

Dreamspinner Press Presents

NAP-SIZE DREAMS



© dreamspinnerpress

“NO, don’t blow, damn you. I told you to suck.”

A dull thud followed the breathy exclamation, heavy panting clearly audible in the air. The sound slipped through the slight opening of the not-quite-closed-silver electronic door; Kyle completely unaware that he now had an audience.

“When...” *pant* “will you...” *pant pant* “learn to...” *grunt* “do what I tell you to?” Sweat poured down Kyle’s brow, frustration causing him to clench his fist as he resisted the urge to use brute force to get what he wanted. This was not how he pictured this encounter playing out and he’d be damned if he let his mechanic get the better of him. “This is...” *groan* “not...” *pant pant* “how we do things round here!” Kyle growled, silently cursing said mechanic. “Mother fu—” A string of curses escaped his lips, the electronic slide of the door registering only in the back of his mind.

“Kyle.” Sadie’s soft voice broke into his string of curses, interrupting the rest of the rather unsavory sentence. Sadie was Kyle’s navigator and second in command. “This...” Kyle turned, aware of the reprimand in her tone, “is Makiel. The emissary we are required to transport to Earth.”

Releasing a final growl of frustration, Kyle dropped the spanner he was holding. Reaching for a greasy cloth, Kyle moved to stand, the movement abrupt and careless. His head connected with the rounded steel of the cylinder containing the cooling fan he was currently working on.

Sharp pain flared behind his eyes, and another string of curses danced upon the tip of his tongue. He opened his mouth to let the string loose only to have the curses die at the look he received from Sadie.

Closing his mouth with a click, Kyle approached Sadie and their new cargo with care. Okay, so maybe referring to the young man standing before him as cargo was a little harsh, but Kyle didn't care. He was doing this under duress and would refer to his unwanted guest in any way he pleased. At least in his own mind. Kyle transported cargo, not passengers, and just because he happened to have a free spot on his ship due to a flighty mechanic abandoning him without so much as a by your leave did not mean that this was some kind of diplomatic vessel designed to pamper those who thought they were his betters.

Kyle had no interest in politics. He wasn't ignorant. He was aware of the negotiations currently taking place between the Siminrhod and Earth but didn't want to be involved. If experience had taught him anything, it was that politics often lead to disaster. It was a complication he didn't really need in his life. Unfortunately, the order to take on the Siminrhod diplomat came directly from the military. Apparently, it was important that no one know this particular diplomat was aboard his ship. Kyle didn't really care for the hows or whys. The long and short of it was, if this diplomat wished to travel with them, he would have to make do with who and what they were. There would be no pampering on his ship. Period.

Kyle ran his gaze over the young man's slim form, noting the slight figure, the silvery skin that seemed to shine

in the artificial light, the violet eyes, and the long emerald hair. It was eerie how much he resembled a human if one ignored the strange coloring and the pointed ears. Even more disconcerting was the fact that his body instantly reacted to the slim man's presence.

Fighting to ignore his reaction, Kyle roughly wiped his hands clean, the grease on the cloth not really helping clean the grease off of his hands. Dropping the greasy rag, he reached out and took Makiel's offered hand. The moment their skin touched, a surge of electricity coursed through him, the sensation a mixture of both pleasure and pain. Time seemed to still for but a moment, the shock in Makiel's eyes imprinting itself upon Kyle's memory, the soft hiss that escaped the young man's lips echoing in his mind as the young man collapsed before him.

Kyle lunged forward, guilt coursing through him. Sadie sent him a disgusted glance, the heated accusation in her stare gutting Kyle. His own anger flared once more, drowning the niggling sense in the back of his mind that he'd somehow managed to hurt Makiel without meaning to.

"You all right?" Sadie asked Makiel, the subtle accusation against Kyle slipping pointedly into her tone.

Kyle raised his arms defensively. "I didn't do anything," he protested bitterly. "All I did was shake his hand, and the next thing I know, he's collapsing. Don't blame me. He's the one that offered me his hand in the first place." Kyle crossed his arms across his chest, returning Sadie's glare. "I didn't hurt him," he added, growling at the continued silent accusation in her eyes, betrayal coursing through him at the

thought that Sadie did not trust him.

He tore his gaze away from Sadie when Makiel spoke, panting softly. “I’m all right.” Makiel stood, gently pushing Sadie’s hands off of him. “He didn’t hurt me. I... uh... I’m just tired.”

Kyle swallowed the growl in his throat, fighting the emotions clamoring for his attention. Makiel seemed to be rejecting him, avoiding his gaze in favor of smiling wanly at Sadie. Kyle wanted nothing more than to tear Makiel’s attention away from Sadie, a mixture of protective instincts and jealousy threatening his very sanity.

Before he could act, though, Makiel was leaving, Sadie in tow. He clenched his fists, his nails digging into the palms of his hands, Sadie’s parting reprimand echoing in his ears. “If you want it to suck, you might want to turn the fan around, Captain.”

“I’M telling you, he’s avoiding me,” Kyle growled, pacing back and forth, empty coffee cup in hand. Sadie had cornered him in his office to discuss Makiel. He’d been expecting this conversation for a while now and was kind of relieved he could finally vent. Sadie was his closest friend, and he badly needed a sounding board. Makiel’s very presence had him off balance, and he didn’t know what to do about it. “You can’t keep telling me I’m imagining things, Sadie. Every time I walk into a room, he turns around and leaves. There can only be so many coincidences. I’ve even apologized for

shaking his hand too hard when he first came aboard, but all he does is smile at me and tell me that I didn't hurt him before promptly leaving the room."

"Well, you do have a certain way about you, Captain." Sadie responded, taking this far too calmly in Kyle's opinion. She didn't seem to be taking this seriously at all. In fact, she wasn't even looking at him, sipping coffee while absently scribbling on a napkin.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Kyle demanded, ignoring the fact that Sadie seemed to be ignoring him. The casual demeanor was just a cover. Sadie was far too nosy not to be hanging onto his every word.

"You have a tendency not to be all that approachable, Captain," Sadie explained, looking up to face him directly. Kyle moved to protest, only to pause when she raised a hand to stall him. "Let me finish, Captain. All I'm trying to say is that glaring and growling at the person you are trying to apologize to doesn't make for a sincere apology, nor does it create the opportunity for civilized conversation when you look ready to bite his head off. I'm not surprised he's avoiding you. If I didn't know you better, I would be avoiding you, too, just like Devon did."

"Are you trying to tell me our mechanic left because—" Kyle spluttered.

Sadie interrupted him before he could finish, leaning over to pour herself another cup of coffee. "That's exactly what I'm trying to tell you, Kyle. You tend to bark, not speak, and when it's coming from your superior, it can be more than a little intimidating."

Kyle gaped at her, speechless. He was just about to attempt another protest when he was once again interrupted, this time not by Sadie but by a knock on his door. Taking a moment to walk back over to his desk, he placed down his coffee cup and seated himself, calmly rearranging a few pages and picking up a pen before calling out, “Enter.”

“You called for me?” Kyle gaped in shock when Makiel peered into the office, emerald bangs falling into his face. Kyle hadn’t called for him. He was just about to say so when a sudden suspicion drew his gaze back to Sadie, noting the mischievous sparkle in her eyes.

“Well, he’s here now.” Sadie whispered. Picking up her coffee, she playfully dropped the napkin she had been doodling on before leaving. Glancing down he realized that written on it was a message: *You’re grumpy enough without. You don’t need the additional caffeine. Good luck.* That was when he realized the coffee pot was now empty, the last of the liquid currently in the cup she’d just carried off.

Sighing he picked the napkin up, folded it, and tossed it away before standing. Taking a deep breath, he walked toward Makiel, lost in the enthralling sight before him. Everything about Makiel seemed to fascinate him, attract him toward the other like a moth to flame, and he didn’t understand why. He’d been unable to get Makiel out of his mind from the moment he’d lain eyes upon their unwanted guest, and though unable to explain the urge, he was dying to interact with Makiel.

Pausing before Makiel, Kyle dropped a hand onto his

shoulder, ignoring the tingle of electricity that accompanied the touch. “Makiel, I need to talk to you.” He watched as Makiel tensed at his touch, this time refusing to step down. He was tired of being avoided, of chasing Makiel and trying to make sense of all the confusing feelings he seemed to have awakened within him.

He tightened his grip on Makiel’s shoulder when he tensed and tried to pull away, keeping Makiel in place. “Please don’t run away, Makiel. This—” Kyle sheepishly ran his free hand through short red hair. “This is driving me crazy. I... uh....” Kyle was beginning to regret this confrontation, more than a little uncomfortable now that he seemed to have Makiel’s undivided attention. He wasn’t sure if he really wanted to do this but didn’t feel he could back out after his rather confrontational approach. “Don’t know what’s going on between us, but I intend to find out.” He scowled at Makiel, trying to look intimidating but failing miserably.

Makiel didn’t even flinch. In fact, instead, he smiled softly, amusement sparkling in his violet eyes before casually nodding towards the exit, the silent message clear.

Not to be outdone and not about to give control of the situation over to Makiel, Kyle moved his grip over towards Makiel’s elbow turning to guide him out. His thoughts raced, realizing he didn’t know how he wanted to go about this, what he wanted to say or even where the best place for this confrontation would be. One thing was certain, he wanted privacy and didn’t think his office was the right place for a personal discussion.

Kyle paused when he saw an all too familiar silver door, changing course abruptly to guide them into it. He figured it was only fitting that their current confrontation play out here in the engine room where it all began. After closing the door, Kyle turned Makiel to face him, finally releasing him. He silently watched Makiel step back, creating some distance between them. When Makiel looked comfortable, once more, Kyle moved to speak, casually placing himself between the door and Makiel. He didn't want to invade Makiel's personal space, but he wanted to be certain he didn't run away again.

"I... uh...." Kyle began awkwardly, once again running a nervous hand through his hair. "Sadie says I should bark less when I talk. She... uh... says it's not conducive to civilized conversation," he finally admitted sheepishly, completely at a loss for words now that he had Makiel's undivided attention.

Makiel chuckled lightly, seeming to find him amusing. "No, it isn't exactly conducive to... um... civilized conversation," Makiel agreed, watching Kyle carefully.

Kyle shifted beneath the scrutiny he could practically feel, clearing his throat awkwardly. "I... want to know what happened. When we met. I know you say I didn't hurt you, and even though your presence here is not exactly... ideal... I want you to know that I didn't intend to hurt you."

The amusement upon Makiel's face fled. "You didn't hurt me." Makiel's tone was soft, almost resigned. He paused after the statement, the moment stretching between them, winding Kyle up tight as a bowstring ready to snap.

The moment Makiel parted his lips once more, however,

Kyle cut in to stall the usual excuse he could already see building on them. “Don’t give me that bullshit about being unwell,” Kyle growled. “It’s bullshit, and we both know it. You collapsed only after touching me, and I...” He paused for a moment, looking confused. “I want to know why. Ever since we first met, I haven’t been able to get you out of my mind. It’s almost as if you’ve slipped into my mind and taken it over, yet you’ve been avoiding me ever since. I know it’s not a human thing. You seem to have no problem touching Sadie, and as far as I can tell your race isn’t prone to grease allergies. Yes, I did my research. I have seen you interact with the rest of my crew, and you seem fine, yet, you tensed up today when I touched you, which leads me to the conclusion that it has to be me personally you have a problem with.”

Makiel blinked in surprise. Licking his lips he dropped his gaze, obviously uncomfortable once more. “I think I slipped into your mind.” Makiel’s admission hit Kyle with the force of a sledgehammer, crashing into his chest, the impact further emphasized by the return of Makiel’s gaze to his own. “You see, the reason I’m here is because I’m an empath.”

Kyle moved to protest. The idea of having someone aboard his ship who could read all of his emotions mortified him. The protest died, however, when Makiel raised a hand, lip twitching in amusement, almost as if he’d been waiting for Kyle to do just that.

“No, not in the traditional sense. I’m not usually able to read the emotions of living beings. I’m more attuned to places of note. You see, any event that happens leaves a mark on the place where it happened. These marks are

influenced by the intensity of the emotions and intents of those that instigated those events. It is usually these emotions and intents I'm attuned to. Strong emotions from the past, as it were."

Kyle didn't like Makiel's careful wording and didn't like the implication of past tense within the explanation, a dark suspicion niggling him from the back of his own mind. "By stating that you're not usually attuned to living people's emotions, are you trying to tell me that you can read mine?" Kyle asked the moment Makiel paused, his tone carefully controlled. He fought to control his facial features, taking a defensive step back, away from Makiel, his own emotions in turmoil. "Why?" he added, not waiting for Makiel to confirm or deny his assumption. He already knew the answer. That had to be what Makiel was implying, else they wouldn't even be here right now.

"Because you're my balance."

Kyle backed away a little more with Makiel's reply, wanting to create as much space between them as possible. "Your balance?" he inquired, uncertainty creeping into his tone, a note of panic clearly slipping in. This was unfamiliar territory, territory he had no experience dealing with, and the strain of his confusion was beginning to affect him.

"Yes, my balance," Makiel repeated, taking a deep breath before launching into an explanation. "From the moment we are born 'til the moment we die or find our balance, whichever comes first, we are able to only use a fraction of our abilities. In order to tap into the part of our ability that we cannot use, we need to find our balance. Our

balance basically holds the mental key to the rest of our abilities. This key is transferred through touch. At the same time the source of our power is transferred to our balance. Consequently our balance becomes a sort of conduit for our power, thus lessening the burden upon us.”

“Let me see if I understand this correctly. By touching you, I unlocked your dormant power, and some of that power shifted to me so that you’re able to control it better, and this is why you can read my mind?” Kyle asked in clear disbelief. “I don’t feel any different. Not really,” he pointed out.

“Yes and no,” Makiel replied, smiling. Kyle moved to voice another question only to have Makiel interrupt him, by launching into another explanation. Goosebumps rose upon Kyle’s skin when it turned out that Makiel was answering the very question he was about to ask. “Because the touch was minimal, you only unlocked a small fraction of the dormant power within me, so it’s unlikely you would really feel it. Furthermore, I can’t read your mind, only your emotions, and only when you touch me directly. That’s a side effect of the fact that you are my balance. To truly share my power, we need to ultimately be able to share its source, sharing mind, soul and....”

Makiel’s words trailed away, but it was already too late. Kyle knew what Makiel meant to say even though he left it unsaid. A mixture of horror and excitement coursed through him, his body tensing as he finished Makiel’s sentence for him. “And body.”

Makiel dropped his gaze, nodding in assent. “It is not a requirement, and many Siminrhod balance pairs choose to

only share part of the burden, the part they are most comfortable with. You have every right to refuse the position, and no harm will come to either you or me.” The words were soft, resigned, and something in the tone bothered Kyle, only he couldn’t pinpoint what exactly.

“Position?” He ran a hand through his hair once more, tugging on the strands in frustration, confusion and uncertainty thick within him. Something told him this wasn’t as simple as Makiel was trying to make it out to be. There had to be a catch. “You make it sound so formal.”

“That would be because, in a way, it is formal. Siminrhod don’t find their balances all that often, and when one of us does it’s considered to be an honored position. Some see it as more honored than marriage.”

Each admission Makiel made seemed to create more chaos in Kyle’s world, throwing everything he had planned for himself, everything he believed in, into chaos. This one, however, took the cake.

“You still get married even though you...?” Kyle spluttered incredulously, disbelief waging war with fear and jealousy within him. “No offense, but I don’t want to be the spouse of a Siminrhod that’s decided to fully, what do you call it, bond with their balance?” Outrage was coursing through him at the thought of Makiel wed to another even though they... even though they... hell, he didn’t understand anything, least of all the turmoil of his own feelings since meeting Makiel.

“It’s a choice some make. Most prefer to marry their balance.” The soothing tone in Makiel’s voice only seemed to

irritate Kyle further, the words throwing him into even more confusion.

“You want me to marry you?” Kyle asked in disbelief, hating the relief that coursed through him. He didn’t want this, wasn’t ready for any kind of commitment, and certainly not to some emerald-haired alien diplomat he’d just met.

“I’ve already told you, it’s not a requirement. We can forget this ever happened. But if you choose not to forget, I, however, would prefer a monogamous commitment. I’m not one for, how shall I put this... sharing my affections.” Makiel’s calm response did nothing to ease Kyle’s turmoil, his mind longing to dance away from the meaning behind them like an agitated pony shying away from danger.

He gaped at Makiel. Kyle couldn’t believe Makiel was actually seriously considering this. Was he the only one who saw the insanity in this entire situation? You couldn’t commit your life to someone you just met, someone you barely knew, could you? “I... uh... I need to think about this.” Kyle tugged at his own hair shaking his head in disbelief. This couldn’t be happening. Not to him. He didn’t just indirectly get a marriage proposal from some alien diplomat. Turning, he headed to the exit and left.

“STONEHENGE?” Kyle stared at the familiar stones before him in surprise. “Why Stonehenge?”

“I don’t know. The Siminrhod requested that we allow them to take a look at Stonehenge. It seems important to

them, but I can't seem to make sense of it."

Kyle watched Makiel disembark, only half listening to Sadie's explanation. He barely even managed to register her sudden change of topic, his mind still trying to make sense of recent events.

"What happened between the two of you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," he hedged, watching Makiel walk around the henge, trailing a hand over the stones. Makiel's emerald hair trailed behind him, his skin reflecting the pale light that now lit one of Earth's oldest monuments.

"I thought you were trying to get Makiel to stop avoiding you, and now it seems to me like you're avoiding him," Sadie pointed out. "That's a little hypocritical, don't you think?"

Kyle frowned at her words, flicking a switch to zoom in on the surrounding area, keeping an eye out for danger. It was a habit he'd picked up a long time ago. He used the movement to delay having to reply, not knowing how to face Sadie's questions. Darkness shifted on the right side of the screen, drawing his attention. "See that?" he asked, pointing at the area, Sadie's inquiry momentarily forgotten.

He scanned the area he was talking about when Sadie leaned in to take a closer look. Something about the area bothered him, and he hoped Sadie could perhaps explain why.

"The bio-scans didn't show anything," Sadie pointed out softly, much to Kyle's disappointment.

Kyle shook his head, frowning in concern. His gut instinct was screaming at him, telling him to act, and his mind fought to find something to act upon, some sign of danger despite the fact that what Sadie said implied there wasn't any. Unable to ignore his instincts any longer, Kyle exited the bridge at a run, heading for the airlock. Running outside, he pulled out his phase pistol, every instinct alert for danger.

The moment he exited his ship, he put on an extra burst of speed, allowing his instincts to take over completely. He threw himself at Makiel. A shot rang out, and they hit the ground. Rolling, Kyle lay on top of Makiel, already shooting before the motion was even complete. Seven armed Siminrhod ran in, pale, artificial light reflecting off their silver skin.

Kyle continued his rolling motion, hooking an arm around Makiel as he did so, moving to place the ancient stones between them and their attackers. Sitting up he leaned against the stone, his ragged breath mixing with Makiel's. "I suggest you put down your weapons," Kyle called out, using his voice as a distraction. "We don't want trouble." He stilled his breath, listening past Makiel's, to pick up the soft rustle of grass as the Siminrhod attackers moved over it, ignoring his words. Reaching forward he shifted Makiel up, pulling out his spare gun and holding it out to Makiel.

Makiel looked away from him before glancing up once more, violet eyes wide. Kyle's heart dropped, fear thick in his throat when Makiel shook his head in silent response to his request. Makiel would not take the gun. Seeing the desperate denial in Makiel's gaze, Kyle reluctantly accepted the refusal,

and he peered around the stone. Remaining still, he watched for any motion among the shadows. Left hand holding the phase pistol, his right hand worked at communicating with his navigator via Morse code, using an old outdated device hooked to his belt. Soft whispers drifted through the air, the sound of wind through trees, when in actual fact it was the response he was receiving.

Noticing a shift in the shadows, he grinned, sending the go-ahead signal. Three phase pistols discharged, and three shadows twisted. Slipping out from beneath Makiel, Kyle ran out, shooting wildly, gun set on stun in order to preserve the monument. His fire was returned, and soon the sky was lit in various shades of yellow and blue.

A mere ten minutes later it was over, the seven attackers unconscious upon the ground, two of his crew injured, and the monument still intact. All in all, a good day, even if Kyle did say so himself. The only thing tarnishing his victory was the fact that Makiel wasn't coming out to share it with him.

Giving in to the worry deep in his gut, he headed back toward where he'd left Makiel, paling when he discovered Makiel's prone, blood-soaked body unconscious on the ground.

"WILL you stop pacing? You're making me dizzy, Captain." Sadie reprimanded him softly, cradling her bandaged hand. A stray shot had scorched her during their confrontation

with the Siminrhod attackers, but that was the least of Kyle's worries at the moment. No, right now his mind was frantically occupied with another casualty, currently in the operating room where doctors fought to repair the damage to a lung.

"It's my fault," Kyle growled, anxiety threatening to overwhelm him. "I should've noticed the shadows earlier, should've gotten to him earlier. Hell, I should've noticed his blood soaking my clothes." The last was said with utter frustration and self depreciation. "How could I have missed the fact that he'd been hit? I should've stayed with him, stemmed the blood flow. The least I could've done is prevented the damned blood loss." Kyle panted, resisting the urge to hurl random objects across the room.

Several layers of guilt coursed through him, eating away at his conscience, whispering soft words to him, words of regret, telling him he should've taken the chance on whole balance thing and gotten to know Makiel better. No. He'd let that chance slip him by. Instead he'd ignored him, ignored the feelings deep within him, the feelings that drew him to Makiel. Ignored the chance to find out what the hell it was about Makiel that drew him so and now left him in pieces even though he barely knew him. This wasn't right. This wasn't how things were supposed to work.

Kyle released a string of curses, ignoring the look he received from Sadie. Language be damned, extreme situations called for desperate measures, and this was as desperate as they came. He needed release, and if he couldn't throw things, the least he could do was cuss at them.

“Kyle... Kyle... Kyle?” Sadie’s voice echoed in the back of his mind. “Stop it, Kyle.” she snapped, her anger finally gaining his attention. “You couldn’t have predicted this attack.”

“We were hired to protect him, Sadie.” He growled, eyes glowing in frustration.

“No, Kyle. We were hired or more specifically ordered to bring him to Earth. We’ve done that. Staying behind to make sure he’s safe was a choice we made. Seriously, Kyle, this is unlike you. You didn’t want to cart him around to begin with. Why are you letting this get to you like this?” Sadie crossed her arms, her glare a clear challenge.

“He’s a living—”

“Kyle.” Sadie interrupted him. “Don’t give me that bullshit. This...” she pointed at him, “is more than concern over the life of another living creature. What’s really going on, Kyle?”

Kyle sighed in defeat, forcing himself to sit down beside her. “I don’t know what’s going on,” he admitted, running a hand through his hair. “I... I can’t get him out of my mind, haven’t been able to from the moment he touched me. He’s always there, his eyes watching me, silently asking me for something I can’t give.”

“Something you can’t give?” Sadie frowned at him.

“I spoke to him, Sadie. You know, when I was angry that he was avoiding me.” He watched her carefully, measuring the impact of his words. “He called me his balance. He says a balance is—” He willingly let his words die out when Sadie

raised her hand to interrupt him. He barely understood what Makiel told him and was relieved he wouldn't be forced to try and explain it to Sadie.

"I know what a balance is," Sadie stated softly, turmoil clear in her gaze. "So when are you leaving us?"

"Leaving?" Kyle's heart began to race. "Why would I want to leave?"

"He's going to remain with us?" Sadie asked, her tone puzzled. "No offense, Kyle, but he doesn't really strike me as the space-faring type. You really think he'd make a good courier?"

Kyle shook his head. "No, he won't be coming with us."

Sadie raised an eyebrow at him. "I'm not sure I understand. If you're not going with him, and he's not staying with us, how exactly are you going to work this whole balance thing?"

"He said we can forget it ever happened. I mean, ignoring it won't harm either of us, and we can both go on with our lives."

"Is that what he's told you?" Sadie exclaimed in disbelief, the tone in her voice confirming Kyle's earlier niggling suspicion that Makiel hadn't been entirely honest with him. That, Kyle supposed, was the root of all his tension. "Don't tell me you believe that. He's found you. He's touched you. It's already too late to forget about it and pretend it never happened. Touching you should've already woken his dormant power. It will keep building up within him, and if he avoids regular contact with you, it will

overpower him, break him.”

Kyle stared at Sadie, surprised by the vehemence in her tone. “Sadie? If I may ask, how exactly do you know all of this?” he asked carefully; uncertain whether he really wanted to know.

Sadie sighed, pulling a face. “My brother, Kristin, was working off-planet on one of the space ports when he stumbled upon a visiting Siminrhod dignitary’s son. Turns out he’s Yas’s balance. I was on the receiving end of some really interesting communications regarding Yas, so I did my research. Siminrhod empaths don’t survive very long if they lose their balance. Furthermore, finding their balance is an extremely rare occurrence. I don’t fully understand the intricacies of it, but the position holds much honor.”

Kyle gaped at her. “Honor? Yas? Are all Siminrhod, balance pairings, male?”

Sadie shook her head. “No. There are also female-female and male-female pairings. The pairings seem to be fairly evenly shared among all the possibilities. The Siminrhod have no prejudice against same-sex pairings.”

“But I’m not ready for marriage.” Kyle protested.

“You don’t have to marry or even have sex with him,” Sadie explained. “I’m sure he told you that?” Kyle dropped his gaze, suddenly uncomfortable. Her words bothered him, and he wasn’t sure if he was ready to admit to what he was really feeling. “You like him, don’t you?” Sadie’s words cut into him, the truth in them raw. “You actually like him. You want to do more than just touch him, don’t you?” He

flushed, unable to help himself. “You’re sexually attracted to him, aren’t you? You want to kiss him, you want to hold him, you want to fu—”

“Sadie, that’s enough.” Kyle interrupted her light teasing gruffly, pointedly avoiding her gaze. “I... uh... I don’t know what I want. He’s a diplomat. I’m a space-faring courier. He’ll never survive flying with me. It’ll never work.”

“You want him,” Sadie repeated stubbornly. “You want him enough to be a real terror on board of late. Maybe you should listen to your heart instead of your head for a change. Talk to him. Find out what he wants. Think long and hard about what you want. You were forced into this line of work, and I still remember a boy that wanted to be a healer. You didn’t have enough money for the studies then, but you do now.”

“A healer?” Kyle gave a derisive laugh. “I no longer have the temperament to be a healer,” he pointed out.

“You’ll learn,” Sadie said softly. “It’s never too late to learn.” Her words echoed through his mind, waking a train of thought Kyle had long since given up on.

KYLE knocked on the door to Makiel’s quarters before letting himself in. The infirmary doctor had contacted him to inform him that Makiel was well and resting in his own quarters, giving Kyle the opportunity to actually have a private conversation with him.

“Makiel?” Kyle approached the slim figure upon the bed, seating himself and reaching out to touch Makiel’s shoulder. Sleepy violet eyes turned to face him at the touch, confusion swirling within their depths.

“Mind if we have a word?” Kyle asked softly. Shifting, Makiel sat up, rubbing sleep out of his eyes. The sheet slipped down revealing the silvery skin of his naked chest. Kyle’s gaze followed the contours of Makiel’s slim form, mouth suddenly dry, still awed at how similar yet different Makiel was when compared to him. “I want you.” Kyle whispered, the words slipping out before he could stop them. It had not been what he’d come here intending to say, but now that the words were free he knew it was true. “I’ve wanted you from the moment I laid eyes on you.”

Makiel’s parted lips tempted Kyle, Makiel’s tongue flicking out to lick at them in what came across as a sensual caress. “If we touch....”

Kyle continued to watch Makiel, waiting for him to continue, enthralled by the movement of those glistening lips before him.

“We’ll bond.”

“I know.” Kyle reached out to bury his hand in Makiel’s hair, for once savoring the light tingle of electricity upon his skin. “I’m not sure what this means, how this is going to change our lives, but I don’t want to lose you. I barely know you, but I don’t want to lose you. When....” Kyle licked his own dry lips. “When I saw you there, covered in blood, I thought my heart had stopped. I don’t understand it, don’t know why, but it felt like I was going to lose something

important to me.”

Makiel avoided Kyle’s gaze, slim hands shifting to pick at the bed sheets. “It’s my fault.” Makiel’s words were reluctant, filled with sadness. “It’s the bond between you and I. I lied to you. It’s already there. We bonded the day we first touched. It’s already too late for me.”

Kyle shifted his hand moving to cup Makiel’s cheek, tilting Makiel’s face back toward his own. “I know. Sadie told me.” Kyle grinned at the emotion in those violet eyes. He loved the fact that Makiel’s apparent ironclad composure seemed to slip around him. Makiel’s face wasn’t nearly so expressive around anyone else, he’d noticed. “I must say, it was an enlightening conversation. Keeping that in mind, care to take on a repentant idiot of a man who was more concerned with appearances than the value of a true bond? He’s learned his lesson, I promise,” Kyle finished cheekily, smirking.

He didn’t really intend to give Makiel a choice. Leaning toward him, he allowed his breath to caress Makiel’s lips for a moment before gently settling his own onto cool flesh. Kyle sensed Makiel’s tension, softening his kiss to ease it, to soothe Makiel. He gently traced Makiel’s lips with his tongue, savoring the cool texture and the unique flavor, relief coursing through him when Makiel’s lips parted, letting his tongue into the slick warmth of his mouth. Swallowing the moan that slipped through Makiel’s lips, Kyle gently pushed him down, moving to lie over him.

Trailing his hand over smooth, cool skin, he savored the difference in texture and temperature. Makiel’s skin rippled

beneath his fingers, soft ridges hidden within the contours of his body, shifting and reacting to his touch. It was cooler than his own and hairless. Tracing the shape of Makiel's hip, Kyle's hand slipped beneath the sheets, satisfaction coursing through him with the realization that Makiel slept naked.

Moaning softly, Makiel arched into his touch, weaving his fingers through Kyle's hair, changing both the angle and intensity of the kiss. Releasing Makiel's lips, Kyle moved to nibble at his jaw, lapping the skin to soothe it, repeating the action when Makiel's slim form shivered beneath his touch.

"You... sure about this?" Makiel gasped, violet eyes drifting closed.

Pulling Makiel's nipple between his teeth, Kyle sucked, rolling his tongue over it until it peaked in his mouth. Withdrawing, he blew on the moist skin, smiling when Makiel let loose another soft moan, speaking only when he was satisfied that Makiel knew what pleasure he was offering. "Yes, I'm sure." Kyle confirmed, pulling the sheet down, revealing Makiel's body.

Not giving Makiel a chance to protest any further, he bent, sliding Makiel's penis down his throat with ease. Rolling his tongue he began to bob his head, sucking as he did so, watching the waves of pleasure roll off of Makiel's features.

The sound escaping Makiel's lips was a cross between a whimper and a moan, his fingers digging into Kyle's scalp. Taking advantage of Makiel's distraction, Kyle slipped a finger and then another into his body, slowly preparing him, stretching him for the penetration that was to come. When

he slid a third finger into that tight tempting heat, Makiel's violet eyes opened to meet his own pale green, reflecting his own lust and need. The muscles around his fingers tensed for just a moment before relaxing beneath his persistent penetration, the silent invitation clear when Makiel opened himself further to Kyle's touch.

Slim silver hands trailed over the material of Kyle's clothes, quickly disposing of buttons, zips, and fastenings, baring Kyle's skin to Makiel's touch. A distant part of Kyle's mind noted the contrast of skin color, Makiel's pale silver skin stark against his own peach-colored flesh, but the thought was quickly forgotten, drowned in the pleasure Makiel's touch elicited. Kyle groaned, liquid fire coursing through him when Makiel cupped his erection and moved his other hand to his mouth.

The sultry look Makiel gave him as he sucked his own fingers was nearly Kyle's undoing, the slight coolness of Makiel's skin the only thing that kept him from coming there and then. Kyle wanted to sigh in relief when those tempting fingers were removed from Makiel's mouth, only to groan again. Makiel's fingers slid over his erection instead, spreading slick oily liquid over him. When Makiel withdrew those fingers to thrust them into himself along with Kyle's fingers, Kyle lost all semblance of control.

Growling in frustration, Kyle caught Makiel's hand, pulling it out of his body. Releasing Makiel's member from his lips he leaned forward to kiss him, thrusting his tongue into Makiel's mouth just as he thrust deep into his welcoming body. Electricity surged between them, Makiel arching into Kyle's thrusts, his tongue dueling with Kyle's,

each in their own way seeking and welcoming dominion.

Passion coursed between them, electricity arcing across Kyle's body and dancing across his nerves. Touch, scent, and sound dominated his senses: the friction of sweat-slicked skin, the scent of arousal, musk in the air, the sound of skin hitting skin, ragged gasps of pleasure accompanying the beat of lust. Kyle's mind drifted, no longer within his control, all rational thought long since gone. He was drowning in the passion that sparked between them.

Then something reached out toward him from the corner of his mind. He sensed rather than heard a soft click moments before his mind was invaded by a flood of emotion he knew was not his own: the sensation of being filled, stretched by a thick hard organ, the heat of sticky liquid filling his body, and the sheer rapture of being joined into the most intimate way possible. His pleasure doubled, his control slipped, and he cried out, his body arching as he continued to empty himself into Makiel, his mind drifting away from him as darkness consumed him.

"I CAN feel energy... you, in my mind... in my blood," Kyle said in awe, looking at his fingers, expecting and failing to see something different upon his very skin. When Kyle had awakened after their lovemaking, he'd realized something was different. He could sense Makiel in his mind, Makiel's emotions seeming to blur and merge with his own.

It had taken quite a bit of explaining to get him to

understand that his mind was now joined with Makiel's, and they would now forever be able to sense each other. Even though he understood the explanation, he still could not reconcile himself with the reality of it, continually trying to find outward evidence of an inward change that had changed him more than he could have ever believed possible.

He blinked when all he received in response was a smile and an insistent tug, Makiel pulling him out the spaceship and toward the monument. "I told you already. You won't find any physical differences," Makiel teased him lightly.

Kyle returned Makiel's smile, loving the playful manner. Makiel was only playful with him, retaining his polite formal manner when it came to interacting with anyone else on Kyle's crew. He opened his mind when Makiel mentally reached out towards him, allowing the affection Makiel felt for him to wrap around him. "It's a mental link, and no, it's not really anything like human electricity, though it may feel like it."

"It's strange," Kyle explained, rubbing his fingers to and fro through his hair, almost as if trying to rid himself of a kinetic discharge. "It's tingling over my nerves, and it's confusing to have my emotions randomly shifted and changed by yours."

"I asked you if you were sure." The smile slipped from Makiel's lips. "I told you we would bond." Kyle watched Makiel, worried that he'd said the wrong thing. Relief coursed through him when Makiel reached out for his hand, weaving the fingers of his right hand with Kyle's left. The touch soothed him, easing the anxiety that coursed through

him when he and Makiel were not physically in contact. The anxiety was not as intense as it had been just after their minds had bonded, but it was still there when they parted, sitting in the back of his mind like a fresh open wound that had yet to heal.

“I don’t regret it, Makiel.” Kyle squeezed Makiel’s hand, welcoming his touch. “I’m just commenting that it’s a little strange.” He paused, looking around Stonehenge. The moment he’d woken, Makiel had softly asked him to take him back to Earth, to Stonehenge. “So what is it you want to show me?” Kyle queried, looking around at the ancient stones.

Kyle followed Makiel to the center of the circle, turning to face Makiel when he paused. Makiel captured his other hand before speaking. “Close your eyes.” Kyle watched him for a moment, trying to figure out where this was going before obeying the soft instruction. “I’m going to slip some images into your mind,” Makiel warned softly, moments before Kyle felt his mind reaching out for his own. The moment Makiel slipped fully into his mind, images began to run before his closed eyes.

He saw Stonehenge, complete and newly erected. He was surrounded by stone circles, glowing a faint blue in the early morning light. Turning, he watched the natural light flicker through the stones, creating an atmosphere so surreal he almost missed the people surrounding him. Standing in the circle with him were humans, clothed in flowing white robes, carrying bowls of water and rings of flowers, but the most surprising were the Siminrhod among them, silver thread woven into their robes, walking beside

the humans holding their hands. The small group gathered there, moved in pairs, carrying their wreaths, placing them in front of the stones before moving on.

Kyle barely managed to register the scene when it changed, the circle of stone becoming a circle of wood. The same small procession was present, only this time the rings of flowers were worn in flowing hair and yet more flowers tied clasped hands together, the warmth of sunset created an inviting, relaxed ambience. Where those gathered in the ring of stones had been solemn, sharing a moment of serious introspection, these were laughing, sharing happiness, warmth, and the joy of a bonding ceremony.

The scene faded. Kyle opened his eyes to find himself once again standing in the ruined stone monument, Makiel's hands clasped in his. "We've found it," Makiel stated softly, holding Kyle's gaze. "We finally managed to find the circles of life and death."

Kyle simply raised an eyebrow in question, waiting for the explanation he knew was coming. He was slowly learning that Makiel could understand him without him having to be vocal about it.

"We've spent thousands of years looking for these circles, Kyle." Makiel glanced around at the stones. "Stonehenge is the Siminrhod circle of death." Makiel released one of Kyle's hands to point. "It's aligned on the axis of summer-solstice sunrise and winter-solstice sunset. The wooden circle you saw in the vision is that way." He turned to point toward Durrington henge. "It's the Siminrhod circle of life. It's aligned on the axis of winter-solstice sunrise and

summer-solstice sunset. The wooden pillars are no longer there, but they definitely were there, I can sense it. The two circles are linked.”

Kyle stumbled when Makiel pulled him toward the ditches and mounds that formed the circle surrounding Stonehenge. “See, the ditch is on the wrong side of the mound, signifying death. If we go to Durrington circle, I just know it will be the other way round, signifying life.” Excitement began to trickle into Makiel’s voice. “Even the stones and wood all point to life and death and the balance between the two. There is a great well of energy here, Kyle. Flowing between the two circles and along the river and avenues that link the two sites. The energy is broken, unbalanced, but it’s still there. I can feel it. Kyle. We’ve finally found the circles of life and death.”

Kyle shook his head, confusion coursing through him. He didn’t understand any of it. Didn’t understand what significance an old stone monument could possibly have. Makiel was babbling, and Kyle didn’t have the slightest idea where he was going with this. He raised a hand to stall the breathless words still streaming from Makiel’s parted lips. “Hold on a minute, Makiel. I’m confused. What are the circles of life and death?”

Makiel smiled at him, pulling Kyle down to touch the ground, awe clear in his tone as he spoke. “We have a long and complicated history, most of which is forever lost.” Kyle could hear the grief in Makiel’s voice, feeling it echo through him. It was not his own grief and strangely enough, nor was it Makiel’s. The grief that now echoed through him seemed to come from the past, pulling him into long-forgotten

memories as Makiel spoke.

“It took me a long time to figure this out.” Makiel’s soft words brought pictures to Kyle’s mind, images of great cities sparkling in blue-tinted light, high pinnacles presiding over strange aquamarine grasslands. He saw spaceships flying through the air, the design of which he could not even begin to fathom, and he instinctively knew this is what had been lost. “I had to visit a lot of places... touch a lot of ground just to begin to piece some of it together.” Makiel shook his head. “A long time ago, we were extremely well-advanced, but we lost it all. I don’t know who did it or even why, but it was horrific. Our entire planet was destroyed in little more than a couple of minutes. We were attacked. I saw it, Kyle. I saw the shock wave that all but destroyed our people.”

Kyle could see it, too, in his mind’s eye, a wave of force tearing everything apart, bright mauve, amber, and ultramarine sparks flying into the sky, the sight beautiful even amongst all the destruction, a borealis of death.

“Millions died. If not for a few individuals, hidden deep in the bowels of our planet at the time of impact, our entire race would have been eradicated. For all intents and purposes, we were. We lost everything that day. We lost our home, our knowledge, and our people, all in but a moment. The few that survived were left with nothing, possessing barely enough to live. We had to start again, fighting to survive on a planet wounded beyond imagination, and to keep hope alive we passed down the stories of what we used to be. It gives us something to fight for, a dream to return to. One of the stories that remained with us was the story of Siminrhod balance pairs. The few Siminrhod balance pairs

that survived the attack soon died, and it seemed like we'd lost that too. All that remained was a legend. We worked hard to regain our planet, our dignity, and our pride. We swore to become peacemakers, and now we take an oath against violence. It's why I couldn't use your gun."

Makiel's words died. On impulse Kyle reached over, grabbing the young man and pulling him into his lap, cradling the slim body as he fought the grief still thrumming between them. It was all starting to make sense, and it scared him. Makiel's people had lost everything. They survived through sheer determination alone, yet strangely, after everything that had been done to them, they chose to leave themselves open to attack by refusing to use violence. It seemed the Siminrhod people needed more than balance—they also needed protection, and so Kyle made a silent promise to protect Makiel. "So these circles were lost then too?" he prompted gently.

Makiel nodded, glancing up at Kyle through stray emerald strands of hair, the top of his head up against Kyle's chin. "Yes, but that didn't concern us 'til much later." Makiel's lips twisted, a dry smile gracing his features. "Ironically, it was a rogue space pirate that first stumbled upon his balance. Not too long after you humans discovered space travel, in fact."

Something about Makiel's comment tugged at his senses, and Kyle knew that the reference had been a deliberate one. "Let me guess. The balance was human?" he asked, knowing he was taking a shot into the dark, but certain he was right nonetheless.

Makiel smiled reaching up to pull Kyle's face down, kissing him before letting him go once more. "I knew I bonded to a smart man." Kyle grinned with the praise. "Now, if only we'd been as smart. Do you know it's taken us three hundred and sixty years to even realize that all Siminrhod balance pairs are between a Siminrhod and a human? It's taken us another fifty to get your government to even agree to meet us for this treaty we are trying to get. You'd think that piece of information would be obvious, but no one seemed to look beyond the fact that we seemed to have regained something that had been lost for a long time. Finding it again was a great cause for celebration, and we lost ourselves in the belief that we were back where we had been before the destruction of our planet. Needless to say, that delusion didn't last all that long. Over time, as more Siminrhod balance pairs emerged, we realized that there were problems. The power between the two is extremely fragile and easily prone to disruption. The effect of disruption can be nearly as devastating as not having a balance to begin with. It didn't happen to all the pairs that popped up over time, and it took us a while to figure out it has to do with contact and separation. If a Siminrhod and his or her balance are separated, the balance of power tilts and can never be restored. It's harmful both to the Siminrhod and the balance and is the reason why a Siminrhod is not allowed to be separated from his balance. It is also the reason why a balance is regarded so highly."

Makiel's explanation ran through Kyle's mind, the words seeming to taunt him. He'd never had a choice. If he left Makiel, it could have destroyed them both. He was destined to remain with him, yet Makiel had nearly let him walk away.

Makiel nearly let him make the biggest mistake of his life.

“Why didn’t you tell me this?” Kyle demanded gruffly, fighting the anger that threatened to ruin their conversation. He simply couldn’t believe that Makiel nearly let him kill them both.

“You misunderstand,” Makiel whispered. Kyle knew Makiel could feel his anger, for he could feel Makiel’s regret, but it did little to soothe him. “It was too late for me, but not for you. I hadn’t touched you long enough to fully transfer the locus of my power to you, only long enough to awaken your awareness and my dormant power. The most harm you would have gotten from our separation would have perhaps been a feeling of emptiness. I, on the other hand....”

Kyle stared at Makiel in disbelief, awed at the way the other seemed to have so quickly sensed the root of his anger without so much as any input from him. Makiel’s answer drained the anger from him, leaving him ashamed of his own selfishness and at a loss for words. “I... I... uh....”

Makiel glanced up, shaking his head, interrupting the apology Kyle was fighting to voice. “I... I’m sorry I didn’t tell you everything about the bond.” Makiel glanced away from Kyle, his guilt slipping into Kyle’s mind. “It’s one of the reasons I avoided you in the beginning. I wasn’t sure I wanted the bond, but I’m constantly drawn to you. I can’t help it. Losing my mind scares me, Kyle.” Makiel’s soft words hurt, echoing Kyle’s own feelings.

Kyle cupped Makiel’s chin and guided his gaze back toward his own, making sure Makiel was looking at him before shrugging. “It’s okay,” he stated softly, deciding not to

dwelt on the mistakes that might have been. “I’m willing to take the good with the bad. I’m drawn to you too.” He smiled when Makiel dropped his gaze again. Leaning in, he tilted Makiel’s chin up once more and dropped a soft soothing kiss onto Makiel’s lips. “I won’t say losing my mind doesn’t scare me, too, but you still haven’t told me how these circles of life and death you claim we’ve managed to find fit into all of this,” he teased lightly, deliberately changing the subject.

Makiel’s guilt faded from Kyle’s mind, replaced by relief. “These circles were used for healing, to create and to restore the equilibrium of power that exists between a Siminrhod and his or her balance. The energy trapped here is perfect, unique. We’ve lost so many....” Makiel whispered, losing himself in his story once more. He trailed a hand over the earth they were seated on. “So many pairs died simply because their power moved too far out of balance. We’ve been searching for a way to help restore it, and it’s been here all along.”

Kyle took a moment to contemplate Makiel’s words, weighing everything he had revealed. It was overwhelming, frightening, and at the same time, wonderful. Makiel trusted him. That much was apparent due to the very nature of the information he shared, and that pleased Kyle far more than he believed it had a right to. However, one small piece of missing information still bothered him. “Why the secrecy? Why were you attacked?”

Makiel sighed, dejected. “Not everyone agrees with our policies against violence. Some Siminrhod believe we should use our power to get revenge. They’ve banded together to form a rebel faction. They don’t want us to have the power a

stable Siminrhod balance pair is capable of and will do anything to prevent us from getting it, but that's not right, Kyle. It's not right to punish the current generation for the sins of the past." He gathered up some loose sand and let it trickle out between his fingers. "Our ancestors would grieve over the thought. They're buried here, deep in the earth... Siminrhod balance pairs... their dormant energy is trapped and directed by the circles. It's meant to help the healing, only it's broken, the circles are broken, and some of the pairs have been separated." Makiel glanced up, his eyes filled with grief. "The circles are weeping, Kyle, slowly bleeding. We need to do something."

Kyle reached out, caressing Makiel's cheek, wanting nothing more than to wipe the grief from his face. "What do you propose?" he inquired, still shocked by everything he had just learned. He hated the fact that Makiel was hurting, hated the fact that the precious circles had been ruined, but most off all, he hated the fact that Makiel's life was in danger, and for what? To prevent a bond from being stable? He could still see the visions Makiel had shared, only they made more sense now. Siminrhod human balance pairs walked in a circle of wood, flowers woven into their hair, laughter upon their features as they celebrated a bonding ceremony. The same pairs also walked the circle of stone, faces solemn as they gave respect to those who had come before, thanking them for energy freely given, trapped and amplified by circles of life and death to help stabilize and heal the wounded minds and souls of bonded Siminrhod balance pairs. It was the way things were meant to be.

"I spoke to Jairen a little while ago." Kyle could feel Makiel's tension, both through their mental link and through

their current physical contact, and it worried him. He almost feared what Makiel had to say. “He’s a telepath. He was the head emissary sent here to negotiate our treaty. The treaty is signed, and we have been granted permission to restore Stonehenge and Durrington circle. We need to restore the balance between the circles of life and death and need a Siminrhod balance pair to do it. Please, Kyle... I....”

Kyle blinked at Makiel in shock. He couldn’t believe Makiel was really asking this of him. Wasn’t it too much, too soon? That’s when he recalled the attack, recalled his fear for Makiel’s life and Sadie’s words to him. He weighed the value of his own life against Makiel’s and made his decision. “Oh, what the hell,” he growled, deciding not to fight his future anymore, and with that, he pulled Makiel into a heated kiss his lover would never forget.

RAYNE AUSTER always had a passion for writing. However, growing up, she didn't have the patience to finish what she started. Most of her projects died before even seeing the light of day. While studying for a master's degree in computer science, she decided to post what she wrote online. That is when she discovered the joy of sharing the stories in her head. Unable to bear the thought of leaving her readers hanging, she finished her first piece of fiction. The satisfaction of actually completing a story quickly led to further inspiration, and she hasn't looked back since.

You can contact Rayne at rayne.auster@gmail.com.



Dreamspinner
Press

For more of the
best M/M romance,
visit

Dreamspinner Press

www.dreamspinnerpress.com

Circles of Life and Death ©Copyright Rayne Auster, 2009

Published by
Dreamspinner Press
4760 Preston Road
Suite 244-149
Frisco, TX 75034
<http://www.dreamspinnerpress.com/>

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are the product of the authors' imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

Cover Design by Mara McKennen

This book is licensed to the original purchaser only. Duplication or distribution via any means is illegal and a violation of International Copyright Law, subject to criminal prosecution and upon conviction, fines and/or imprisonment. This eBook cannot be legally loaned or given to others. No part of this eBook can be shared or reproduced without the express permission of the publisher. To request permission and all other inquiries, contact Dreamspinner Press at: 4760 Preston Road, Suite 244-149, Frisco, TX 75034 <http://www.dreamspinnerpress.com/>

Released in the United States of America
August 2009