

MOUSE  
IN THE  
WAINSCOTING

MARK ALDERS

David Walker Craven hauls freight for *Red Star Haulage*. He has done so for five long, lonely years with only a sarcastic, sexually deprived computer as company. Her name is Miranda, the bane of his existence, but the one he depends on the most as well.

Everything seems to be going along swimmingly. David's plans of retiring on a desert island, once he has saved up enough money, looks to be in the bag. After each successful haul his dream moves one step closer to reality and all he left behind fades into memory.

Until Miranda detects a life form on board.

A stowaway.

David is soon embroiled in a series of events that involves a dead young man, a legendary being called a shifter and an alien race that scares the absolute shit out of him. Can he survive the events that unravel? Or will his past, present and future catch up with him in ways even he couldn't have expected? In ways that will change everything...forever.

The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000.

**Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the author's rights is appreciated.**

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Mouse in the Wainscoting  
Copyright © 2011 Mark Alders  
ISBN: 978-1-55487-866-6  
Cover art by Martine Jardin

All rights reserved. Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilization of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, is forbidden without the written permission of the publisher.

Published by eXtasy Books  
Look for us online at:  
[www.eXtasybooks.com](http://www.eXtasybooks.com)

*Mouse in the Wainscoting*  
*A Schism Universe Story*

*By*

*Mark Alders*

*Dedication*

*To my family*

## Chapter One

“Checkmate.”

“What? No way. Where, Miranda?” David Walker Craven examined the screen in front of him. There was no doubt. The ship’s computer had won again...for the three-thousandth time if David remembered right. He didn’t know why he played the computer at chess. Such a pastime didn’t serve any other purpose but to waste time. He had only won one game in the five years he’d been a long haul freighter pilot for *Red Star Haulage*, and he suspected even with that victory that Miranda gave it to him. She must have felt sorry for him that day because it was after a particularly long haul, one that sent him deep into the *Orion* system. Good thing the money was fantastic.

Miranda replayed the last seven moves on the floating plasma screen that hovered over the control panel. The seven moves were the exact amount it took to win the game, showing beyond question David had lost. Again. “Can I ask you a

question, David?"

"Sure." David reclined in his chair, knotting his fingers behind the back of his head, taking in the view of the eternal black out of the cockpit's window beyond the glitter of technology that surrounded him. "Fire away."

"Why do you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Run freight all by yourself. Shouldn't a man of your age be with someone? You're in your prime, David. You should be out there copulating with every creature that moves. Isn't that humanity's dictum, if you can't kill it, have sex with it?"

"Are you getting all philosophical on me, Miranda?" David leaned forward, reaching over to grab his flask of coffee that had proceeded to go cold over the course of the last few hours. He took a swig. The coffee *was* cold, but far better to digest than when it was first brewed.

"Just asking."

"Well, I got my hand. What more does a man need?"

"Yes, and you've used that hand three-thousand times since you took over the ship."

David smiled, pointing at the screen where Miranda's face appeared. She was a red head, creamy white skin and lips that would look good around any cock. If she were human, then he'd almost be tempted to give her one. Not that he cared for women. Still, sliding his dick into her

would shut her up for a few minutes and wipe that smug smile off her face. A thought that had amused him many times during a haul. "Then you'd better let me win chess more often so I don't have to jack off trying to dull the pain of defeat. It's no coincidence that your victories and my solo sessions in the bedroom are linked."

Miranda giggled. "Why do you think I win?"

"You can be such a bitch sometimes, you know that." David paused. He rubbed his stubble. The sound of his action filled the cockpit. "I did have someone before I took the job. Someone who was quite happy riding my dick and letting me suck him off at any given moment. We were beautiful together. All hand in hand and knowing glances and all that shit."

"What happened?"

David thought about how his life had turned. How a young man named Chaz wiggled his arse in front of the man he thought he would marry, ending their relationship in a nano second. A bitter taste rose up and David swallowed hard. "An eighteen year old with fresh eyes and a virgin arse, that's what happened. My man, Jonny, couldn't control himself and he was off chasing the bastard's tail before I could blink...and well, that's why I'm here."

"To run away?"

"Who me?"

"Then what do you call this...right now?"



"Running away," he mumbled, his lips dry all of a sudden. Thinking about Jonny wasn't good. The man was poison. But in a way, he was glad he hadn't committed to the bastard in any serious way. The man would have cheated on him sooner or later, and for the benefit of David's sanity, at least it happened sooner. "Out here no one can bother me, and I won't get hurt. Simple as that." David turned his attention away from Miranda. "Now what's our status? We're here to work, not make idle chit-chat."

Miranda didn't respond straight away. David knew she was compiling information at his request. Her status reports were always detailed. That and she was sulking because he had changed the subject. But the change in conversation had more to do with the fact that five years wasn't enough water under the bridge as far as he was concerned.

The pain of what Jonny did on that hot, balmy night in August was still so vivid it was like yesterday. The look of Chaz on the doorstep of their home, all fresh faced, lips so kissable, eyes so deep and easily lost within, innocent and beautiful and alluring all rolled into one magnificent specimen of a man, was burned into David's mind. He'd bet his haul money for this trip that Chaz had a cock that would gag even the most eager, too. Again, that bitter taste became apparent. He swallowed hard once more.

David closed his eyes, squeezing them tight. His stomach turned. How he yearned to be with another man. Be wrapped up in strong arms, lost in the musk and warmth only a man had. But that wasn't possible. Not out here. Over the years he had convinced himself that such a thing was for the best. Sure, he had no one to say they loved him, but no one to hurt him either. David had come to like the arrangement.

"I am detecting a life form on board," Miranda said, knocking him from his reverie.

He glanced at the screen. Along with all the usual readouts, oxygen, gravity, hull pressure, outside radiation levels, there was the indication that there *was* a life form on the ship. Miranda was right. Then again, she always was. "What? Damn it! It must have been in the crates we picked up from *Ardross Major*. Looks like I'm going on another bug hunt." He got up out of his chair, heading for the hatchway door, zipping up his jumpsuit.

"The life form I am reading is larger than any insectoid vermin we've encountered before, David. I suggest you arm yourself. We may have a stowaway."

## Chapter Two

“How large is this life form, Miranda?” David paused at the doorway, glancing at the weapons locker. A cabinet he hadn’t opened in all the wanks he’d enjoyed since he started playing chess with her.

“Size is indeterminate. The ship’s inner panelling beyond the cargo hold is shielding my sensors. I can tell you that it is warm blooded. A heartbeat can be detected, too. Possibly mammalian.”

David paused at the weapons locker. His mood lightened. Was there someone else on board? Or was it Miranda playing tricks on him again, giving him false hope? “Well, all it needs is a cock, and I’ll be all over it like a lovesick teenager on a first date.”

Miranda let out one of her customary giggles. “You are lovesick. But tell me, what would you do if it turns out to be a hideous creature hell bent on devouring anything that moves? *Ardross Major* has

some rather nasty life forms prowling its dense forests. Any one of them could have wandered in during loading. The quarantine restrictions are not so tough out there in that part of the system."

"Who's to say the thing stowed during that pickup?"

"And who's to say it didn't?"

David's face hardened, his light mood replaced by something else. Concern. If Miranda was right, and she wasn't fucking around, then he'd better be ready for anything. He opened the locker, retrieving a laser pistol and checking the battery pack. It was empty. He pulled another one out of the clip that hung beside the weapons and re-loaded the pistol with loud clicks. "Where are you detecting the life form now?"

"In the living quarters."

David holstered the weapon in his jumpsuit's front pocket. "Stay with me, Miranda. I may need you."

"What do you want me to do if you're confronted by a primary predator with you in its sights for lunch? Checkmate it to stone cold boredom?"

David ignored her. Instead, he proceeded down the corridor toward the living quarters, a small section near the rear that also housed his bedroom. The ship—named the *Ultramarine* for whatever reason—was large. More than a kilometre long if David had to guess. Most of that

space was taken up by the cargo hold. It was common knowledge that the more cargo inside the ship the more profit at the end of the haul. That was simple economics. Still, even the relatively small living quarters seemed large as David began his search. He checked the mess hall after he had searched his bedroom.

What he saw as the doors to the hall slid open, stole his breath away.

Beyond the set of two chairs and table where David ate his meals, but in front of the food vending machine, the body of a young man lay on the floor. Still. Silent. David ran to him. His skin was pale and cold, his mousy brown hair lifeless and rough to the touch, like it hadn't been cared for in a long time. The young man couldn't have been more than twenty-five.

David grabbed his hand, checking for a pulse. One thing was apparent, besides the fact that he was naked. He was dead. There being no pulse confirming what David already suspected before he checked for life signs. A tear welled in David's eyes, his throat tightening to the point of being uncomfortable. Even though he had no idea who the young man was, he couldn't help feel for him. How did he die? Or more importantly, why was he on board in the first place? Was he sick, needing to get medical help on a more advanced world? Was he murdered? David couldn't see any signs of attack. There wasn't even a scratch on his

perfect skin.

"Well shit, isn't this just my damn bad luck. Poor guy." He closed the young man's eyelids and kissed him with tender care on his forehead. He couldn't help but notice his voice straining with emotion. He stood up, then glanced back down to the body. "A fucking waste of a perfectly good looking young man, if you ask me. Rest in peace, my man."

"Pardon? What was that, David?"

His attention snapped back to the moment by Miranda's question. "Diagnostic. And quick, Miranda. I need to know what happened here."

"I don't know what happened in the mess hall. The body of the man you see right now never registered on my sensors, but the life form I did detect is retreating back to the cargo bay. His heartbeat is accelerated."

"What do you mean *his*?" David got to his feet. He went to the panel by the wall so he could see Miranda in the screen.

"There is testosterone registering on the sensors...and it's not yours. Besides, seeing as the dead don't give off any hormonal activity—not ones who have the early signs of rigor mortis anyway—it is safe to assume the life form is a male. Of what species I cannot tell yet. I am working on it. The readings are strange. They change."

David glanced at the body. "Well, this one

certainly looks human to me. But I think the important question is, why is he in my mess hall?"

"A victim of the intruder perhaps?"

"Are you saying we have a murderer on board, Miranda?" David knew such a thing was a real possibility. It wasn't unheard of for pirates to stow away on board long haul freighters, to then kill one other and the pilot, when the bounty in the hold became apparent. But again, something didn't seem right. There was no sign of a fight on the young man's body. No bruises. No cuts. No laser shot wounds. Then again, perhaps he was poisoned. That wouldn't be unheard of either. David made a mental note to get the body examined...if he survived long enough to get to *Oberon*, that is.

"I am not saying anything. All I am giving you is the facts. We have a life form on board and a dead body. You can work out the rest even though you can't get beyond the queen's gambit moves in chess."

David stepped over the body, coming to the linen cupboard. He took out a sheet, covering the man with it. He then retrieved his pistol from his front pocket. "As soon as I've caught our intruder, we'll put them both on ice. Let the authorities on *Oberon* deal with the how and why. I just want to deliver my cargo. Nothing more. Nothing less."

## Chapter Three

David left the mess hall and proceeded, his anxiety rising more and more with each step to help fire his determination, toward the stairs that led down to the cargo bay. He swallowed hard. All the while he was unable to get the image of the dead, young man out of his mind. He wondered who he was. He pondered the simple things. What was his name? What did he do for a living? Where did he live? Then so many more questions presented themselves that he gave up his contemplation. He knew, deep down, many of them may never be answered. Unless the other life form he pursued knew all, of course.

"I am heading down to the cargo bay now. Keep me in check." David's steps echoed on the metal grating of the stairs as he descended them. Sure, even with having a hold filled with medical supplies, spices, crates containing the super luxurious *Existence Spheres* – personal armoured carriers that could withstand a descent through a



sun's corona—and boxes of trinkets and wares for the more advanced worlds of the system who liked to purchase rustic things, he couldn't help but get the feeling of emptiness. An emptiness which surrounded him, consumed him, stuck to his skin like sweat did after his daily exercise routine.

"Sure thing..."

David didn't hear the rest of Miranda's words. A clatter, a noise like something metallic striking the floor, came from the far end of the bay, catching his attention and holding it for an eternity after the echo had subsided. His heartbeat thumped loud in his ears, and the hand that held his pistol became clammy. He wasn't nervous, just apprehensive. He had to calm himself. He had to mentally count to try and alleviate the excess adrenaline that had flooded his system.

With lips hardly parted, David mumbled, "There is definitely something in here, Miranda." Stating the obvious, the already known, was a method he employed to try and help quantify in his mind what was going on. The ramifications of discovering someone or something who not only murdered the young man, but could also murder him, was a notion that took a bit of getting used to.

"I told you it was larger than any *bug* we've ever encountered."

David was well within the maze of crates, gingerly stepping as though each could be his last.

Checking around corners, sighting clear pathways that meandered between the cargo, before venturing any further.

Again a clatter rang out.

David gasped, but not from the fear of what was amongst the crates, but because he swore he felt something scurry across his foot. In reaction he dropped the pistol. "Fuck," he wheezed. The sound of his gun clanging on the floor echoed loud, rang in his ears. There was a moment of confusion as David scrambled to pick up the weapon, but caught sight of something...or someone, moving in the gloom ahead. More noises filled the air. Noises of the intruder running fast though the cluttered cargo hold. Crates moved.

"...going back up to the mess hall." Miranda's voice was shrill. A far cry from the sultry tone she normally employed. "The mess hall, David. He's returning to the mess hall."

David's confusion clung to him like the bargain hunters at the *Mattock* markets. He blinked, another method he used to try and clear his thoughts, recoil his mind back to the moment. He had also counted to well past one-hundred.

"The mess hall?" he finally managed with a drawl.

"Yes, you great dummy. The mess hall. Get your sexy arse back in there. My sensors have given me more information now that he has been out in the open for a longer period of time. He is

humanoid, but I cannot make out his species. That's weird. I have all humanoid life forms in my registry."

"No. What's weird is that we have a dead body where I eat and a man who killed him running around free. That's what's weird."

"Aren't you even the slightest bit interested in where he is from?"

David had reached the stairs once more. He climbed up to the living quarters level. "No. Why should I care? He could be from Timbuktu. Won't make a squat of difference to me as I smoke him with my pistol as soon as he's in my sights. The murdering bastard."

"So you'd shoot him in cold blood? That would make you a murderer, too, you know?"

David came onto the landing. Again, with cautious footsteps, he proceeded back toward the mess hall. He didn't reply to Miranda's questions. She was right. She always was. Then again, David was all talk anyway. He hadn't killed anything in his life, let alone deliberately raising a pistol to someone and pulling the trigger.

When he reached the mess room door, nervous as he'd ever been, he waited for it to slide open, to reveal in the next moments the exact situation that could change his life forever.

Everything that happened next happened so fast David's heart couldn't have completed a beat. The intruder looked up, horror and sadness in his

eyes. If David wasn't mistaken, there were tears down his cheeks, too. In a blur, and with a scream of words David couldn't comprehend, the intruder dashed toward the linen cupboard, disappearing from sight. The door slammed.

David was frozen to the spot. His mind spun. Why would the intruder come back to weep over his victim's body? The intruder...no, the *man*—or the glimpse he caught of him registered to him that he was a man—didn't seem to be a murderer at all. So who was he? Again more questions wheeled to confuse his thoughts.

One thing David did know in the maelstrom of doubt about the whole situation was that the man was naked. Just like the poor guy he had covered with the sheet. Had he picked up a crate of slave boys bound for *Van Dezion's World* by mistake? Many times, and with the huge volumes David dealt with, crates were misplaced. It was a possibility.

David managed a smile, his nerves ebbing away. The man was attractive, again with mousy hair and a thin pleasant body rich folk craved for as house pets. In fact, from first glance the two men looked very similar, like twins. If that were true, then they would have certainly fetched a high price on the commercial slave market. Perhaps that was it. They were running away for their freedom. One of them unfortunately paid the ultimate price.

“Hello,” David finally managed as his feet registered what his brain requested, to walk over to the linen cupboard. Why would the man hide in there? Surely he would know he would be found.

David grabbed the cupboard doors, and with more force than was needed, flung them open. Inside, there was only the linen, hanging up and on the shelves as it had always been. The man was nowhere to be seen.

## Chapter Four

“Diagnostic, Miranda,” David barked, frustrated he had lost a full grown man in nothing but his skin in a blink of an eye.

“The intruder is nowhere on my scanners. He is in the panelling again, and I cannot detect him with all that shielding. I only have internal sensors available, you know.”

David snorted, shutting the doors and glancing at the body on his mess hall floor. “That’s impossible. How can a man fit in the walls? Bugs, yes. But not men.”

“Well, he did it, didn’t he?” Miranda paused. More for effect than anything else as David would bet his next chess game loss on the fact that she had more to tell. “But while he was out in the open, I have discovered more about him, as I said earlier. Would you like me to tell you what I have discovered?”

David’s nerves, curiosity and fear and frustration were replaced with anger. He balled

his fists. "Of course I want you to tell me, *Miranda*. I've just seen a naked man disappear before my very eyes."

"No need to get upset. Just because he slipped into the wainscoting doesn't mean you can't introduce yourself at some stage."

"What did you say?"

"Nothing."

"Didn't sound like nothing to me. Sounded like you were being a smart arse and you were insinuating that I'll be swapping body fluids with him at the drop of a hat because I haven't had a decent root in five years."

Miranda giggled, a noise that somehow soothed David even though her words were meant to rile him. "Would you have it any other way, my dear David? And you said all that, not me."

David re-covered the dead man with the sheet. He had to admit he hated looking at the corpse. More than creepy. He would probably have to eat all his meals in his bedroom until he could get to *Oberon* and get the place fumigated. "Just tell me what you know, you bitch."

"He's a shifter."

David came to stand next to the panel that displayed Miranda's snug, smart arse, eyes glistening with delight, cute as a button, shove your cock in between her lips, face. "That's impossible. Shifters are a legend cooked up by folk in the market to jack up the prices of certain

goods. Nothing more. Nothing less."

"Well then, that's two impossible things that have happened in the space of an afternoon. Or do you not believe your own eyes, David?"

David glanced back at the body. It was true. There was something different about the man. Slaves were usually sickly looking and with an outlook that matched their imprisoned upbringing. The man who ran into the linen cupboard was far from defeated by circumstance. Yes, Miranda's information did explain a lot. It also raised more questions. Again the most important, why were they here of all places? They weren't even supposed to exist.

He left the mess hall, headed for the cockpit.

If the men *were* shifters, then their price would be immeasurable to a potential buyer. A twin set, living or dead, or any other combination including being frozen, would be worth, pound for pound, more than *Atlantica Dream*, the latest party drug of high society. In fact, David would even hazard a guess that two shifters would be worth triple their weight of that particular narcotic.

*Dream* was reputed to heighten senses and sensory perception to the point of the user being able to make love to someone by just looking at them. Many bragged about how they achieved continuous orgasms lasting well into the next day with a mere thought or brush of skin. Pity it left those who used it as emotional zombies after only



a short time, otherwise David would have bought some long ago.

Once inside the cockpit proper, David returned the pistol to the weapons cabinet.

"Do you think that's wise?" Miranda asked, her voice darkening.

"I don't think the man is a murderer."

"What do you base that rather bold assumption on? Your tactical knowledge of any given situation, making you a master at anything you tackle or just dumb luck?"

David smiled. "Dumb luck, I think." He knew in the pit of his stomach that the man didn't kill the other. They were related, and even though he didn't know the how or the why, it was clear by the man's expression of raw sorrow that his brother had passed away and that he was taking him somewhere to lay him at peace. The freighter going where they needed to go. *Oberon*.

He thought about how the man might have died, but couldn't come up with anything other than guesses. Still, whether he died from natural causes or something else, a murderer doesn't comfort his dead victim or scream in warning when approached.

"Now who's being the bastard?"

A noise made him reconsider another sarcastic retort. A noise that reminded him of what a rodent would create as it scurried behind walls in search of food. All scratches and staccato movement. Had

the shifter turned himself into a rat or mouse? How interesting. How intriguing.

"Just getting you back for that smart arse comment before."

"Men!"

David followed the noise through the wall, pressing his ear against the panelling to gain his bearings as to where the shifter headed. He ended up back in the corridor that led toward the living quarters. Seemed the mess hall was again the place of choice. Not surprising, really. "I'm going to follow it," he proclaimed. "He's got to come out sooner or later."

Miranda let out a sigh. "You are a dumb ox. Good thing you have looks otherwise not even the slave market would have taken you in."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means that there is another way to catch a mouse instead of following it through the many miles of panelling all over the ship. I bet you'd give up long before he decided to show itself again anyway. Rodents are very cunning, and one that is a shifter probably more so. Besides, you do have a very limited attention span, you know."

"So you want me to build a mouse trap?"

"Yes."

## Chapter Five

David rubbed his chin. "But what will I use as bait? I don't think cheese is going to cut it."

Miranda let out a giggle. One David didn't like the sound of. "You are going to be the trap, silly."

"What? You're crazy in the head, Miranda. I think you've been watching me jack off way too much. I may be *your* cup of tea in *your* electric dreams, but who's to say this shifter will find me attractive? Who's to say he's even interested in human men, more to the point."

"Simple. You are the only other person on this ship who can reach out and comfort him in his time of need."

He snorted. "Now I know you're fucked for sure. From what happened last time we met, he wasn't exactly open armed enthusiastic to see me, was he? I think you've been ingesting too many gigabytes of porn or something if you think he's going to willingly come to me."

Miranda clicked her tongue, something she only did when she meant business. "That dead man wasn't his brother as I believe you think he was. I have run a complete scan on the body. He is human."

"You're telling me that the dead man isn't a shifter?"

"Yes, I am. All shifters need a grounding, someone to use as an anchor should anything happen to them while they are in their changed state. They sometimes take on a likeness to their foundation to confuse any enemies and to create diversions if threatened. I believe that's what happened here. It will only be a matter of time before another foundation is needed. That's where you come in."

"So the shifter changed himself to look like the other man—I am assuming he was alive at that time—and they stowed away on board to get away from whoever and for whatever reason. Something then went wrong early on in the haul. Am I right so far?"

"Right." Miranda smiled, just like she did that one and only time David won that chess game. "We did just come from a market that deals in the slave trade. Twins would have generated interest and the more eyes on them the better for security. Until they would have wanted to get away that is. Then their likeness would have been a burden."

David's mouth fell open. "A buyer wouldn't

have been happy to have his potential slave twins make a run for it, now would he? Disguise or not."

"He would have been pissed off, more to the point. Slave twins fetch a handsome price, even on the outer rim worlds. I'd say our shifter friend and his foundation had to make a run for it from both the slave traders and the original person who would have forced their disguise in the first place. Our ship was the only one on the loading bay at the time."

"So how did his *foundation* die?"

Miranda's smile disappeared. "I don't know, not without the information from a complete autopsy which I can begin if I access my medical files."

"You're right."

"About what?"

"I will be a good trap, then."

"You may not be the brightest star in the galaxy, David, my man, but when you get it, you get it."

David swallowed hard. That nervous feeling rose up within him once more. "So how do I set this trap?"

"Just take off your clothes and wiggle your dick around. Put on a real show with that tasty looking cock and ample foreskin of yours. I'm sure you'll catch him then."

His face hardened. "You really can be a bitch, you know that?"

"So you've said."

David shrugged his shoulder, not in the mood to react to her at the moment. "I have another idea." David's eyes narrowed.

The noises of the shifter scurrying through the walls continued as he made his way back to the mess hall. The creature kept ahead of David, stopping when he stopped. Seemed to him that the being was curious as well as cautious and scared.

He came to the body once more.

Without pulling back the sheet, not wanting to look at the poor man for fear of losing his nerve, he knelt down so he could place his arms underneath the body. With all the strength David could muster, he picked him up. His goal was the back of the living quarters where there was a dispenser chute out into space. Normally such a thing was used for garbage disposal, but for the one occasion he would use it as something that could give the man a decent send off into the afterlife.

He placed the body onto the work bench in the chute room as careful as he could, he wrapped him up within the sheet as tight as it would go. David added a strengthened ribbon and a single created flower from the organic dispenser that all ships who venture into deep space had these days. All the while, as he prepared the man for his final departure, he could hear the shifter in the walls.

He was being watched. His intention all along.

When David was satisfied he had prepared the body as best he could, he opened the chute. After an awkward moment and a bit of cursing, he managed to get the man into the dispenser tunnel without causing any damage, to either the body or the ship. Just before he pressed the dispense button, he recited something his mother had once said to him when he was young and with all the dazzle of what lay ahead in life fresh in his eyes, "We are all made of star stuff. Stuff of legend and of the ages. The physical may be fleeting, but the soul is as eternal as the majesty and beauty of the universe. Do whatever you do in peace. Be whatever you can be with love."

David pressed the button. With a clank and whoosh of airlocks opening and closing, the body was sent into the endless black of space. At least the man had a service. Sure, he wasn't surrounded by his loved ones, but he would be remembered so long as David's heart still beat, anyway.

Wiping away an errant tear, he left the chute room and proceeded toward his bedroom. The urge for rest overwhelmed him all of a sudden. He remembered he was at the tail end of a twelve hour shift. To put it in simple terms. He was beat.

"Miranda, I'm hitting the hay."

"That was beautiful what you did, David."

"What I'm going to do next will be even more beautiful."

“What do you mean?”

David hoped by taking care of the man, that his shifter lover would see he didn't mean him any harm. Although, deep down he doubted it. The creature was probably more interested in getting away from any human, friend or otherwise. When they arrived on *Oberon*, the shifter would more than likely disappear, never to be seen again. To return to being just a whisper in the market places of the outer rim worlds. He sighed. A pity really. David would have liked to have got to know the being. There would have been a story to tell, no doubt.

“I'm going to have a nice long shower.”



## Chapter Six

Hot water cascaded over David's weary body. He immersed his face in the stream, letting himself become carried away by the sheer joy of being cleaned of the day's grime. With soap lathered on a flannel, he washed himself. Careful and deliberate, he caressed his weary muscles, rubbed his skin, enjoyed having his own touch across his body.

He dropped the flannel and soap, favouring skin on skin contact.

Soon his hands were at his genitals. He smiled. The water added to the sensation, lubricated his actions, and again, as gentle as he dared, he touched himself, made himself stir. He placed a finger into the mouth of his foreskin, touching his head, sending shivers of delight up his spine and throughout his body. He moaned, working that finger in little circles over his piss slit and down to his coronal rim and frenulum, all the while keeping his foreskin unretracted. He loved the

sensation of fingering himself in such a way, his long foreskin stretched right up to the second knuckle of the finger he used to pleasure himself. He knew how he liked it, and in no time at all, he had a full on raging boner. Veins bulging, head as engorged as it ever would be. He smiled. This was beautiful. This was perfect. A man could be his own best friend.

Good thing his foreskin was long, because even in his erect state and horny as hell, he was able to continue his fingering action. His own movement over his head gained in speed and intensity with each passing moment. He closed his eyes tight. His balls tightened and the pangs of ecstasy rose with that wonderful and familiar delight.

With his other hand, he jerked off, still careful not to retract. The inside of his foreskin was just as sensitive and pleasure giving as his ripe head. Both being stimulated in combination was mind blowing, and within several pleasurable heightened heartbeats, shudders of delight consumed him.

In the end, he had to pull his finger out, for his skin was too sensitive even for his own touch. He shuddered some more. His fingers and toes tingled, and nothing would stop him from climax. He was seconds away. His lips, moistened from the water that cascaded all over him, quivered.

David groaned as white, hot ribbons of cum spurted out from his bulging cock. His stomach

quivered, his mind overwhelmed by the rush of everything that was an orgasm. Over and over the shower wall was sprayed with his own joy. He was unable to think of anything, do anything, but continue to revel in the rapture his own touch had created.

When spent, he sunk to the floor.

The hot water soothed him again. He was content. Pleased with the universe and everything in it right now while he was at the height of his euphoria and before he came down from his climatic high. He had a good self session, the warm flush still in his cheeks. Perhaps the presence of the shifter on board got him worked up even more than usual.

Slow and sure, he stood and continued to wash himself. He retracted his foreskin as far as it would go, making sure he soaped there to clean out his efforts. Nothing worse than dick cheese left to go stale between showers. Besides, getting into the shower was meant to clean, not get one dirtier.

When done, and when he was about to shut off the water, in his peripheral vision he caught sight of something move. Something that was in his bedroom. Something that most certainly wasn't Miranda's image on any floating screen.

He stepped out of the cubicle, not bothering with a towel.

The shifter he had tried to get out of the ship's wainscoting without too much success up until

this point stood in his bedroom. He was in human form and cowering, shivering from what David could only assume was fright. Or was that how he stood and behaved normally? He couldn't tell. He couldn't help but notice that the shifter was still naked. Not that such a thing should be a surprise. The creature was naked the last time he caught sight of him. But this time it was different. This time David was naked, too. Was Miranda right? Was the sight of David's dick enough to entice the creature out from the dark hidden places?

"Naru," the shifter said with a gentle voice, soft and timid.

For the longest moment David was unable to form any coherent thoughts, let alone speak any words that wouldn't sound like gibberish. He had to admit, in its human form, the shifter was attractive. Finally, and with his throat tightening all of a sudden, he said, "So you wait until I'm in the buff before you come out, hey?" He then added, "Um...are you, Naru?"

The man nodded and much to David's delight, his dick jiggled while he did so. A sight that was more enticing than he would have ever imagined, for now he could get a good look at the shifter. He was skinny, no doubt, bones visible at his hips and ribs. His eyes were large and the deepest brown, so deep that getting lost in the man's stare would be an easy exercise. Then there were his genitals. He wasn't hung like a horse, more in proportion to

the rest of his body, which was, for lack of a better word, petite. Cute would be a nice word, too.

David smiled. The shifter had a foreskin that wrinkled up near his head, making the mouth unnoticeable compared to the rest of what he was endowed with. It was in that moment that he thought about touching him, running his hands over his perfect alabaster skin. To touch that foreskin, place his finger inside to massage his sensitive head just like he did to himself. Then he would cup those beautiful little red balls that hung nice between his skinny legs. That would be something David wouldn't mind at all. But would the shifter want that? He shook those thoughts from his mind. The man's lover has just passed away. Why would he be interested in anything like that so soon after such a tragedy?

"I *am* Naru. And a man who is uncovered cannot hide malicious intent."

David blinked. "I take it that's why you waited until I was naked. So I couldn't have anywhere to hide a gun or a knife. So I couldn't hurt you. Am I correct?"

The shifter stepped forward, ginger in his movements. "You are a human male named David?"

"Yeah, I'm David. And I think you can see I'm a *male*."

"My foundation was treated well by you. I thank you for that."

"No worries. Say, forgetting for a moment about how you got on board and everything else, how did he die?"

Naru looked down, his gaze no longer fixed on David's body. It was only with that change of gesture did he realise that the man was checking him out, too. Seemed there was an interest there. "I...I murdered him."

## Chapter Seven

His interest in the shifter quelled, like cold water thrown onto naked flames. David reached for a towel, covering himself. "You what?"

Naru looked David in the eye. Again, he stepped forward. This time with more confidence. David stepped back. With conviction and sadness beyond words, Naru said, "Let me explain the breadth of my actions and the consequences that will live with me for the rest of my natural life."

"You'd better explain, and it better be good. Otherwise you're going in the freezer and left for the authorities on *Oberon*."

"It would be what I deserve."

Miranda appeared on screen. "Oh, I see you caught him with the right bait there, David."

"Shut up, Miranda," David barked. "Leave us. I think there is a bit to sort out here before anything more is done." She disappeared.

The shifter nodded. "I would like some

water...and possibly some food. I haven't eaten since we left the slave markets of *Ardross Major*."

David couldn't help but feel sorry for the shifter, even though he had admitted to killing a man. A calm came over him. He went to the dispenser and ordered a peanut and pickle sandwich on extra crusty rye, lashings of mayo and a glass of water. The sandwich was his favourite. The water was requested.

He grabbed the plate and glass that materialised at the dispensing portal. The towel had slipped off him. He didn't care. His mind was on other matters and being naked wasn't one of them. Perhaps there was something more to the whole situation. That thought clung to him while he handed the meal to the shifter. Then again, what could justify murder? "Sit down over there." He gestured toward a chair near his bed. "You don't look like a killer to me. I've been to all corners of this galaxy, and I've seen some pretty crazy shit. You don't have the right body language for someone who has killed. But you'd better tell me everything real quick. These next few moments will decide what I'm going to do with you."

"Dante and I were running away from the Schism." Tears welled in Naru's eyes and even though he turned his face away, taking small nibbles at the sandwich, his voice gave away his emotional state. "Dante...was my...foundation."



David nodded. "I got that." He sat down on his bed, close to the chair but far enough away so that he was out of arms reach.

Naru looked into David's eyes once more. His lips were trembling, stained with his tears. "The Schism have been hunting shifters for an eternity. To them we are against nature's laws and need to be destroyed. They are ruthless...able to merge into the fabric of the universe, the dark places where matter is unseen. They walk unnoticed and unknown, but they are always there, hunting us. We have been scattered, our homeworld destroyed by their ruthless agenda. My people so few we have fallen into nothing more than legend now."

"So what went wrong...with Dante, I mean?" Unbeknownst to David he had shuffled closer to the shifter. Sitting on the edge of the bed, he wanted to reach out and comfort the man, reassure him. But he resisted. He had to know more. How could he have killed?

"A while ago, Dante and I decided that we'd be far better off as slaves, at another's whim, our bodies no longer our own, than spending our days in fear and without a home. All we wanted was to be together in peace. All we wanted was to be in each other's arms until we both grew old. The idea of being under another's care seemed hopeful at the time." He looked down, sadness dripped off his words like the tears that fell onto his stomach.

"But when we arrived on *Ardross Major*, and I shifted so I looked like Dante's twin, the attention on us was more than we could have imagined."

"They began fighting over you both, didn't they?" David knew the mentality of the market place. A shiny new toy, slave twins in this case, would have made whoever secured them rich beyond their wildest dreams.

Naru frowned, a flash of anger crossing his face. "Yes. But one man, one of the more established and *trusted* traders in the market place, approached during the tussle that resulted from our presence in the buying ring. He silenced all the others and put in an offer for us that no one else could match." Naru's tears flowed freely.

David wished he could kiss them off his weary face and wipe his bloodshot eyes. But again he resisted.

"Dante had his doubts," Naru continued. "He told me that this trader was giving him a bad feeling. I ignored him, saying that everything would be all right once we were bought and in our new home."

David swallowed hard. He had heard stories of how slaves were treated, and not one of them was good. They were worked to the bone, both in and out of the bedroom. Most never lived more than a few years. To chose that sort of life could only be done out of fear, sheer and absolute. The Schism must be terrifying. "But that trader wasn't very

trustworthy at all, was he?"

"No. He was in league with the Schism. They had enticed him with riches unimaginable, from dark matter stones to technology that could make him one of the most powerful men in the universe. The Schism don't care about such things as wealth. They only have their holy cause...to get rid of us."

"What happened next?"

Dante and I managed to run away while the trader was preoccupied with the other slave boys he had purchased that day. A couple of them he fancied himself, and they were put to work for his own pleasure. Which was good for us. It gave us the chance we needed. We ran into the loading bay near the market and hid in a container that was being loaded into your ship." Naru's shoulders heaved and he covered his face, hiding his pain. Through all his emotion, the agony of his loss manifesting itself as he recalled the story, he added, "Dante was so scared. He was...he was unable to control his breathing...unable to remain quiet. I could see the Schism approach us through the gaps in the wood, led on by the trader who had caught on to our absence. They searched everywhere, coming closer and closer to us. In my fear of being discovered, in my absolute state of panic, I covered Dante's mouth to try and...I only wanted him to be quiet...just for a minute. But I must have kept my hand there too long.

He...he...passed away...in my arms. He couldn't breathe. I...I killed him. I killed him with my own hands, David. I am worse than the Schism. Dante trusted me. He put his life in my hands and I failed him. I failed him."

"Oh dear God," David said, tears welling in his eyes, too.

## Chapter Eight

David embraced Naru. He brushed his hand over his hair, sweeping his fringe away from his eyes so he could stare deep into them without obstruction. "I know you didn't mean to kill Dante. I believe you were so scared you wouldn't have felt him struggle."

"I was so scared." That look of pure conviction, of profound sorrow and eternal love he had for his foundation, Dante, was reflected back.

Something stirred feelings within him he thought he lost when Jonny ran off with Chaz all those years ago. "I'm so sorry," he whispered.

Naru held David in return. His touch was warm and welcome around his waist. His breath tickled his chest as he came closer. David stomach quivered in delight. The sensation of having a man touch him would be enough to keep his dreams occupied for months. "I loved him so much....still love him so much."

Before David could reply, and before he became

lost in Naru's presence, revel in the warmth from his body that would soon consume his senses, his wonderful musk satiating his thoughts, he pulled away. David found himself in a difficult situation. He was attracted to the shifter. His caring nature, the sacrifice he made to try and gain a better life for himself and Dante, made him noble in his mind. *Nothing more alluring than a man of noble intentions.* Naru was beautiful, plain and simple. David was smitten.

He could see himself getting involved on all levels, emotional, physical and spiritual, with Naru. Falling for him so easily. But he couldn't think like that. He couldn't take advantage of anyone, no matter how beautiful inside and out, in their hour of need. "I think you should finish eating up." He cleared his throat and returned to the bed, eyeing the nibbled at sandwich by Naru's feet, placed there before they touched. "You are welcome to stay for as long as you need to."

David got up, retrieving the towel and wrapping himself in it as quick as he could. He had to calm down, cool his thoughts. He knew it would have been a matter of seconds before his feelings for Naru were visible for all to see, both sexual and otherwise. That tingle in his stomach reminded him that his hormones were surging through his system, an erection the result. Not a good look trying to comfort someone with a raging hard on dripping with pre cum and

obvious intention.

He turned toward the shower cubicle. Fresh clothes hung on the rail. That was what he would do. Get dressed. No use looking at Naru. All naked and cute and beautiful and sexy and...oh fuck. That wasn't the way to think at all. Damn it. Such thoughts were worse at a time like this. David licked his lips, swallowed hard and grabbed his clothes.

When he had clambered into his underwear and jumpsuit doing the best he could to stuff his growing cock into the garments without looking like he was desperate or horny or both, Miranda appeared on screen. "David, I apologise for disturbing you, but there is an anomaly up ahead that I think you should see." She looked him up and down. "I see that bait you used to catch our shifter friend is still very much alive and well. And here I was thinking only your hand could entice it into action."

David blushed. He flicked his gaze over to Naru. The man was busy eating, his stare distant. He seemed oblivious to everything around him. Good. Perhaps he hadn't heard Miranda. "Oh, very funny. Now what's this about an anomaly? I don't have time for games."

He couldn't help but feel for Naru. The shifter's face was stained with tears and he was hunched over, his sadness weighing him down. David desired to wash him clean, rub every part of his

body while kissing his plump lips and showing him just how much he cared for him now that he was alone...just like he was.

"This isn't a game, David. There is something in front of us and you need to see it. You can massage Naru with your dick later. I know you want to."

"Take that back!" David glared at her. "Naru has just lost someone he loves. What sort of man do you take me for?"

Miranda didn't answer. Which was just as well. David would have switched her off for a few days had she spoken another word. He had done it before, and he wouldn't hesitate to do it again.

When he passed Naru, he said, "I'm just going up to the cockpit to check something out. You can hang here or come along. It's up to you, okay?"

"I will stay for a moment."

David left his bedroom, heading up the corridor toward the cockpit. He realised that Miranda's acidic tongue had deflated his erection. At least he was now comfortable in his clothes. But she was right. He did want to be with Naru, on every level one man could be with another.

"So what are you going to do?" Miranda asked when David entered the room, the view of the universe the first thing that struck him, giving him a sense of awe no matter how many times he saw it.

He sat at his chair. One of the many screens



inside the cockpit floated in front of him. He pushed a few buttons and slid his fingers across panels. "What do you mean?" But he knew what she meant. She was asking about Naru and how he felt about him.

"Naru needs you, and you need him. Can I spell it out any clearer than that?"

Before David could answer, formulate in his mind how he was going to give her one of his famous off-handed responses, the view of the anomaly filled the screen. He hadn't seen anything like it in all his life.

The anomaly was massive. It had form but didn't have form. It radiated energy but drew in energy. He shook his head, unable to believe the readings scrolling in front of him alongside the image. They all contradicted themselves. "What am I looking at, Miranda? These readings from the scanner are crazy. Or are you having me on?"

"Believe me, I'm not having you on at all. I would much rather watch you suck that adorable cock of Naru's than deal with this."

David stood up, deciding to look out the window. A cloud was all he could see. But like the readings from the computer, what he saw made no sense. It was dark and light and moving and still all at once. One thing he did know, the freighter was heading straight for it. "I am beginning to agree with you, Miranda."

David turned to the controls. In the doorway of

the cockpit, Naru stood. His face was a mask of fear. He mouthed many words, but no sound emanated from his lips.

“What’s the matter, Naru?” Miranda asked.

Finally, one word blurted from him. A word that struck fear into David on a level he couldn’t fathom, so profound and deep he ached from within.

“Schism.”

## Chapter Nine

“We need to take evasive action,” David commanded, forcing his stare away from Naru. “We have to get the freighter out of here.”

“I can’t.” Miranda seemed distracted for a moment. When she gave David her full attention once more, she added, “The Schism have a hold on us I don’t understand. I’ve tried to break free, but it’s like we are being locked to them on a quantum level. I can’t fight against that sort of glue, so to speak. Believe me.”

David returned his attention to Naru. What he saw struck dread into his heart.

Naru had released his bladder, a puddle of urine at his feet. His fear had manifested itself in the worst way possible, his facial features macabre, his skin drained of blood. The shifter fled from the cockpit. “It...was...was all for...nothing.”

David sprang into action, catching the pilot’s

chair on his thigh and forced to grapple for one of the handholds dotted around the walls to prevent himself from falling. "Wait, Naru!"

The shifter charged down the corridor. Where he was going to hide, David had no idea, but he was more determined than ever to catch the man before he got lost in the cargo hold. "Dante died for...nothing!" Naru screamed over and over.

David caught him, grabbing him by his arms. With swift movement, he forced Naru to look at him, deep into his eyes. Tears were there. There was also that ever present fear. "Naru! Listen to me. This isn't going to solve anything. Naru!"

The shifter was silent, his stare beyond David and focused on a place only Naru's mind could quantify. David shook him with as much force as he dared, yet at the same time trying to be as careful as he could. He didn't want to hurt the man, but he also wanted him to snap out of it. If anyone could offer any suggestions as to how they could get away from the Schism, it was the shifter. He had been doing it all his life.

With lips trembling and plenty of movement but no sound eventuating, Naru finally mouthed words that struck even more dread into David's heart. "Dante. My beloved Dante. He's gone and now...now I will be too—you will be, too. We sacrificed everything for nothing. Nothing."

David moved closer to Naru. "We have to find a way of getting away from the Schism. If there's

anything you can suggest that will increase our chances, I would like to hear it, okay?"

"There is nothing."

"Don't you dare give up on me now. I know you have lost your foundation, but know this, Naru, I care for you, too. I care and I don't want to go out without a fight."

A flicker of hope sparked in the shifter's eyes. "You care...for me?"

David licked his lips. He had opened the gates of his true thoughts and feelings and now wasn't the time to back track. "Yes. I care for you very much. Now get your arse back into the cockpit and help out Miranda. She's a pain but she needs your help. Clear?"

Naru nodded slowly. "You care for me?"

David was so close to the shifter that the most natural thing to do was embrace him. Should he be so forward so soon? Or had his admittance hastened the inevitable? "I care for you, I told you that." With those words, he did what his heart desired.

They embraced.

David's mind swam with delight. To have Naru close to him, to have him accept his action more to the point, was the most positive thing that had happened in a long time. Then another thought struck him. The Schism. How could moments of joy be shared on the deepest possible level with such a threat looming ahead? David pulled away

from Naru, something he didn't really want to do. "I think we'd better get back to Miranda. Otherwise that hug may be our last." Had David pushed the boundaries of trust too far by letting Naru know that he cared for him? Had he ruined any chance of a relationship?

Naru smiled. Tears continued to trickle down to his chin, but his fear no longer seemed to consume him. There was hope striking light into the darkness. "There is a way."

"Excellent."

David reached down and grabbed Naru's hand. His skin was clammy. Together they went to the cockpit. When inside the control area proper, he offered the pilot's seat to the shifter. He sat down with an enthusiasm David hadn't seen from the man before. "Miranda, we have to get away from the Schism, and I think Naru here may have an idea."

"Let's hear it. I'm all out of ideas on how to deal with something that isn't reading properly on my sensors."

Naru leaned forward. David's gaze wandered toward the man's genitals, he couldn't help it. The shifter's dick had perked up, a natural thing for a man to have happen when he was in the seated position. He licked his lips. That cute foreskin sure was enticing, all crumpled up and begging to be fondled. Even his little balls, red and ripe, looked as though they would tighten with the slightest

touch. He had to force himself not to stare. He also had to think of other things, otherwise his own cock would be more than perky, it would be aching with intent. David forced himself to look at Miranda. That would cool his thoughts.

The shifter stared at one of the floating screens that projected the image of the anomaly outside on it. "The Schism can travel within and manipulate dark matter and dark energy. That is what you are seeing, that substance interacting with the normal universe as they manifest themselves for a strike against us. When they are fully materialised, that is when they will attack. We don't have much time."

"Dark matter?" Miranda chimed. "Hold on a minute. I am computing."

David came around to look at the screen proper. Something that also diverted his attention away from Naru. Thank goodness. "Just hurry the fuck up, Miranda. That thing looks a lot bigger than before, and I have a feeling the Schism don't seem to be the kind of people to sit around and wait for their enemies to come up with a defence against them."

While David examined the screen, Naru reached up and grabbed his hand. The shifter's touch was just as welcome as it was back in the hallway. David tingled inside. Then, with gentle care, he rubbed the top of Naru's palms with his thumbs, something Jonny used to do when he sat

with him while they watched vidficks together.

"You followed me," Naru said. "I thank you for that."

Before David could answer, and take the next plunge and plant sensual kisses onto the shifter's lips, he caught himself again and stood up straight, breaking their hold. Now wasn't the time. Then again, perhaps it was the time? David was confused. He wanted Naru. But at the same time he didn't want to hurt him in any way. Perhaps there will never be a time for them to be together. How long did the fires of love for a partner need to be extinguished before a new flame could be ignited? David offered a meek smile as compensation to his actions.

"Don't mention it. I only wanted to make sure you were all right."

Naru looked deep into his eyes like he always did, and said, "You know we can't truly break free from the Schism's grasp. And even if we do, they will walk in the dark places for an eternity to get to me. They can bend the laws of the universe to gain their will if that is what's needed. This ship is nothing, a speck of dust on the bowl of matter that contains all the galaxies in all the cosmos. And we can be wiped away with a mere thought by their malevolent intellect."

David said, his voice choked by his emotions he couldn't control, of conflicting thoughts for how he felt about Naru and the situation around him,



"If there's a way, no matter how small, Miranda will find it now that she knows what she's dealing with. She may be a pain in the arse, but she's got what it takes."

"How did it come to the Schism hunting the shifters, Naru?" Miranda asked. She was working furiously on many, many calculations. All the screens in the cockpit, floating and fixed, were scrolling equations and numbers at lightning speed. He knew she was asking such a thing for one thing and one thing only. To distract them from what was going on outside as the Schism drew them in.

Naru said, "Long ago the shifters came to the world where there was a great and ancient race. A race that had helped seed the rest of the galaxy in our region of space. They were advanced, and in a way, the most amazing we had ever encountered. At first, all was well, we joined with them, many becoming our foundations."

David cleared his throat. "Why do your people need a foundation, Naru?"

Miranda tutted. "Let the man answer one question at a time. You can have him all to yourself later."

"Miranda!" David felt his cheeks flush. How could he have a decent conversation with a sex mad, sarcastic computer listening in on every word?

"I will answer all questions, not a problem at

all,” Naru said, leaning back in the chair, exposing all of his perfect body for David to feast his gaze on. “You are a special man and your kindness has awoken a new hope within me. If we do get out of this mess, and I really hope we do, then I would like to get to know you better. If you don’t mind...that is.”

“You what?” David asked.

“He said he wouldn’t mind if you fucked him good and hard when we are free from the Schism. Now can we get on with this, please? The testosterone level in here is almost unbearable. I don’t want my circuits clogged by raging hormones while I try and figure this out.”

## Chapter Ten

Under his breath, but loud enough so Miranda could hear, David said, "I'll deal with you later, Miranda. Perhaps turning you off for a few days will cool that smarmy attitude of yours."

Naru stood up. "The computer you call Miranda is right. I do want you. I have from the moment you showed your true intentions by treating Dante with the respect he deserved."

David felt himself stir again. Visions flashed in his mind, of Naru writhing underneath him on his bed, gasping for air in sheer ecstatic delight while he entered him over and over. Of how the shifter's long fingered hands at his back while he opened his legs wider and wider, begging for more. David blinked in an attempt to quell his thoughts of such images. "Gee, thanks. I appreciate that – and don't you say a word, Miranda. But isn't it a bit too soon...after you know what...to be thinking of someone else?"

Naru let out a gentle chuckle, but one filled

with nerves. His gaze never too far away from the image of the Schism. "You will understand soon enough." He then turned toward one of the screens where Miranda was visible. "What did you mean when you said David had used the right bait, Miranda? Is it something to do with the Schism? Do you have a plan?"

Miranda giggled. "No. It hasn't got anything to do with the Schism. But you are right about one thing. I do have a plan, thanks to you."

David turned his attention to her, too. "What is it?"

"One thing at a time, dear David. Continue with your story, Naru. I am most interested. I just have a couple of calculations to finalise, and I should be done. Not a moment too soon, either from what I can see. The Schism are close now." David could confirm her words by looking out the window. The strange nothing but something cloud filled the view.

Naru cleared his throat and grabbed David's hand once more. Again that tingle shot through his body, and again sensual thoughts crammed his mind. But this time he didn't pull away. This time he let the man's touch become the enjoyment that it should be. "There were those on the planet that didn't like what the shifters had done. They didn't like that some of their people had become our foundation—and, David, we need a foundation so we can return to human form after we have

shifted. That is why I need you so soon after my loss. Yes, Dante is gone. I will always feel that guilt weighed on my heart. I will always love him, too. But I also need to function as the being I am. I need a foundation. It's as simple as that." Naru squeezed David's hand.

"I think I understand." David came to terms with the fact that he was probably Naru's new foundation. What did a foundation have to do? Or more importantly, how could he, as that foundation, protect Naru?

Naru said, "But the race we have no name for because this all happened so long ago and there are too few of us left to pass on the knowledge, decided that what we were doing was unnatural and disgusting. They formed a religious cult, a split from their society. We called that group the Schism. Since then we have been slaughtered, scattered throughout the universe to try and get away from their *cleansing* as they have called it."

"I see. A foundation is sort of like a safety line for you, isn't it?" Miranda asked.

Naru nodded. "Yes. There is nothing sinister about it at all. If you believe the Schism, you would think us as corruptors of intelligent life. We are far from that. All we want is to be loved and to share that love back. That is what we are. Without another foundation, I won't be able to shift at all, reverting back to my rodent form. Without a foundation, I can never love or experience love. If I

can't do that, what is the point of living? Shifters are a sensual race. We need contact of another." Naru smiled at David. "Besides, I don't want to remain a mouse for the rest of my days."

Miranda harrumphed, but smiled. "Even I got it wrong. Just goes to show that legends are just that. Here was me thinking that the foundation shifters needed was like an anchor, someone you used to help you shift. How wrong was I? Oh, and my plan has been confirmed by my calculations. I do think we have a chance at getting away from the Schism."

David let go of Naru. "Well, don't keep us all in suspense. What is this plan of yours?"

"We're going to purge the engine of nuclear fuel and use the magnetic constrictors as a sort of guidance mechanism for a weapon I just came up with. A weapon that can destroy dark matter and neutralise dark energy. How clever am I, hey?"

Naru shifted his weight, letting go of David. "What will such a weapon require to be built? Will we have enough time?" The shifter's voice was filled with the same fear he had when he first entered the cockpit. His eyes grew wide again, too.

Miranda offered one of her smug smiles. "It won't take much time at all. And it will ensure that the dark matter vehicle they are using will be rendered useless by a sudden burst of neutrino energy."

David couldn't believe his ears. "Easy for you to say. Haven't you forgotten the simple and rather important fact that doing such a thing will also render *us* useless? We'll be dead in space, Miranda."

"And that we'll be burned up in the star's corona because the freighter's shielding will not function without the nuclear energy you have dispensed toward the dark matter vehicle," Naru offered in support of David's concern. Something he noticed straight away and liked.

"Do you have a better idea?" Miranda said, pouting her lips. "I've come up with a great plan, making sure I kept you both occupied as well, and all you can do is rain on my parade. I'd like to see you calculate the configurations of a neutrino weapon while holding a small talk conversation."

"I never said you weren't brilliant, Miranda," David said. "I was just pointing out that doing such a thing will leave us vulnerable if the weapon doesn't work, that's all."

"I *am* brilliant and don't you forget it. Being a woman I have to be. You men only think of your stomachs and what it will take to get laid."

"What else is there to worry about?" David said with a wry smile. "Look the plan is a good one, Miranda. But how will we get away once the Schism have been neutralised?"

"If one of the Schism knows we are here, they would have alerted others. If we neutralise this

one, another will come," Naru interjected.

"I will just have to send out a distress signal and hope someone picks it up."

"We're damned if we do and we're damned if we don't." David placed his hands firm onto his hips. He didn't like the idea of being stuck between a rock and a hard place. "Surely there must be some other way. What else can affect dark matter? What else can we do, even if it's to stall them so we can get away? C'mon, think, Miranda. I need to have something better than a no win situation."

"There is nothing else, David. I have run all the calculations. We must reconfigure the magnetic field so that we can create a burst of photon energy toward the Schism ship. I can use the star nearby to enhance the weapon, too, but that's it. That's our chance. Take it or leave it."

Naru cleared his throat. "There is one other way."

There was silence in the cockpit. All attention on Naru. David came to the shifter. "You better not be thinking what I think you're thinking."

"You can give them what they want."

David shot Naru a glance. "No fucking way. I just knew you were going to say that. I just fucking knew it. Over my dead body Naru. Look, if I'm going to be your foundation, it's up to me to make sure you're safe. Giving you to the Schism isn't in that vocabulary, simple as that."



Miranda cleared her throat. Not that she needed to, she was a projection on a screen, but the effect got David's attention. "I think Naru is right."

"Are you fucked in the head, too? No way. No way is Naru giving his life to save mine."

"Shut up and listen for five minutes, David. We don't have much time," Miranda said, her voice as stern as any he had heard. "The Schism are attacking our hull, de-ionizing it for whatever reason. Soon we will be swallowed up by them and no amount of neutrino energy will have any effect. My point is, I can configure the weapon and give them Naru at the same time, but you must trust me."

David's eyelids narrowed. "How are you going to achieve all that?"

"Do you trust me?"

## Chapter Eleven

David nodded. “You may be a complete pain, a pervert and one of the most sarcastic bitches I have ever known, but you’ve never let me down. I trust you, Miranda. I trust you with my life – with our lives.”

“Excellent. Now, you and Naru climb into one of the *Existence Spheres* you are holding in the cargo bay. When I deploy the weapon, I will set the freighter to explode, too. You will both survive inside the sphere, but the Schism will be destroyed. Also, anyone looking on will believe that no one could have survived such a disaster. They will not detect the *Existence Sphere* because it will be something they won’t expect. Your life signs and the signature of the sphere itself will be erased by its phase shielding. Oh, and set the controls to head for the fourth planet from this star. It’s class M and fit for human habitation. All right?”

Naru nudged David. “I like that plan. We

should do that."

A loud bang sounded, shook the foundations of the cockpit. One of the fixed screens fell off a control panel, crashing onto the floor and smashing to pieces. "You both better hurry. They will rip us apart to get to Naru. We must act soon." Her gaze was stern for a moment before she added, "Oh, and, Naru, just so you know, Dante didn't die from lack of oxygen. I have completed my analysis of his body I scanned earlier, linking in with my medical data base. He died of fright. His heart gave way."

Naru nodded, and from what David could tell, a great wave of relief washed over him. He smiled, but simply replied, "Thank you."

That was David's cue. He grabbed Naru's hand. "Do whatever you have to, Miranda." Again there were more loud crashes and groans of stress from the hull.

"I will."

"But what about you?" David asked, true concern soaked in his voice. "I ain't going anywhere without my pain in the arse by my side. We've been through too much together."

Miranda smiled. "I will transfer my protocols into the *Existence Sphere's* computer you choose. It will be cramped for me, but at least I can carry on. No go, get that sexy arse of yours to safety. Naru's, too. I'd become a molten mess on my motherboard if anything happened to either of

you. So move it.”

Without any more words, David ran. He ad squeezed Naru’s hand tighter, rushing out of the cockpit as fast as his legs could carry him, the cargo bay his goal. When outside the control room and in sight of the metal stairs, he stopped dead in his tracks by a view that struck fear throughout his being.

Naru gasped.

The access to the cargo bay had disappeared. The stairs were nothing more than a crumpled pile of steel on the floor below. Many of the crates had been destroyed, too. Hopefully not any that contained the *Existence Spheres*. David swallowed hard. Naru held him tighter as the hallway vibrated and more sounds of the freighter being torn apart rang out. Debris rained down onto the crates, some support beams. All around them, parts of the freighter peppered the floor. The sound was unbearable. The Schism had begun their attack in earnest.

“What do we do now?” Naru yelled.

“We take the access lift, that’s what.”

David pulled Naru once more. This time he had to get to the back of the living quarters where the access lift was located. He hoped that hadn’t been rendered useless from the attack otherwise it would mean a steep descent on hands and knees through ventilation conduits. Something he didn’t fancy at the best of times.

Onwards they ran, hand in hand and toward one goal – getting the hell off a freighter that was in the clutches of the Schism. Along with the ship being torn apart around them, the hull on one side of the cargo bay had phased out of existence. The dark energy surrounding the Schism vehicle had touched the freighter. The normal matter that they were entombed within, protecting them from the vacuum of space, was being consumed inch by inch. David knew it would only be a matter of moments before the ship would be sent into oblivion. His heart pounded in his chest, loud in his ears.

Naru pulled his hand out of David's when the lift doors were in sight. The hallway was relatively clear of debris, the control lights still active. A small spark of hope ignited inside him. "Wait up, Naru." A part of the ceiling fell in front of him without warning. David tripped on it. To avoid a fall, he caught himself on the railing. He wiped his brow. "I'm not as agile as you."

"Hurry, David!" Naru was now well ahead. He could run fast. Then again, the whole situation did call for a herculean effort if they were to get off the ship alive.

David ran as hard as he could.

Naru was almost at the lift, about to reach out and press the panels, when a massive jolt shook the freighter. The ship seemed to scream. It was deafening. Even if David could react this time, the

sheer magnitude of the vibration meant that finding the cold, steel floor was his only option. He knocked his chin in the fall, unable to protect himself. He bit his tongue and a sharp pain and a coppery taste filled his mouth.

Staggering to his feet, cursing to himself for falling at a time like this, he was able to catch the instant when one of the support beams from the ceiling came crashing down. Right on top of Naru. Dust filled the hallway. He had no choice but to shield his eyes, wait a moment before he could proceed toward the carnage.

Finally, after what seemed an eternity, David stepped forward. He made sure his footing was as sure as it could be considering the violent shuddering of the ship's foundations got worse with each passing second. To make matters even more difficult, the lights had gone out, emergency bulbs all that illuminated the hallway.

David cursed over and over, staggering his way toward the beam across an increasingly unstable floor, spitting blood that had pooled in his mouth. Many times he had to grab at the railings. Many times he had been struck by parts of the ship. A few of them caused pain, making him wince, but he continued. He had to get to Naru.

When he arrived at the beam, lifting it was out of the question. The thing was solid reinforced steel and twice as long as he was high. Not that such knowledge stopped him from trying. He

pulled and pulled on the beam, trying to lift it even an inch. An inch could make all the difference. An inch could be all that Naru needed to scramble out from underneath it.

Moving the beam proved impossible.

David fell to his knees. Tears welled and soon hot trails of his sorrow, for having failed Naru, streamed down his cheeks. The ship continued to fall apart around him, a klaxon wailing like a reminder of his weakness at not being able to move the beam off his new friend. What was the point in trying to get off a doomed ship if there was nothing to live for once safety was achieved?

He let all his emotions come to the fore. David cried.

## Chapter Twelve

For how long David sat weeping at the pile of debris that had entombed Naru, he couldn't say. Minutes? Probably. One thing was certain, the ship wouldn't last much longer against the Schism attack. Even if Miranda could get the nuclear engines to dispense the weapon in time, the damage had been done. The *Ultramarine* wasn't space worthy any more. He'd lose his license anyway unless he could pay for the damage.

Which he couldn't.

Sure, he was paid well. But not even a bloke like him, one who never spent a cent on anything he didn't need, including anything he needed for pleasure, couldn't come up with the millions needed for a freighter that could carry half as much as this one. He would forever be in *Red Star Haulage's* debt. Not an idea he liked the sound of. His plan was to work for ten more years and then retire on some remote planet somewhere.



Miranda had told him tales of men who, through fate, had become stranded on desert islands. Sure, in those stories, the men wanted to get back to civilisation, but still, being left alone sounded good to him. No Chaz to take his dreams away. No one to bother him at all, in fact. One story in particular from old Earth was *Robinson Crusoe*. One of his favourites and one she read to him to help keep his dreams alive. To him, being stranded on a desert island sounded perfect.

He sighed. Dust and darkness surrounded him, closing in like the final veil of death over the remaining seconds of his life. He thought of those stories once more, sighing again. Ten years and he could have done it, too. He could have achieved his desert island dream.

Not now.

David wiped his eyes. Crying wasn't going to change anything. He might as well die with dignity, go down with his ship. As he was about to stand up, return to the cockpit and watch the show that was being played outside, a tug on his jumpsuits trouser leg stopped him short.

At his feet was a mouse.

That mouse morphed into Naru. A cheeky smile filled the man's face. "No time to be sitting down. We need to get out of here."

David hugged him. He couldn't help himself. To see the shifter in the dim light, looking like an angel of hope, all beautiful and sensual and

caring, was enough to cause such a reaction. He embraced him tight, as tight as he had held any man, letting his touch overwhelm him.

"I thought you were gone," David whispered.

"I will never leave you."

Their embrace was soon broken by another beam falling, crashing just a few feet away. The hallway shuddered again, as violent as the last huge hit from the Schism attack. This time, pipes burst, radiation proof panels flew from their housings and sparks ignited as electrical wiring shorted out. There was another vibration, one that roared throughout the ship from within, causing David and Naru to grab a hold of each other as they proceeded once more toward their goal.

"Miranda must have reconfigured the engines," David said, pressing the control panel at the lift doors. Thankfully, there was still power. "All she needs to do is deploy the weapon so we'll have a chance of getting off this wreck."

"I hope she can make it off the ship, too. I would miss her."

"Me too. But I really don't know if she can." Again sadness washed over him. He would imagine that controlling the weapon's fire for the best strike against the Schism would require her to be in the cockpit. That would then mean she may not be able to transfer her memory into the *Existence Sphere* in time. He swallowed hard.

The lift doors slid open.

Inside the compartment was a floating screen, one of the more advanced see-through borderless ones and with its own internal memory, too. Miranda's stern face was on the display. "Have you two finished feeling each other up yet? I mean seriously, David, I think it's time we got off this crate, don't you?"

David smiled. "Shut up, Miranda. Just lead the way."

The doors closed.

She smiled in return. "If you think I'd miss out on watching you two fuck each other's brains out once we get out of here, you're sadly mistaken. I transferred my personality protocols into this remote unit so I could come along for the ride. I don't know the storage capacity of an *Existence Sphere*. I didn't want to risk it."

Naru said, "I'm glad you are coming with us, Miranda."

David held his smile. "What about the rest of you?"

"That has to remain to make sure the Schism are sent to oblivion." She winced. "They are tough, but I have flown the freighter straight into their heart. The weapon is now active and I am waiting for the exact moment so I can use it for the best effect. Don't worry, David, I can still survive with the sixty percent I had to leave behind."

"So the forty percent you have left is the smart arse bitch part, right?"

"Spot on." She giggled. "Also, I have kept the part that likes to see your cock, too. I couldn't forget that part."

David laughed. "Glad to have you with us, Miranda."

She lost her smile for a brief moment. "But I won't be able to access any archives or do anything other than be my charming self that you see and hear right now. Making sure the Schism are going to be destroyed took up a lot of my memory."

David nodded. "I understand." He squeezed Naru's hand. For the first time in a long while, five years to be exact, he felt complete. Sure, he hadn't known Naru for long, but that didn't matter. The man had struck a chord inside him that few had rarely done. He was not only smitten, he had to admit that he was falling in love with the shifter.

The lift doors opened.

Beyond them, the cargo bay beckoned. But what greeted them wasn't what David would have expected in a million hauls over a million light years. Amongst the ruin of crates and wares, of the ship that had collapsed onto them, two figures stood.

They were unlike anything he had ever seen in his life, both there and not there at the same time. The Schism were shrouded figures of energy, formless, struggling to take cohesion in a material world. Yet, on closer inspection, they were also

bending reality around them as they stamped their will upon it. The floor where they stood melted and changed shape constantly, like matter on a quantum level was acting out all of its possibilities.

David swallowed hard again.

Naru went behind him. "They will take us," the shifter said, his voice strained with fear.

David stepped forward, anger filling his being. "Get the fuck off my ship, you cunts!" Even though saying such a thing wouldn't have made any difference to the Schism, it made him feel better all the same.

"We will kill the shifter," a voice boomed, reverberating throughout the cargo bay as loud and powerful as any of the physical attacks on the hull earlier. "We will kill those who harbour him. That is our purpose. That is our ordinance. That is how it is written."

## Chapter Thirteen

Miranda came forward. "Oh, I know you want to kill us and all, but unfortunately these two lads belong to me. And I don't know if you know this, but one pissed off computer deprived of any of her pleasures can be a real pain in the arse."

One of the Schism figures stepped forward. Matter around it began bending and twisting, wares smashed and crates splintered open. The ship groaned. "Technology from the infidels is not a concern of ours."

Miranda smiled, one David recognised straight away as one of those, I-am-about-to-wipe-the-chess-board-with-your-sorry-arse kind of looks. She had something up her sleeve. "Oh, I think it will be." A countdown then displayed on her screen. Seemed there was five seconds to whatever it was she had in mind. "I need to get my daily dose of naked man meat, and now that I have two of them for my enjoyment, nothing in this

universe is going to stop me from attaining that goal. I will soon be in electronic nirvana, my dear unfortunate friends, and I will not be deprived of entering its gates."

Four seconds.

"Nothing you can do or say will cease the inevitable," the figure who had come forward said, moving closer.

Three seconds.

"Then I won't say anything. Just watch."

Two seconds.

The figure halted. David got the sense the being was sniffing the air, if it was indeed air that they breathed. "You have done something to this vessels engine."

"Smart cookie, aren't you?" Miranda chimed.

One second.

The figure turned toward the other. But all too late.

A shock wave from the rear of the freighter swept over them. David felt nauseous for a moment, but other than that, wasn't affected by the energy the engine had released on Miranda's command. The effect on the Schism was something entirely different. They were vaporised, their hold on this reality broken.

"We must get into one of the *Existence Spheres*," Miranda yelled, her pretty face returning to the display. "I have made the freighter a sort of bitter pill. That's why I had to wait until the last possible

moment. I had to make sure we were in the heart of the Schism vehicle before I activated the neutrino stream."

"You're a genius, Miranda," Naru said.

"As I said to the Schism, you two owe me big time."

David looked into Naru's eyes. "I don't see a problem with that sort of arrangement. Do you, Naru?"

"Not at all."

"Now get your arses moving. We only have seconds before we'll all be contributing to the fire that will soon be burning around us. Dark matter and matter sort of don't like each other, you know."

A crate a few metres in front of David was their goal. It was large and branded with unmistakable markings. Some rich bastard had paid a small fortune for what was within the crate, but for the here and now, its contents could save all of their lives. Besides, insurance would make sure the buyer could compensate himself with slave boys from the *Mattock* markets on *Ardross Major* if the desire so struck him.

David ripped open the crate.

The *Existence Sphere* inside was anything but a sphere. It was a cube-like object, all dark and seamless, no discerning features other than the skin of black metal that greeted them.

"How do I open it?" David asked, panic



imbued in his words as the hull of the cargo bay became walls of fire. The destruction of the Schism vehicle was now at their doorstep and even Naru must have been frightened beyond words. He had shifted into a mouse, scurrying into David's front jumpsuit pocket.

"Touch the skin," Miranda commanded. "The sphere is DNA activated."

"If it is DNA activated, how is it that I can open it? Shouldn't it be tuned in to the owners—oh, yeah, it hasn't been delivered yet. The sphere would be on factory default settings, right?"

"When you get it, you get it."

He reached out and touched the skin of the sphere. It was warm to the touch, and a tingling sensation shot up through his fingers. A split second later, and not a moment too soon, the craft's hatch opened. A large opening that revealed the wonder within.

The sphere was impressive and he understood why the rich forfeit months of *Atlantica Dream* or a year's worth of slave boy purchases to get a hold of one. The technology within had to be seen to be believed. He could only describe it as something he had read about in science fiction novels Miranda read to him. All swish panels and not a button or switch anywhere. Everything done by touch.

David scrambled inside.

Once it was registered that he was secure, the

single pilot seat conforming to his shape, the *Existence Sphere* sealed itself. Not a moment too soon either from what David glimpsed of the outside world.

The cargo bay was no more.

Miranda came next to David. "I would hold onto something if I were you. This could be a bumpy ride as dark matter and normal matter collide all around us."

"What about you?"

But her actions answered his question. She slotted herself into a holding panel on one of the control banks in front of him. Without thinking, he reached for the safety belts, but before that, he made sure he zipped up his front pocket.

"You'll be safe in there for a moment, Naru."

A squeak was his reply.

David clicked on his belt. A screen appeared in front of him, one that revealed the turmoil Miranda had caused outside their safe haven. At first it was a mass of colours, like peering through an old fashioned kaleidoscope. But instead of shapes creating the pretty patterns, as would have been expected, the brilliance before him was made from what resulted when dark matter and matter merged in a storm of energy equivalent in power to any star being born or destroyed.

In fact, the ride wasn't as smooth as David would have imagined or hoped it would be. More to the point, what they were going through as the

universe outside boiled from the Schism's demise, was downright terrifying. They were shaken, spun and jolted. At one point a loud metallic clanking sound rang out.

"The hull can't cope with the forces outside, David!"

Then it happened.

The *Existence Sphere*, riding the waves of energy that pulsed around it, caught up in the forces beyond any that could be created by any man at any time in history, shuddered and groaned. The lights flickered and a warning alarm pierced the air.

"What the fuck!" David screamed as the world around him became shrouded in darkness and his disorientation consumed him. "Naru! Miranda! Fuck!"

Something struck him. He blacked out.

## Chapter Fourteen

A warm sensation on his cheeks woke David up from the dark, terrible place he had succumbed to. "Where am I?" he uttered with a voice far groggier than what he intended.

When his eyes came into focus, the pleasant sight of Naru's face filled his vision. The man was the one who had awoken him with his kiss. "I don't know the name of the place, but it is beautiful."

David sat up, using his elbows to steady himself. Naru must have dragged him from the wreck of the *Existence Sphere*. The object was half buried in the sand, parts of it strewn everywhere. The sand was of the most beautiful beach David had ever seen or imagined. The water beyond the pure white expanse was a brilliant blue, the waves adding a gentle, calming rhythm to the scene.

He had been placed under a tree, a blanket underneath him. The tree was like a palm but with more foliage. The leaves, frond-like and large,

shaded him from the sun well above them. To the left of the sun was a smear, a cloud of dark and light visible even in the bright daylight of this planet. David imagined that was what remained of his freighter and the Schism vehicle.

At that moment, he realised that Naru was holding him around his waist, looking deep into his eyes with wanting. He also noticed he was naked, too. His jumpsuit thrown without care about a metre from his feet. There were burn marks on the material.

What had happened inside the sphere while they descended to the planet, David dared not hazard a guess. One thing was certain, from all of the turmoil, from the destruction of his livelihood, something beautiful had bloomed. Sure, he had no way of getting off the planet unless someone landed on it, but he didn't care. He had found himself on an island in the embrace of a man he could easily love for the rest of his life. What else could he have wished for?

Naru ran his hand up toward David's chest, twirling his fingers in his patch of chest hair. "I think you should try and get up. I want to make sure you're all right. What do you think?"

David winced when a dull thump at the back of his head stopped him from answering straight away. He reached over to soothe the spot where he hurt, an action that made it worse. "Where's Miranda?"

"She's exploring the surrounds. The *Existence Sphere* is unusable for us, but the energy cells within it can power her for a very long time. She's happy."

"That's good. Nothing worse than a cranky computer." David tried to stand again. Once more that dull pain shot through him. "I think I'd better rest a bit more before I do anything strenuous."

"I will be here for you when you wake."

David woke many hours later. Or was it the next day? He couldn't tell, and really, he didn't care. The beach was still the same, beautiful and serene, the sky and ocean was as blue as ever and the trees that grew along the beach marking the start of the jungle, swayed in the breeze. Perfect.

The *Existence Sphere* had been dragged away. Naru was nowhere to be seen, so he decided to get up. Something that was far easier now that he had rested and had a chance to recover from the crash. When on his feet and happy he was naked, his body enjoying the tingle of wind and the heat beating down from the sun, he followed the trail left in the sand.

The path led him into a clearing. Naru was busy constructing a shelter from branches and leaves he had cut off some of the trees. He had done a magnificent job so far. A hut, rather large, could most certainly be made out. He assumed the remains of the sphere was inside Naru's creation.

As soon as David came into the clearing proper, Naru caught sight of him. A smile beamed from his lips. He dropped what he was doing and ran to him. "David, you're awake. Thank goodness." The shifter embraced him tight. Their genitals touched, an unavoidable consequence of their close contact. David's stomach tingled. A new feeling rose up inside him. He felt a yearning. "You must be hungry," Naru added, bringing him back to the moment.

"How long was I out?"

"About a week, I think. Although, I am losing count of the days, to be honest. Miranda and I took turns watching you and feeding you, making sure you were all right. There was a med-kit in the sphere, so we could inject you with nourishment intravenously."

"I didn't see Miranda."

"She would have been there. I think she got a bit upset when I...well, lets just say a couple of nights ago I couldn't keep my feelings bottled up any more. I needed some time alone and she wanted to watch. I wouldn't have minded under normal circumstances, but for my first time relieving myself without...you...around...I wanted to be alone."

David offered a flash of a smile. "I understand. And yeah, that would have pissed her off. But hey, she'll get over it."

"I think she will."

"You sure have been busy." He glanced over Naru's shoulders toward the hut.

Naru let his embrace go, still holding his smile. It was plain to see his touch upon Naru had also affected the shifter's desires. His cock was now semi erect, the mouth of his foreskin finally visible as his skin tightened. "I have built it for us. Come and see."

A shiver of delight coursed through him when Naru grabbed his hand. Was now the right time to consummate his feelings for the shifter? He swallowed hard, his desires overwhelming all of his thoughts. Of course it was. Naru had admitted just then that he had jacked off thinking of him. What other logical conclusion could be drawn from his words.

The hut was one large room that featured a wooden table, two chairs, and bed with many lights powered by energy cells above it. A couple of emergency blankets covered the bed, one Naru went straight to, lying down on it. The smile he offered more than inviting. That and the sight of his full blown erection, foreskin retracted to the point where his pink head and piss slit could be seen. A bead of pre-cum completed the picture.

"Make me complete, my David," Naru said, opening his legs, touching himself.

David didn't need any more encouragement than that. He was on top of Naru before he could blink, before his heart could pump another beat.



His senses overwhelmed by the shifter's intentions. His warmth. His breath. His touch. His everything.

David shuddered in delight as he kissed Naru on his neck. The pulse of the man, his rapid heartbeat, was felt though his touch as he planted more and more kisses onto his flesh. Soon he was at his lips. Naru breathed out a sigh, one so sensual, so alluring, that David knew without thinking that he had a raging boner, too. "I want you so much."

Naru arched his back, embracing David tight. "Make me see the stars where my ancestors once ruled without fear."

"You do know that I have lost everything, too?"

"Isn't it wonderful?"

David smiled, whispering so that his breath tickled Naru's lips. "Yes."

"Then take me."

## Chapter Fifteen

David kissed Naru. A kiss he thought he would never experience again in all his days.

At first it was a gentle touch of skin on skin. Then, as his desires manifested themselves more and more, he parted his lover's lips with his tongue.

Naru groaned, accepting him without resistance. Their tongues touched and David was consumed by both the taste of his new man, all cinnamon and tang, and the sensation of such a sensual connection. A connection only two lovers could really share, really enjoy on all levels.

David groaned. "Let me feel every part of you, my beautiful."

Naru smiled, his eyes glistened with the anticipation he would have felt inside. David came up so he could take in all of Naru – the sight of his body, nipples erect in the centre of bright red areole, cock so hard, balls tight, skin so touchable, that he gasped. "Just do it."

David shuffled down the bed so he was at Naru's feet. With one fluid motion, he took up his left foot, then his right, and sucked on each of the shifter's toes one by one. When Naru's feet were wet with his attention and he writhed on the bed in joy, he moved up to kiss his ankles. Then he was at his legs, his soft hairs tickling his lips. He made sure each kiss was delivered with the same purpose and intent as the last. By the time he had passed Naru's knees and was at the inside of his thighs, he was groaning so loud, so desperate for more, David was sure the guy would cum at any moment.

But such thoughts couldn't distract him from his promise. Naru would be covered in his affection. He had waited five years to give his love and such a thing would not be given lightly.

David was soon at Naru's buttocks, separating his legs so he could get to his rim. When his tongue touched his arsehole, Naru jumped, but soon settled back into the sheer joy he had displayed earlier, more so.

Naru's little arsehole sure was a delight to lick. The ridges of skin increasing and decreasing with each relax and tighten of the muscles, his moans adding to the pleasure. David kept at it, licking him all over, from the sensual spot behind his balls, to the little treasure trail of hairs that led up to his navel.

A navel that he fucked with his tongue.

Again Naru moaned, writhed on the bed as he worked. Soon he was at his stomach, his beautiful abs-tight-quivering-with-delight, stomach. Then his chest. His little hairs offering no resistance for his roving tongue across his lover's skin.

"I am in the heavens!" Naru screamed out.

Soon there were hands at David's back, clawing him. He knew Naru was more than ready. He also knew it was time to give him what he wanted, what his body begged for over the last few moments while he teased him with his tongue.

David smiled. Naru's body was wet with trails of his effort. Once more he parted his legs, but this time he sidled into position so his cock was at that cute arsehole. "And I am in heaven, too," David said with a deep, guttural voice as he pulled at the root of himself so his foreskin was retracted and his glistening with intent head could pierce his new lover's warmth.

He was wet with pre-cum, the moments built up to create a dribble off his cock that would lubricate anything. Entering Naru was an easy accomplishment. When he pushed in, the shifter gasped, writhing and thrashing his arms, eyelids shut tight. At first David thought he had hurt the man, but soon a smile, full and warm, drew upon Naru's lips.

The shifter arched his back again, locking his legs behind David, forcing him to enter him more. David grabbed him by his hips, obliging his wish.

Soon there was a rhythm gained, and the only sound that filled the hut was of their love. Of David's balls slapping gentle against Naru's buttocks as he made love to his man.

Naru had folded his arms behind his head, revealing his beautiful pits with little tufts of blond hair sprouting out from the place that helped create his wonderful musk. David came on top of Naru proper, holding him tight and kissing him all over once more. First he kissed his quivering lips. Then, wanting to experience more of his man, was at his neck.

Soon he was licking Naru's armpits. Each got his full attention and each accelerated the delight he was experiencing. He took in his manly taste and revelled in it, his mind spinning with the sensory overload Naru provided just by laying on the bed and accepting him on every level. He was surrounded by the shifter's scent, warmth and touch.

David wouldn't have it any other way.

"Are you about to cum?" Naru said, his voice as shattered as the fibres of his body would be as he reached the point of no return.

David had to admit he wasn't far off. "Yes," he breathed, pushing in his cock deeper and deeper into Naru.

With more groans and yelps of delight, Naru added, "Cover me in your love when you..." But he couldn't finish his words. David had risen up

to take in the sight of his man beneath him once more, when a huge ribbon of cum shot out from Naru's throbbing cock. Over and over his dick pulsed, sending more and more seed out to splatter over his own body, face and hair.

David had never seen so much cum and to witness it was amazing. Naru must have got himself really worked up since the last time he relieved himself. David smiled. He knew that feeling. He ran his fingers through his lover's hot, sticky cum while still maintaining his rhythm. He licked his fingers. The taste of Naru, all salty and with a hint of sweetness, tingled his tongue. A taste that was just as manly and wonderful as the rest of him.

Then he felt himself quake deep inside. He wasn't far from climax himself, and to make sure he did as Naru wished, he pulled his cock from his lover's tight hole. He missed him as soon as his sensitive skin touched the air. His head was bulging, bright red from his excitement. But he couldn't contemplate such matters for long. He only had to stroke his cock a couple of times as he shuffled into a position that would be the most effective when it came to giving Naru his pearls of love.

Naru reached up to kiss the end of David's cock. A kiss that sent the final shudders throughout his body. Thankfully, the shifter, his wonderful lover, came away just in time. David

climaxed.

An explosion of cum spurted out from his cock. He groaned, grabbing himself tight as each pulse delivered the result of his affection. Naru was covered in ribbons of cum. Some pooled in that wonderful, kissable indentation below his Adams apple, but most created glistening and sensual rivers across his neck and chest.

David came down to kiss all of what he gave off Naru's skin. Naru embraced him. He didn't need to be told that his lover wanted to share their combined tastes that had mingled on his heated flesh, experience each other on the deepest level. To have a man's ejaculate, that was something special. To combine and then share such a thing, that was like giving one's soul to another.

Naru and David shared cum kisses for what seemed like hours. Each time they had spent the fuel that fired their passion up even more, David would lick more off his lover's skin. Over and over they did this until they had raging erections once more.

"Lick my foreskin," Naru whispered. "I will give you more for us to share."

David was at Naru's cock within a heartbeat. Without a thought he stuck his tongue into the folds of his sensual skin that was the gateway to the growing bulge underneath. With short, sharp movements he tongue fucked Naru's cock, tickling his piss slit and keeping his hand at the root of

him so that his foreskin wouldn't retract with his increasing erection. The taste of cum and pre-cum and saliva mingled in his mouth to increase the pleasure of what he did to his lover. The way the shifter let out delighted yelps, breathing heavy, let David know he loved his foreskin stimulated just as much as he did. A man of his own heart, for sure.

Naru writhed once more, sliding his legs across the blankets as his excitement grew and grew. David continued unabated. Soon his mouth was filled with fresh, hot and yummy cum. His tongue was numbed once more, the taste of him a sensory overload. Naru yelled out, his stomach quivering with each pulse as he delivered more and more.

David kept it all, not swallowing.

After he had kissed Naru, the shifter shuffled so that he could suck on David's cock, also concentrating his efforts on his foreskin. Before he could protest, his lover's hot lips were sliding down his length as he retracted him. He shuddered as Naru gained rhythm and pressure to his actions. In fact, he was perfect. Not too rough and not too gentle so as not to be felt. He gave the right amount of attention to his frenulum and the inside of his foreskin while he also rolled his tongue around his fully engorged head.

Soon David was in that familiar place, ecstasy clawing at every fibre of his being. His balls tightened and just like Naru did only moments



ago, he orgasmed. The shifter's mouth filled with his love.

Not a word needed to be spoken as they then lay down together, holding each other tight, becoming a tangle of limbs as they stared into each other's eyes before they shared each other on the deepest level again and again.

David and Naru kissed for an eternity once more.

## Chapter Sixteen

When their combined cum had been spent, and the sweat that had clung to him like the new found love he had for Naru was cooled off his body now that he had come off his high, David separated himself from his lover's grasp. He looked upon him with both admiration and love, lavishing him with even more kisses. Naru had fallen asleep, his gentle breathing filled the hut.

Miranda came into view.

"That was so beautiful, David. You have not only made Naru happy, you have given me enough memories to supply me with electric dreams for decades."

"I'm glad I got two people off with the one shot." David went to a food dispenser that was tucked away in the corner of the room next to the *Existence Sphere*. He punched in the command for a nice long, cool glass of water. Ice, too.

"You shot twice, actually."

"Yeah, sure did. Haven't done that for a while."

"Doesn't he look so darn cute, all tired out and sleeping like a baby, content with the world?"

While he guzzled the fluid, David returned his attention to Naru. Miranda was right, the shifter did look content. The most content he had seen him. But David's thoughts were on other matters. "Will we all be safe here...from the Schism, I mean?"

Miranda floated over to face him. "I have scanned the remnants of the explosion. From what I can tell the Schism were destroyed."

"And what about any onlookers?"

"That I can't tell you."

David came to sit at the end of the bed. Naru moaned, but must have done so in his sleep. "Then we *aren't* safe."

"I can show you how to fix the *Existence Sphere*. Most of the damage was superficial and repairing it should be easy with all the tools that were on board. We could get off this planet when that is accomplished."

David sighed. "That will still take some time."

She frowned. "I really do believe we weren't detected. The sphere had full shielding and the explosion would have disrupted even the most advanced sensors. I have only now, a week later, been able to complete my scans."

"I do hope you are right. I have finally found my paradise, and ten years earlier than I planned,

too. How's that for a score?"

"You certainly did score, no doubt about it." She winked, flicking her gaze to Naru. "Shall I call you Mr. Crusoe from now on?"

David couldn't help himself. He let out a chuckle. "Naw, that guy wanted to get off his island. I think it's safe to say both Naru and I are happy here. He no longer has to worry about running away...and neither do I."

"Well, that settles it then."

"Settles what?"

Miranda floated over to Naru, looking down admiringly at him. "You may not be *Robinson Crusoe* from the fiction stories of old Earth, but you have found your man Friday."

David ran his hand over Naru's leg. Again he stirred but didn't wake. "That I have. And you know what else?"

"What?"

David watched Naru breathe for the longest moment, his heart filled with love for the man. He watched how his chest rose and fell in gentle rhythm, how his balls moved in their sack to maintain their desired temperature, and how his cute dick, one he had enjoyed moments ago, pulsed ever so slightly with his heartbeat. Everything about him was wonderful. Miranda was right. He sure had found his man, no other worry needed to be considered. Chaz and Jonny were nothing but a distant memory, one to be

forgotten like the life he had endured all alone over the past five years. "I wouldn't have it any other way."

Miranda smiled. "Neither would I."

## *About the Author*

My name is Mark Alders. I live in a house. This house has a street in front of it which is a good thing because if it didn't I wouldn't be able to drive down to the shop and purchase the chocolate I need on a daily basis \*giggle\* Seriously, I am a mild mannered post office worker by day and an erotic romance writer (mainly male/male) at night. Not much else to say other than, like everyone else, I have bills to pay, a mortgage and family that I love and drive me crazy all at the same time. Oh, and I have a dog, too! See? Average Joe...except when I get down and write...then I let my imagination go to places I never knew existed and my characters invade my mind.