously.

Cyr rolled onto his chest to avoid staring at his lover. He ached to feel that hard body against him again and memories of Smith's mouth wrapped around his cock tortured his mind. Maybe he'd crawl out of bed and wake Smith with a return gesture. The thought of sliding his lips up and down that long, thick cock had his own pressing insistently into the mattress. But he didn't think Smith would appreciate the sexual favor.

He grinned, remembering Smith's reaction to his mind games. As Cyr had delved into Smith's subconscious, he'd felt the resistance, savored the tension. Rage had simmered in Smith's veins, bubbling so hard Cyr had felt it vibrate in his own body, surging beneath his skin.

A delicious shiver tripped down his spine at the memory. There was nothing more erotic than bringing a man like Smith to his knees, especially when Smith had done everything he could to fight him off. And he'd succeeded.

*But only because I let him.* Cyr had known what the retaliation would be. He knew that relaxing his control on Smith's mind would garner the effect of a slingshot. He'd gotten Smith so worked up, that when he'd loosened the reins, Smith's lust and rage had combined and exploded, giving Cyr exactly what he wanted.

No wonder Smith had stormed out of the room after the act. He'd always liked to be in charge of his senses and if the last twenty-four hours were anything to go by, that need for control had only increased since they'd last seen each other.

The early hours of the morning ticked by slowly, Cyr aware only of Smith's breathing. When seven a.m. clicked on his watch, he rose from the bed and padded into the shower. After he'd dried off and dressed, he headed back into the bedroom to find Smith munching on a *papple* and studying his weapon supply.

"Morning."

Smith grunted in response, not looking up from his knife.

Reaching for a plate of bacon, Cyr sat on the edge of the bed. "So what happens today?"

"We're gonna look for that Drake of yours." Smith blew a fleck of dust from the silver blade. "Get this job done."

Cyr nodded. Crunch time was coming. He could feel it in his gut. *How long will it be before I have to tell Smith the truth?*

"Want me to head downstairs and call a hovercraft?"

"No." Smith got to his feet and stuffed the knife into his pack. "We'll walk. We'll see more that way."

Ten minutes later, they exited the hotel and headed toward Broadway. The sun was out, its rays peeking through the clouds. But the temperature was cool and a light breeze blew in their faces. Cyr tilted his head back and breathed deeply until his lungs were full of oxygen.

"I was worried it was going to be a roaster."

Smith chuckled. "You always were a wuss when it came to heat."

"So I don't live for tropical weather and sandy beaches." Cyr shrugged as they turned onto Second. "Big deal."

"I guess it makes sense. You did grow up in Alaska, after all."

"You make Alaska sound like it's the middle of nowhere."

"It is."

Cyr grinned. How many times had they had this argument in the past? As kids, Smith had always teased him about spending the first few years of his life in Alaska. To a guy from Southern California, Alaska seemed like another world. From the way Smith had joked, Alaska was more out of the way than Mars.

Thinking back to his life on Earth, Cyr felt a sudden pang of homesickness. His parents had died in a vehicle accident when he'd been twelve and Smith's mother had practically adopted him after that. Despite the years that had passed, Smith's family would always be home in his heart.

"How's your mom doing?" The question slipped from his lips before he had time to think about it. Luckily, Smith didn't freeze up. Instead, he pulled out his wallet.

"Here." He handed Cyr a small picture. It depicted a blonde woman with a beer in hand and a warm smile on her face. "She left Earth three years ago and moved out to T-Sdei Delta. She likes the culture."

Cyr barked a laugh. "I'll bet." He could imagine Suzette embracing the party planet with open arms. She'd always been a wacky woman, unlike any other mother he'd ever met. "What does she do there?"

"Cabaret singer at one of the nightclubs." Smith's tone was wry but Cyr detected the notes of pride and love. "She still talks about you. Still expects you to come home." The warmth in Smith's voice disappeared in those last few words, replaced with biting bitterness.

Cyr kept his eyes on the street ahead. *What do I say to that?* Did he tell Smith how much he'd longed to call him and his mother? Did he reveal how many times he'd almost been shot in the head for attempting escape? If he did, he'd have to explain what had happened all those years ago. And he wasn't sure he was ready to do that just yet. He'd rather get Drake out of the way first and then his life could resume on a normal track.



"I'm sorry I didn't call," he muttered eventually.

Smith's lips twisted in a humorless smile. "Whatever." He came to an abrupt halt and pulled open a door. It led into a seedy-looking bar, the kind of place a drug lord might deal in. Cyr followed Smith into the dark interior, trying not to focus on how he was wasting Smith's time with this bogus mission.

"Hey." Smith nodded to the hunched-over man who stood behind the bar. He was cleaning glasses with the dustiest cloth Cyr had ever laid eyes on.

"What can I do you for?"

Smith withdrew Drake's picture from his pocket. "Have you seen this man?"

The bartender placed his elbows on the bar and peered at the image. After a few seconds, he shook his balding head. "No. Never seen him before."

"You sure?" Smith pressed.

The man nodded. "Yeah. Are you military?"

"Do you see any uniforms?"

The man narrowed his eyes at Smith, then leaned closer. "Try the bottom of Sixteenth, just past the Trench club. Anything illegal goes down there."

"Will do." Smith stepped away from the bar and headed for the exit. Once out on the street again, he rummaged around in his pack and retrieved two pairs of shades.

"Put these on," he said, tossing one pair to Cyr. "Watch out for orbit wisps."

Cyr slipped on the shades, his shoulders growing tense beneath his jacket. He'd forgotten about those beings. They saw everything. If Drake had missed even one step, a wisp, or a snitch as they were often called, would have seen him. And if a wisp knew who Drake really was, the game was up.

Thankfully, there didn't seem to be many around. Once or twice, he spotted a bluish-green glow in his peripheral vision but when Smith didn't say anything, he just kept going.

The walk to the other side of the city was long. It was silent too, their earlier banter having dried up after the talk of Smith's mother. Cyr tried to use the time to work out his plan for Drake but thoughts of Smith and their relationship continued to crop up, taking center stage in his mind.

The past day and a half had been incredible. Fucking incredible. In the few hours they'd spent together, Cyr had experienced his life again, the way it should have been. Even as Smith tried to ignore him, even with their mutual pain acting as a barrier between them, it was still...incredible.

After escaping Drake's clutches two years ago, he'd been living like a robot. He ate, he exercised, he got a job with the Amalgamation as a means to bring Drake down. Occasionally he had sex. But his entire focus had been solely on revenge. It had eaten him up inside, the anger and the desire for vengeance. He'd shunned workmates, friends, relationships. All he'd wanted was to destroy the Amalgamation's secret project.

But the moment he'd seen Smith enter the dusty, derelict building, the second their eyes had locked when Smith had reached the top of the stairway his mouth had dried and his heart had stopped. Memories of their night together, the night they'd become lovers, had flooded his mind. As they'd stared at one another, Cyr had been able to feel Smith moving inside him as carefully as he had that night, sucking gently at his shoulder, stroking his buttocks. The effect had been a powerful one, knocking all thoughts of Drake and revenge clean from his mind.

But just because he wasn't as focused as he had been did not eradicate his need to bring Drake's project to an end. People's lives were being destroyed by this man and his machines. Cyr had gotten out just in time before his own mind had collapsed. Hell, two years later he was still suffering those goddamned migraines.

Drake definitely needed to be destroyed. And Cyr couldn't wait to be the one to do it.

\* \* \* \* \*

*What's going through his mind?* Smith wondered as they turned onto Sixteenth. Cyr's brow was furrowed and his lips were drawn in a tight line. He looked as if his thoughts were on another planet.

Or maybe another man.

Smith frowned as jealousy knifed through his gut. He wanted to drill Cyr for information on his life but asking questions would show he cared. And he didn't care.

*Bullshit, Smith, his conscience told him. Stop trying to kid yourself.*

Smith shook his head and focused on the assignment. He could see the Trench already. Soon they'd hit the bottom of the street and maybe by the time they got back to the hotel, they'd have a location on Drake. Logically, he knew that was what needed to happen. The faster they got this over with, the better.

But reluctance to finish this job jarred his usual "get the job done" mindset. His heart wanted this assignment to last forever, because then he wouldn't have to say goodbye to Cyr. And much as he tried to fight the truth, he knew that was going to hurt. Big time.

A couple of drunks stumbled out of the Trench as they passed. Smith yanked Drake's photo out of his pocket. Might as well ask.

He nodded to one of the men and pointed to the picture. "You seen this guy?"

The man leaned over for a better look and nearly fell to the ground. "Nope. Don't recognize him," he slurred.

"Thanks anyway." Smith moved on, noting how the end of the street looked pretty empty. "I have a feeling we're not going to get anything here." He turned to Cyr. "Have you got your telepathic thing turned on?"

The corners of Cyr's mouth lifted in a grin. "Nice way of putting it. And yeah, I do."

"You didn't get anything from anybody we passed?"

"No. I think we've got a dead end."

Smith exhaled loudly, then paused as a flash of blue caught his eye. Bingo. He slipped off his backpack and fumbled inside until he found what he was looking for. Retrieving two energy cubes, he held them out to the wisp. Then showing the ethereal creature Drake's picture, he asked, "Have you seen him?"

The snitch appeared to ponder the question for a few seconds before peering at Drake's face.

"Yes," was the eventual answer. "I have."

Excitement that he was finally getting somewhere battled with his reluctance to let this assignment meet an end. "Where?" he forced himself to ask. "Where did you see him?"

There was a pause and the being seemed to grow confused. "I don't know," it said in its breathy voice. "I can't remember."

Smith clenched his teeth and dug around in his pack for another cube. "Come on," he told the creature. "You don't forget anything."

The wisp took the offered cube but still appeared confused. "I don't remember."

An irritated growl slipped from Smith's lips. He glanced at Cyr to find him staring intently at the wisp.

"What now?"

Cyr sighed, then took a step back. "I don't think we're going to get anywhere."

Looking back at the wisp, Smith shook his head. He knew if he pressed hard enough, the creature would eventually crack. But he didn't feel like pushing today. Damn it, he didn't want to finish the job.

He watched the wisp flit away as a knot of unease tightened in his stomach. He needed to think of something. He was a bounty hunter, for fuck's sake. Ulric would go ape-shit if he knew one of his hunters was deliberately fucking up an assignment.

They headed back in the direction of the hotel and as they stepped onto Tenth, an idea took shape in his mind. He stopped and turned to Cyr.

"Where do the rich and famous get their coke and heroin?"

Cyr raised an eyebrow. "Clubs."

"Right." Smith's steps quickened as they turned a corner. He glanced to his right, his gaze resting on a sleazy-looking club. Redz. "Tonight, let's head here. Who knows? Drake might make an appearance."

Cyr nodded slowly. "Sounds good to me."

## Chapter Five

While Smith showered in preparation for their night out, Cyr lay on the bed staring at the rounded ceiling and fighting a migraine. The same thought kept repeating in his mind, over and over until he thought he was going to jump off the bed and run back down to the bottom of Sixteenth. *That orbit wisp knows where Drake is.*

As they'd stood there on that street and Smith had shown the being the picture of Drake, Cyr had known the wisp had the information he needed. He'd gathered all the power he possessed and zoned in on the being's mind, forcing it to forget what it knew about Drake. He'd been unsure it would work, he'd never tried to use his powers on an orbit wisp before. To his relief, it had pleaded a dose of forgetfulness. He could only hope that when he went back to the bottom of Sixteenth tonight after the club, he'd be able to find that same wisp. His power of suggestion would have worn off by then.

The bathroom door swung open, dragging Cyr from his thoughts. He sat up, his eyes zoning in on the chiseled lines of Smith's body as he strode into the room.

"Let's get going," Smith said as he shrugged into his leather jacket. He grabbed a few credits from the side of the bed and stuffed them in the pocket of his jeans.

"Wait." Cyr's gaze rested on Smith's crotch as he scooted to the edge of the bed. "I want to do something first."

Smith's eyebrow arched slightly but to Cyr's amazement, he didn't argue. Instead, he stepped forward, almost willingly.

"Make it fast."

Cyr swallowed hard as a surge of hunger consumed his body. With shaking hands he unbuttoned Smith's jeans, then slid the zipper downward until Smith's cock jerked out. It grew more swollen before Cyr's eyes, darkening in color to a purplish red, the veins corded and throbbing along the length.

As anticipation hummed in his own body, Cyr licked his lips and brought his hands together at the thick base. Then leaning forward, he opened his mouth and took the hot shaft inside. It slid along his tongue and his hunger increased tenfold at the clean taste of Smith's skin. He sucked harder, relaxing his throat muscles to take this magnificent cock further into his mouth. He twisted his hands at the base, laved his tongue along the ridged underside, swirled it around the engorged head in teasing swipes.

Smith's large hands clutched his head and tugged at his hair, drawing a groan of approval from Cyr's lips. He bobbed his head up and down, pulling back far enough until the head almost popped out of his mouth, then sinking right back down until his mouth stretched around the base. A drop of pearly liquid formed at the thick head of Smith's cock and Cyr gladly licked it off. His lover tasted delicious, salty and unique. He wanted more.

Upping the pace, Cyr sucked insistently until Smith's hips began to thrust hard, jamming that cock right down Cyr's throat.

And then Smith came, his grip on Cyr's hair tightening as he spilled his seed. Cyr lapped it up greedily, holding the shaft in his mouth until the last drop disappeared down his throat. Then releasing his lover, Cyr rose to his feet and tucked Smith back inside his jeans.

"Come on. We don't want to miss the party."

Smith remained still for a couple of seconds and Cyr knew he was trying to catch his breath. Fighting a smile, he waited at the door until Smith finally turned around.

"Nothing's changed," Smith muttered as he stepped into the corridor and punched the button for the elevator. "Don't kid yourself into thinking it has."

Cyr didn't respond but he couldn't help a wide grin from spreading across his face. The urge to press a kiss over Smith's tense lips, to work his tongue into that hot mouth, nearly broke him.

That would be pushing it, he told himself as he followed Smith into the elevator. They could make out later. For now, he'd just revel in the fact that Smith's walls were breaking down. And no matter what Smith said, things had definitely changed.

\* \* \* \* \*

Redz was one hell of a club. Smoky, hot, alcohol flowing like water. Sweaty bodies packed the floor, a mix of Etas, humans, hermaphrodites—you name it, Redz had it. Smith threaded his way through each group, interrogating the dancers and the boozers until he was certain they didn't have any information on Drake.

Thirst getting the better of him, Smith strode up to the bar to order a drink. Before he got the chance, he caught the eye of a golden-haired Eta. "You seen this guy around?" He shoved Drake's picture into the Eta's face but the guy's expression was blank.

"Sorry. I don't recognize him."

Smith groaned and raked a hand through his hair. They'd been here three hours already and he was getting fuck all. Nobody seemed to have any idea who Drake was.

"Why do you need to find him so bad?"

Smith glanced up at the Eta, surprised to find him still standing there. "Business."

The guy nodded. "Looks like you need to forget about business for a while." Blue eyes sparked a come-on and he cocked his golden-haired head to the bar. "Can I get you a drink?"

Smith looked to his right. Through a mass of gyrating bodies, he could make out Cyr who seemed to be getting pretty close to another man. Too damn close. Swallowing the sudden surge of jealousy, Smith turned back to the Eta and forced a small smile. "I'll have a brew."

On the other side of the club, Cyr was half listening to sports talk but his concentration was trained solely on Smith. And the asshole he was hitting on.



He gulped down his ale, giving a polite smile as the guy next to him cracked a joke. The smile faded from his face when he saw that Eta bastard put a hand on Smith's arm. Enough of this shit. He was getting damn tired of mind games. Sure, he played them better than most. But tonight he wasn't in the playing mood.

Muttering a goodbye to the sports guy, Cyr placed his drink on the table then stormed through the crowd until he stood next to Smith. Those dark eyes met his, confused and wary and...interested. A lethal dose of lust buzzed in Cyr's veins, battling his jealousy for space in his blood.

*Quit thinking, Cyr and kiss him already.*

Without even acknowledging the Eta's presence, he grabbed Smith by the arm and brought his lips down on that sexy mouth in a hard kiss. Time to take the reins.

*Oh no you don't.* The warning echoed in Smith's mind, even as he kissed Cyr back. He didn't know what had happened. One second he'd been flirting with Golden Boy over here and then Cyr had been striding forward, anger lashing in those green eyes.

Now their lips were battling it out, tongues and teeth meshing in a war of wills. The violence of the kiss communicated what Cyr's angry eyes had said two seconds ago. "You're mine. All mine." Cyr's tongue encircled his, tugging and sucking, seeking whatever the hell he was looking for.

And Smith didn't want to fight it. He gripped Cyr's shoulders, bruising Cyr's mouth with the force of his lips. He thrust his tongue along the length of Cyr's in long strokes. The abrasive surfaces rubbed together as their hips locked, their erections grazing. Smith could feel the heat of Cyr's cock through his jeans, a heat that was hard and demanding. He groaned into Cyr's mouth, a fresh burst of urgency shooting through his limbs. If they didn't get out of here soon, he was going to come in his jeans.

Finally, Cyr broke away, his grip remaining on Smith's arm. "Come on," he muttered, his voice low and rasping. "We're leaving."

Smith didn't argue. He followed Cyr out of the club into the cool night air. The temperature did nothing to alleviate the heat in his body.

They said nothing as Cyr flagged down a hovercraft. They climbed in, gave the driver the name of their hotel and five minutes later, pulled up outside.

The elevator ride up to their room was torture. Smith watched the floor numbers increase one by one, his hands itching to grab hold of Cyr. But something told him he had to wait. They were doing things on Cyr's terms tonight.

Once they entered their room, Cyr pulled him close again. Their lips met in another harsh kiss, tongues dancing and caressing. Smith tried to rub his hips against Cyr's but Cyr wouldn't allow it.

"Take off your clothes," Cyr ordered when he'd broken away.

The thunder in Cyr's eyes held all the power of an aphrodisiac. Smith tore off his jacket and t-shirt and fumbled with his zipper, tugging it until it jerked downward. Once naked, he stood before Cyr, his hard cock throbbing and leaping against his belly.

Cyr ran his gaze down Smith's body. His stare was so intense, Smith felt like every centimeter of his skin was being stroked. And then Cyr lifted his head and gestured to the bed.

"Lie down."

Smith backed up until his calves connected with the curved edge of the bed. He sank onto the covers and lay down, heart hammering in his chest as he waited for Cyr's next move.

"Open your legs."

"Cyr—"

"Open your legs." The sharp bite in Cyr's words had Smith's balls aching. He let his knees fall open, rendering himself vulnerable to Cyr's will. His breath caught in his throat as Cyr's cool palms slid the length of his quivering thighs. The skilled hands bypassed his balls and cock, moving upward to stroke the planes of his chest. His whole

body shook, muscles clenching and unclenching. *Control it Smith*, his mind ordered. But he couldn't. He'd come too far.

The muscles in his abdomen tightened beneath Cyr's touch and he groaned as Cyr's thumb flicked one flat nipple. The weight of Cyr's body bore down on Smith as he sucked the nipple between his lips and bit gently, then rolled the sensitive nub on his tongue. Another groan tore from Smith's throat. He lifted his hips off the bed, not caring that he was showing his desire. Cyr's green eyes came to his, their depths glittering with dark need.

"Turn over, Smith."

He stilled at Cyr's words, every muscle in his body tensing. It was rare that he ever turned over for another man. He always liked being the dominant one. Having a man penetrate his ass had always made him feel too open.

But tonight, staring into Cyr's eyes, there was nothing he wanted more than to feel Cyr moving inside him.

He swallowed thickly and nodded.

"Good." Cyr pulled back and got to work on his shirt. His eyes flared a warning as Smith watched. "Turn over," he repeated.

A sweat broke out across his forehead as he twisted on the bed and rose on his hands and knees. Torturous minutes drew out, minutes filled with the sounds of Cyr undressing. Smith clutched the black covers to keep himself from turning back and helping Cyr out of his clothes. He had to be patient.

The bed dipped as Cyr climbed on behind him. He squeezed his eyes shut, a drop of sweat falling from his face to the sheets. And then he felt the velvety head of Cyr's cock brushing against him. He bowed his head, breath coming in short pants as Cyr drew his cock along the crack of his ass in teasing strokes. And then Cyr replaced his cock with his hand and coated Smith's hole with lube.

*I'm not going to last*, he thought to himself as Cyr's fingers circled his ass. *I can't hold on.*

A familiar quiver at the front of his head signaled Cyr's presence in his mind.

*Yes, you can,* were the soothing words as once again Cyr's cock pushed between his buttocks, deeper this time. *I'm right here.*

In one smooth move, Cyr thrust inside him until Smith's buttocks met the wiry curls at the base of Cyr's cock. Smith roared, the burning pleasure of his passage being stretched almost too delicious to bear. His stomach muscles rippled and his thighs shook, threatening to give way. He gripped the covers harder for support, gasping for breath as the pulsing cock withdrew slowly from his hole.

"You're tight," Cyr growled in his ear. "It feels good." And then he was there again, piercing Smith's ass, lunging forward until he was all the way in.

Smith's ass muscles contracted around the thick shaft as his cock leapt against his belly. The skin was stretched tight, the blood in his veins pounding so hard he was sure he was going to explode. His body thrummed with the need to come, desire coursing beneath his skin. But he wanted to wait, to hold out until he felt Cyr explode in his body.

Once again, Cyr's cock slid from him but this time it didn't plunge back in. Instead, the thick head rimmed Smith's hole, teasing the tiny nerve endings that surrounded the entrance to his ass. A guttural moan reverberated in Smith's chest, the sensations both agonizing and incredible.

And then Cyr's wet tongue was trailing along his spine, stopping midway and swiping at the sweat-soaked skin. The stiff point drew light circles across his back, right up to the nape of his neck. Both soothing and erotic, stoking the fire in his belly.

"Please," he whispered into the sheets, eyes shut tight as sweat dripped from his forehead. "Please."

"Please what?" Cyr's hot breath fanned Smith's right shoulder and sent a ripple of pleasure down his spine. "What do you want me to do?"

Smith opened his eyes and stared down at the sheets which were bunched in his fists. His mouth was dry. He wasn't sure he'd be able to get the words out.

"What do you want me to do?" Cyr repeated, his voice harsh and demanding. His mouth descended on Smith's shoulder and sucked on the damp flesh.

Smith moaned and pushed his ass back against Cyr's cock. It was rock hard and moisture coated the tip. Damn it, he needed it inside him.

"No." Cyr's teeth nipped the skin he'd been previously sucking. "Tell me."

Smith cleared his throat and fought for breath. "I need you," he gasped on a shuddering breath, "I need you. I need you to fuck me."

The warmth of Cyr's breath left his shoulder. "Good," Cyr muttered as the pressure of his cock on Smith's ass increased, poised at the very ready entrance. "That wasn't so hard now, was it?"

Before Smith took a breath, Cyr's cock slammed inside him again. This time there was no pause to let him catch himself. Cyr set a sharp rhythm, uncompromising and void of mercy. That heavy cock pounded Smith's ass, Cyr's balls slapping the lower part of Smith's buttocks.

Sweat poured from Smith's skin and blood roared in his ears. Cyr leaned over him, his nipples scraping Smith's back. He sucked on that same patch of flesh just below Smith's shoulder. Stars flashed behind Smith's eyes, the agonizing pleasure drawing tears down his cheeks. Their sweat-slick bodies thrashed together, Smith shoving his ass back to meet Cyr's thrusts. Thick groans reached his ears and he didn't know if they were Cyr's or his own. They seemed to move as one, completely in tune with one another. Smith couldn't distinguish where he ended and Cyr began.

Their fucking was nearing the crescendo. Smith's balls tightened and his jaw clenched. And when Cyr reached under his body and pumped his cock in two quick strokes, Smith reared his head back and shouted at the ceiling as his climax ripped through him. As if from a distance, he heard Cyr echo his roar and then he felt a hot stream of liquid spill into his ass. Cyr jerked his hips twice more, then collapsed over him, his hot breath caressing Smith's shoulder.

"I love you," he gasped in Smith's ear. "I fucking love you."

Smith closed his eyes, all energy drained from his limbs as his mind threatened to lose consciousness. Before he drifted asleep, he mumbled, "I love you too."

## **Chapter Six**

Cyr waited until Smith's breathing deepened in sleep, then gently removed himself from the bed. He stared down at the delicious body before him, his hands itching to run over that glistening ass again. But he had work to do.

He dressed quickly, watching Smith for any sign of movement. The barriers had broken down tonight. Smith's earlier words echoed in his mind—I love you too. Cyr's heart soared, even as he reached into Smith's jacket for that pistol and then grabbed a pair of Spectra-shades from the pack. They could have a future. He was certain of that now. That was why he was determined to finish Drake tonight. Then there'd be no lies left between them.

Stuffing the laser pistol in his pocket, he strode out of the room and hit the button for the elevator. The lazy after-sex glow was leaving his body, replaced by a tide of tense anticipation. He'd get a hovercraft to take him back to Sixteenth. Hopefully he'd find that same wisp, or maybe another one which would hold the same information. It would lead him straight to Drake and his operations.

The muscles in Cyr's shoulders bunched at the thought of facing Drake one last time. Memories of being strapped into that examination chair, lights shining in his eyes, some kind of headset locked around his ears. Pain bursting behind his eyes in white-hot shards. Under the pressure of Drake's machines, he'd expected his head to explode. And if he hadn't escaped when he did, it would have happened. He'd seen the tragedy befall some of Drake's other experimentees.

The elevator doors pinged and he stalked through the lobby until cold air met his skin. He hailed a hovercraft and jumped in.

"Sixteenth, please," he said as the hotel disappeared behind them. "As fast as you can make this thing go."

\* \* \* \* \*

A buzzing behind his ear drew Smith from his sleep. Damn, I thought I turned that thing off. He rolled over on the bed and clicked his comm-tab below his ear.

"Yeah."

"Smith, this is Jenna. Do you read me?"

"Hey Jen." He sat up and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. Where the hell was Cyr?  
"What's going on?"

"Four-two-four just came to me with some really disturbing shit."

"Oh yeah?" *What's that droid up to now?*

"Yeah." She took a breath. "Cyr's not who you think he is."

"Huh?" Smith blinked and rose from the bed. "What do you mean?"

"I mean Drake Ivanof is no drug lord. He works for the Amalgamation in undercover ops, no hint of a criminal record."

Smith began to dress, his eyes falling on his open pack at the bottom of his bed. *Fuck.* "Are you telling me Cyr isn't Amalgamation? No way would Ulric slip like that."

"Oh, he's Amalgamation all right. But he works for the Department of Intergalactic Transport. And he's apparently on a two week vacation right now."

Smith's jaw tightened at the information. Shit, he'd known something was up. There hadn't been a trace of Drake Ivanof, drug dealer, anywhere in this city. He grabbed his pack and headed out the door. "I'm on my way to find him now."

"You mean he's not with you."

"No," he bit out the admission, climbing the metal stairs to the roof. When he got his hands on Cyr, he was going to throttle him. "He's gone." Something clicked in Smith's mind and he felt in his jacket. "Shit," he seethed. "The bastard took my laser pistol."

"You want me to let Ulric know?"



"No. I'll fix it first, then tell him what happened." Smith reached the roof and opened the hatch of his ship. He climbed in and settled in the pilot seat, barely waiting until the hatch had closed before he took off.

"Okay. Good luck."

"Thanks." He turned his Comm-tab to silent, as the ship rattled with electric energy. He was moving too fast but he had to reach Cyr before he did something stupid.

His gut told him that Cyr had returned to Sixteenth where they'd interrogated that wisp. It made sense now why the being hadn't been able to answer their questions. Cyr had been fucking with its mind.

Anger surged through Smith's veins, energizing his blood, giving him the focus he needed. He wouldn't think about how Cyr had lied to him and manipulated him. That would come later. First he was going to find the asshole and get his laser pistol back.

It only took seconds to reach Sixteenth. He engaged stealth mode and swooped low until he landed in the yard at the back of the Trench with a jolt. The stench of alcohol and cigarette smoke wafted up his nostrils as soon as he exited the ship, making him gag. He pulled himself together and strode through the garbage-filled yard in the direction of the alley at the side of the dingy bar.

Drunken shouts reached his ears as he approached the end of the alley which opened out right beside the bar's entrance. Before he came to the street, he heard Cyr's voice, low and desperate.

"I need a location."

Smith peered around the wall, his gaze immediately falling on Cyr. In his chest, his heart tightened painfully and a lump of something he didn't want to acknowledge settled in his stomach. There'd be time for focusing on the betrayal later. For now he needed to fix his screwup.

Cyr's eyes were hidden behind Spectra-shades as he concentrated on the patch of air and spoke in low tones with the wisp. Those broad shoulders were squared and the

hands which had stroked Smith's bare skin earlier that night were balled into fists at his sides. He looked like he could rip someone apart.

Then the lines on Cyr's forehead disappeared and Smith knew the snitch had provided the answer. Cyr took a step back, then turned to head down the street.

"Don't move." Smith stepped out of the shadows and watched Cyr swivel in the center of the street. They were alone except for the sound of a red-haired Eta vomiting a few meters away. Suddenly, on this long, empty street, Cyr's betrayal grew in importance and threatened to swamp Smith's soul. He gritted his teeth even as his throat constricted. How had he let himself get hurt like this again?

Cyr tore the shades from his face and green eyes met Smith's gaze. "I can explain."

Smith arched a brow, even as the sour taste of betrayal filled his mouth. "You don't need to. I already know."

"I highly doubt that." Cyr approached slowly, his footsteps echoing in the alley.

"Drake is Amalgamation. You work in Transport." Smith released a low laugh, humorless and forced. "I think it's pretty obvious what you're trying to do." He nodded at his laser pistol which was hooked in Cyr's trousers.

Cyr's glanced down, then returned his gaze to Smith. "Drake Ivanof isn't a drug dealer. He's worse. What I'm trying to do is save other people from a fate worse than death."

"Really?" Smith shook his head. He wasn't going to be taken in by this bullshit. "What are you going to save them from?"

Cyr took another step forward. So close, his breath fanned Smith's face. Resisting the urge to run away from this fresh bleeding pain, Smith remained still and battled through the storm of emotion. How could Cyr have done this to him? How could the only man he'd ever loved betray him like this again?

*No Smith, he told himself. Don't focus on Cyr. Focus on the fact that he's a fucking criminal.*

"I'm going to have to cuff you, you know? Ulric won't like being screwed around like this."

"I wasn't trying to screw anyone around, Smith." The words were laced with desperation and Cyr's eyes dimmed, misting over as if distracted by something Smith couldn't see. "All I wanted was to put an end to Drake. People's lives are being destroyed. My life was almost destroyed." He took a breath as if the words physically drained him of energy. "I want revenge."

He knew he shouldn't ask but the question slipped from his tongue before he had the chance to think. "Why do you want revenge, Cyr?"

Something flickered in Cyr's eyes and Smith found he couldn't look away. Time froze. Smith waited. It seemed Cyr couldn't find the words. His Adam's apple bobbed and he cleared his throat. Finally, eyes darkening to the deepest green, he spoke. "I want revenge because he took me from you." The words were quiet but determined. "I want revenge because he came for me that night and took me away to his lab without letting me say goodbye."

The breath locked in Smith's throat. Cyr's words wrapped around his throat and squeezed tight, their meaning sinking in and making him dizzy. "I don't believe you," he ground out eventually.

"Yes you do." Cyr dropped his forehead against Smith's, pinning him against the brick wall. "I loved you, you know that. I would never have left by choice."

The words soothed even as Smith's heart burned in his chest. "What happened?"

"He wanted to use my mind." Cyr gave a hoarse laugh. "He wanted to see the damage I could do if I tried."

The pain in Cyr's voice shattered Smith's soul even as rage ripped through his body like a tidal wave crashing on the shore. He'd destroy whoever had caused his love to feel this agony, he'd rip them apart with his bare hands. But for now, he needed to remove the intense pain he sensed in Cyr, or at least soothe the ache. He framed Cyr's face with his hands, looked deep into those haunted eyes and lowered his mouth until it

brushed over those firm lips. He pressed softly at first, tasting in gentle strokes, trying to communicate all that he couldn't say right now.

And then Cyr kissed back, their lips melding together as a sudden burst of urgency soared between them. Their tongues entwined, rasping together in the shared heat of their mouths. The smells and sounds surrounding them faded into the background until they disappeared altogether and it was only them.

Aware only of his lover, Smith slid his hands slid upward into the golden waves of Cyr's hair. He twined one strand around his finger, reveling in the silky texture, tugging it gently when Cyr's hands skated across his back and stroked along his jacket.

With each second that their tongues twisted together, Smith felt the pain evaporate from his heart. Full of love, he continued to taste Cyr's mouth, sending up a silent vow that he would do anything it took to put an end to whatever monster had caused Cyr's heartbreak.

"I missed you," Cyr murmured against his lips as he pulled Smith's hips closer. "I've wanted this for so long."

Smith nodded, moving his hips so his erection rubbed Cyr's. "I'm never going to let you go again."

Cyr's lips curved beneath his mouth and he began to grind his hips in time with Smith's. "Good."

They stayed like that for what seemed like forever. Smith savored every second. It felt so right, so perfect for them to move together like this. The delicious friction of their cocks stroking together built with each thrust of their hips. They kissed softly, breathing each other in. Cyr's hands clutched Smith's ass, his fingers pressing into the denim-clad buttocks.

Their breathing grew labored. Though they were fully clothed, Smith could feel Cyr's body heat searing through his shirt. He slipped a hand beneath the fabric and his palm connected with rippling stomach muscles.

Cyr's moan was his undoing. He grabbed Cyr closer, his hips losing their control.

Cyr accepted the pace and rammed his cock against Smith's in furious strokes. The friction intensified, their heat rising in the air, clouding Smith's senses. He couldn't hold back. With one snap of his hips, he came hard, pumping against Cyr until he was dry. Then dropping to his knees, he released Cyr's cock from its confines.

He sucked the throbbing length into his mouth, laving the scorching skin with his tongue until salty liquid erupted from the velvety tip. He drank it down, every last drop, as if it contained the very essence of his life force. Then he rose to his feet and held Cyr until the shaking left their bodies.

"What now?" he breathed in Cyr's ear when he could speak again.

Green eyes looked up at him, a solemn determination filling the pupils. "Now I need to find Drake."

Smith nodded. "Then so do I."

## Chapter Seven

When they lifted off the ground in Smith's *Dragon*, Cyr gave him the location the orbit wisp had provided. Smith entered it into his system and a red light pinpointed Drake's location.

"Just outside Eta," Smith said, steering the ship to the right. "Rural."

Cyr nodded, aware of the lump growing in his stomach, so heavy it felt like lead.

"It's going to be okay."

Cyr glanced at Smith and the love he saw in those dark eyes made his body sing even as tension built in his limbs. "I know. It's just going to be hard seeing it again."

"What did he do to you?"

A sigh slipped from Cyr's lips. He'd never talked about what had happened in Drake's labs. There'd never been anyone to tell it to. "He has a team of scientists. They take people like me and use them for experiments."

"What kind of experiments?"

"Experiments to see how far our powers can go." Cyr closed his eyes to block out the sudden rush of pain. Then Smith's warm hand covered his and he felt the pain drain away. He opened his eyes and cleared his throat. "They attached machines to our heads. The machines would attract the telepathic power in our minds, transforming it into one ball of concentrated energy. And with the scientist's will, the energy was used to do everything from smashing a glass to killing a living being."

"Fuck." Smith's hand tightened on his. "Are you sure the Amalgamation knows?"

"Yeah. It's a top-secret project. They use prisoners and convicts for the experiments." He paused, unable to go on at the memory of those people being slaughtered like animals. Many times he'd awoken in the dead of the night, hearing

those raw screams in his nightmares. He swallowed and continued. "They're experimenting with ways to rid the universe of problems. They could even be developing this as a weapon against the Cintealios." He shrugged as a pit of anger opened inside him. "I don't know. We're just the tools."

"Not anymore." Smith's eyes were determined when they met his. And Cyr was damn glad he had such a man at his side.

Cyr watched Smith press a couple of buttons. Static came over the radio.

"Four-two-four? Do you hear me?"

"Affirmative."

"Good. I need you to tell Jenna that everything's okay. I'm going in for Drake now. I'll explain when I get back."

"Does your ship need backup?"

"No."

"I will find Jenna now."

"Thanks, 424." Smith reached over and pressed the button to end the conversation.

"So how did you get out?"

"Luck and determination." He gave a wry grin, remembering the night he'd broken away from the lab. "Fighting Drake every step of the way wasn't working. I needed a plan. So I started faking an interest in the experiments, asking questions. As Drake answered, I pretended to be enthusiastic about it, willing to go along with the experiments. After a while, Drake began to trust me and soon I was granted freedoms that the others weren't. One night, Drake didn't chain me to my bed. I used my telepathy to get past the guard on duty. And then I ran." Cyr took a breath. He could almost feel the burst of adrenaline that had erupted in his veins that night as he'd raced across the fields, lungs burning and eyes watering with the exertion. He'd run until he'd found a cave. He'd curled up inside it and the pain in his head had taken over. "When I woke up the next morning, I couldn't remember anything. My head felt like it

was going to shatter. A young girl found me and told me I was on Sa-Ro Five. She took me back to her Farm Op. I was there weeks before I remembered what happened."

"Did you go back to the lab?"

Cyr shook his head. "It was gone. Everything packed up as if nobody had ever been there." He glanced at the satellite map which showed they were only a few seconds from arriving at Drake's lab. "He moves from place to place to keep his labs from being discovered. That's why it's taken so long for me to track him down."

Smith flicked another switch and a radioed-in voice announced the ship had enabled stealth mode. Cyr peered through the front portal, seeing only open, grassy fields. From the map, Drake's lab should have been visible by now.

"It's probably underground," Smith muttered, almost to himself, as he made a sharp right and swooped low until they hovered above the fields. He pointed to another device which showed bodies moving directly beneath them. "See?"

Cyr nodded and wondered which of those bodies belonged to Drake. He jolted forward as the ship slid into the grass and shuddered to a halt.

Smith reached behind them for his pack. "You keep that laser pistol," he said, retrieving a silver bracelet from his stash of weapons. "Use it. We're breaking into an Amalgamation op. We have no choice."

"Okay." Cyr pulled the pistol out of his belt. "What's that?" He nodded to the silver bracelet which Smith was clasping around his wrist.

"A whip." The hatch slid open and Smith grabbed his arm. "Are you ready?"

"I've been ready for seven years."

They stared at each other for a few seconds and Cyr was glad he didn't have to lie anymore. He leaned over and kissed Smith lightly on the mouth.

"Let's go."

Smith nodded and climbed out of the ship. Cyr quickly followed, pausing to look up at the stars. He relished the energy which zinged in his veins. Soon those stars



would shine on a universe that didn't contain a monster like Drake. He was ready for this.

He turned to find Smith studying an electronic device. "I'm looking for the entrance," he said. A beep sounded and a small smile appeared on his face. "Found it."

Cyr strode to where Smith stood. "How do we open it?"

"We dig." Smith dropped to his knees and began to pull at the grass and dirt. After a few seconds, he found the spot he was looking for. Cyr watched Smith pull back the layer of grass like a carpet, revealing a large metal plate. He leaned over and helped shift it to the side.

Cyr stared into the hole. A narrow set of steps led downward. They didn't go far. From where he stood, he could see the metal door at the bottom. He glanced at Smith and took a breath. "Come on."

Together, they descended the steps. All too quickly they stood before the door. His palms were sweating in eager anticipation.

"I'll do this for you if you want."

Cyr turned at Smith's words and realized the other man thought he was scared. "I want to do this Smith. I need to be the one to destroy him."

If the vengeance in his tone shocked Smith, he didn't show it. Instead, he gestured to the laser pistol in Cyr's hand. "Use that to open the door."

Cyr aimed at the lock and shot. The lock crumbled to the floor and the door swung open. Then all hell broke loose.

About seven scientists charged toward them. He didn't think, just lifted his arm and shot one. He was aware of Smith passing and out of the corner of his eye, he saw a whip extend from the silver bracelet. It slit the throats of two scientists and was recoiling for another.

Cyr turned away and let Smith finish off the scientists. He was only interested in one.

His eyes scanned the white, machinery-filled room until they finally fell on Drake.

*Ah, there you are.* The man—no, monster—was standing next to one of his captives, silver eyes wild as he searched for a weapon. He caught Cyr's eye and recognition gleamed in his gaze. Cyr swallowed the urge to vomit and stepped forward, weaving his way through the metal trays of surgical instruments, trying not to focus on the empty gazes of Drake's projects.

When only an examination table stood between them, Drake spoke. "One-eleven," he said as his thin, bluish lips twisted in an ugly smile. "I knew you'd come back."

Cyr shook his head, hand clutching the pistol. Hearing that rasping voice calling him by his project number felt like ice-cold hands running up his spine. He fought a shiver as he took in the sight of the crazy scientist. White-haired, wrinkled before his time, wide eyes that had once held some amount of sanity...Drake probably hadn't seen daylight in years.

"I've come back to put an end to this."

Drake shook his head calmly. "You don't want to do that, 1-11. You've come back because you want to be a part of this creation."

Cyr gave a short laugh. "No. I really, really don't. I ran away, remember?"

Drake's eyes misted over as he stepped toward one sleeping experiment, a pale, dark-haired man who could have been anywhere between the ages of twenty and fifty. In this condition it was hard to tell. "You didn't know what you're doing, 1-11." He reached for one machine and placed a long, shaking finger on a button.

With the slicing sound of Smith's whip in the background, Cyr's grip tightened on the pistol. He recognized that button. It was the button that would make the dark-haired captive's head explode.

Without a second thought, he aimed the pistol and fired. Drake's eyes grew impossibly wider and his mouth opened in a silent O. Cyr watched his tormentor fall to the ground, dead and gone.

His arm shook as he dropped it to his side. And then he felt Smith behind him, one warm arm hand pressing against the small of his back.

"It's over," he muttered, eyes still on Drake's dead body.

"Yeah." Smith swallowed in his ear. "What do we do with these guys?"

Cyr tore his gaze away from Drake and glanced around at the couple of dozen bodies that were laid out on examination tables. "We turn off the machines. They'll wake up soon after that and make their way out."

Smith nodded and began to flip the switches on the various machines. Cyr followed suit and in a few seconds, the buzzing of the equipment ended.

"We better get out of here before they wake up," Smith said, leading Cyr toward the empty doorframe. Cyr glanced at the dead scientists on the ground, not even flinching at the sight of their blood.

He looked back at the room once more, a claustrophobic sensation tightening around his throat as he absorbed the sight of the prison that had once been his. But it was over. Relief swam through his body and his throat relaxed. It really was over. No more machines. No more scientists. No more Drake.

He turned away from the scene and followed Smith up the steps. At the top, he breathed in the night air until it filled his system. Then he stepped into Smith's strong embrace and allowed himself to be held. How good it felt to know that they could be together now without any lies between them.

"So what now?" he asked, lifting his head from Smith's neck.

A slow smile curved Smith's full lips as he winked. "Back to the hotel. I think there's a waterbed waiting for us."

Cyr grinned and slipped a hand over Smith's jean-clad ass. "Sounds damn good to me."

\* \* \* \* \*

*One Week Later*

*The Web*

Smith stood in the center of his dorm, hands at his hips, eyes on the weapons which were laid out on his bed. In less than an hour, he was heading for Aboo Nine on another mission and he still needed to stock his ship.

"This one." Jenna chose the Icsantheze dagger and held it out to him. He grasped the emerald leather handle. It was soft against his palm. This would work as a replacement for his laser pistol. Cyr had really taken a shine to that thing.

"So," Jenna leaned back against his headboard. "What did Ulric say?"

"Nothing." Smith's mind revisited the moment he'd stepped into Ulric's office with Cyr by his side. He'd explained the Drake situation quickly, reassuring his boss that the happenings wouldn't be traced back to either him or Bounty Hunters Inc. Ulric had raised his large hand in a gesture indicating that he didn't need to know any more, but Smith had a feeling the man had known all along what Cyr had been up to. Not a lot got past Ulric Vonner, though Smith didn't know why Ulric would have played along.

Smith had drawn a relieved breath, then continued with a rehearsed speech about why Cyr, with his telepathic skills, would be a perfect addition to Bounty Hunters Inc.

"Will you train him?" had been Ulric's only question. Smith had agreed immediately and the deal was done.

"Is Cyr going with you to Aboo Nine?" Jenna asked, toying with a tranq-ring.

"Yep." A grin tugged at Smith's lips. "He's got some intensive training to get through before I'm done with him."

Jenna flashed him a wicked smile. "I'll bet it'll be intensive." She groaned and threw herself back on the bed, long black hair fanning out around her head. "It's not fair. I want a Cyr!"

"You'll get one." He reached down and squeezed her knee as P.I.424 entered the room. "Clothing, food and batteries are on board the *Dragon*."

"Thanks, 424." He stuffed the dagger into his pack, glancing up as Cyr strode out of the bathroom with just a towel riding his lean hips. Smith ran his tongue over his bottom lip, his cock hardening in his jeans. Maybe they'd have time for a quickie before they took off.

Jenna seemed to have read his mind. She rose from the bed and gave him a sly wink. "Me and 424 will get out of your way." She sauntered to the door, hand tugging 424's arm. "You boys behave yourself."

The door closed behind her and Cyr slanted an ironic look in Smith's direction as he whipped off the towel. "I don't think there's much chance of that happening, is there?"

Smith swallowed hard, gaze drifting from Cyr's throbbing erection to his sparkling green eyes.

"There sure as hell better not be," he muttered, then pulled that hard body flush against his.

Aboo Nine could wait. His cock had a much more tempting assignment in store.

## **About the Author**

Ava Rose Johnson first delved into the pool of erotic romance during the very lazy summer of 2003 and hasn't looked back since. By day she works in an office, and spends most of her time day-dreaming about her characters and possible plot twists. Her hobbies include photography, yoga and reading (of course!).

The author welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and e-mail address on her author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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