

Encounter at Westfold

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Author's concept imagery at: http://velorian.org/auow/genesis_picts.htm

Prologue

Dr. David Morrison was trying to save the Arion from his fellow men. Even if she didn't want to be saved.

From the day the alien ship had meteorically entered the dense atmosphere of Westfold 2, he'd tried to protect the young girl he'd found in the wreckage from both exploitation and arrogance. She'd been two years old then, and the only survivor from the flaming crash.

The men of Westfold knew nothing about her that wasn't obvious to the eye, or that she didn't know about herself. That her skin was dark, her heritage clearly African, and her eyes were large and blue. She knew that her name was Kyreen, but didn't know her family name. She only knew that she missed her parents, who'd sent her away on that ship.

The rest Morrison discovered over time. That she was incalculably strong. That she couldn't be hurt. That she could see through things, or make things disappear just by looking at them. That she could not be tethered to the ground by the mere force of gravity.

The engineers from his university, WLCA, the largest of two on Westfold, managed to retrieve a portion of the ship's electronic log from the wreckage. It took them years to decipher it, but what they learned had shaken the confidence of an entire world. For they learned that there were powerful and warlike races out there. Races that were attempting to enslave all mankind.

The fact that there were previously unknown aliens didn't shock them, for Westfold was a seeded world. But the seeders had left them with no histories other than those of Earth. What else they knew was in the form of myths that had been handed down from the original settlers. Stories about the Seeders, as they called them. Yet in the long two centuries since they'd arrived, they'd had no contact with anyone not born on Westfold.

Until Kyreen landed among them.

The recovered fragments from the Arion logs filled in only a few of the gaps, and created many more. The final log entry, describing the Arion ship's arrival in this system, described Westfold as a remote world, off the trading pathways. A Haven.

Reading back through the logs, and accessing what pieces of linked data that remained ungarbled, they learned that the Arions were part of an Empire, and that a brutal enemy called the Enlightenment was threatening to destroy them.

The logs also described the ship's mission: transporting one of the Empire's special children to a safe haven. A place where she'd not be found until she was ready to engage the Enlightenment and destroy its hated warriors – their deadly Protectors.

Frightened by the Arion description of a universe in flames, and lacking weapons powerful enough to engage the Enlightenment, they looked elsewhere for their salvation. In time, as they observed Kyreen's growth, as they witnessed her unique abilities, they began to scheme of ways to create a weapon that could oppose anything the Enlightenment could direct toward them.

They called their weapon, **Promise**.

Her foster parents, John and Hilary Kiplinger, continued to call her Kyreen.

Chapter One

It was a blustery day in late October when Dr. David Morrison found the note lying on his desk. A note his Admin hadn't put there.

The note was written in a precise longhand:

Kyreen is playing into their hands.

Meet me at Mickey's.

Tonight. 9pm.

Alisa.

Morrison turned the note over to stare at the blank backside, then at the plain envelope. There was no clue as to the sender other than the signature.

Mickey's he knew about. It was a sports club along the beach that served a mixed crowd of faculty and students. Beach volleyball games, that sport having become a worldwide obsession in the last years, ran continuously from opening until its 2:00am close. Bets were for drinks and bragging rights. They also had body painting nights. Wet T-shirt nights. The usual stuff you'd find near any university campus.

He looked at the signature again as he wracked his brain. Who the hell was Alisa? And whose hands was Kyreen playing into? The military?

He dropped the note into his inbox and sagged tiredly into his swivel chair, briefly allowing himself to imagine that Alisa was a young and stunningly beautiful coed, down on her grades, offering a very hot night in exchange for a better grade. He tried to think of anyone in his classes who fit the profile: antiestablishment, grades not so good, beautiful enough to entice an older man to take such a risk.

Three remarkable women came to mind, one of them a Theater Arts major who had a rep for encouraging creative grading with her favors, but none of their names were Alisa.

Sighing, he spun around in his swivel chair to look out the window. It was almost November, and the leaves were already turning their brilliant colors. Swashes of yellow and red were creeping down the hillsides from the cold summits. The original settlers had brought with them the seed stock for a great many deciduous trees, but virtually no evergreens. The result were three beautiful seasons and one totally barren one.

Feeling strangely depressed that Autumn was already fading to Barren, Morrison turned back to sit at his desk, telling himself he wasn't really a player in the 'nookie for grades' program, as he despairingly called it. Other than that one time when he was a teaching assistant. He'd exchanged a few hints about what was on the Final in exchange for an evening with one of the hottest women he'd ever met. Unfortunately, she'd tried to assuage her guilty conscience by talking the entire time about her boyfriend. But she got what she wanted from him, and he'd learned that beauty and erotic passion don't always come in the same package. Most of all, he learned a valuable lesson about acting like a drooling idiot around beautiful women. Which was just as well. His associates who developed reputations for being approachable by such women inevitably lost their perspective – and eventually their jobs.

Not that he had a problem hanging out with students. He still looked young enough to date them without looking like a leech, but never on a quid pro quo basis. In fact, he'd just finished kayaking with his most famous student. They'd traveled from Venture Harbor to Scripts Island just north of Gilltown, and then down to City Harbor, a distance of nearly one hundred and eighty miles. An impossible distance to travel by kayak in a single weekend if not for his companion's vigor.

It went without saying that Kyreen Kiplinger had provided most of the muscle. It also didn't hurt that she was seriously hot, and it didn't even bother him that she was bisexual – a common enough persuasion in the 30's. He liked open-minded women who had beautiful girlfriends. Share and share alike, or so he liked to say.

Kyreen had also proved to be passionate and fun-loving, and the two of them had celebrated the completion of the first leg of their journey on a hidden beach behind Scripts Island. She was even more extraordinary at sex than she was at paddling, what with her tight body and unworldly fitness, not to mention all 6'2" of her. They'd even managed to do it later in the middle of City Harbor, on his kayak no less, a feat requiring nearly impossible agility.

But of course, Kyreen's athleticism and sense of balance were legendary. So was her supply of 24K gold jewelry, a remarkable enough possession, its value incalculable, given that Westfold was completely devoid of that rare metal. If not for the gold they'd salvage from the Arion ship, his relations with Kyreen would have been much poorer. He was very fond of what that gold did to her.

Yet even while wearing gold from head to toe, she was incredibly fit. It was humbling to realize that she'd worked very hard at not breaking his back, for she was a very enthusiastic lover. Fortunately, his long hours in the gym and natural athletic prowess made him strong as well, and he was well acquainted with the athletic demands

of bedding very fit coeds. The genetic stock of Westfold 2 had been very carefully selected from the best Earth had offered.

But Kyreen was something else again. He'd been a member of the survey party that had investigated the wreckage and he was the one who'd found Kyreen buried in a small cave in the solid rock beneath the engine compartment. He'd heard her sobbing, and had helped dig her out. Remarkably, she was completely unharmed.

As a faculty member of the Genetics Department at WLCA, he'd participated in the study of the other alien remains on the ship. He'd later helped incorporate some elements of Arion genetics into humans as part of a very hush-hush project that he eventually came to oppose.

Naturally, the military wanted no part of him opting out. So despite the fact that he hadn't seen Kyreen since her landing seven years earlier, the military had taken him along with the rest of the faculty members to a demonstration at a nearby military base. Once there, the soldiers dressed them in protective clothing and hearing protectors, and walked them out to stand behind a line of particle, energy and projectile weapons.

Then, from high overhead, Kyreen appeared as if by magic, dropping from the bright sky to land barefoot in front of a wall that rivaled the Great Wall of China back on Earth. She was known by now, of course, as the legendary **Promise**. *Protector of Westfold*. Morrison thought that was a very heavy burden to rest on the slender shoulders of a nine-year-old girl.

An officer had given a command, and the weapons had all trained on the slip of a girl. He gave another command, and the ripping-cloth roar of the rotating barrel machine guns tore the air apart, the bullets slamming the young girl against the thick wall, and filling the air in front of her with a million pieces of shattered stone and shredded clothing. Her skin rippled from the impact like the surface of a pond during a cloudburst. Before Morrison could be offended by the girl's sudden nudity, the lasers fired, their actinic beams sizzling as they flashed at light-speed across the gap to heat her body to incandescence. Finally, the particle beams cracked like lightning, their jagged beams ripping the air apart in a deafening roar of thunder.

Promise disappeared inside a ball of superheated plasma.

When the weapons stopped firing minutes later, a gigantic cave was revealed, easily twenty feet in diameter. The cave extended fifteen feet into the solid granite of the massive wall, with molten rock dripping from its white-hot inner walls. Inside the opening of that cave, little Kyreen was still standing where she had been in the beginning, hands on her hips, her eyes glowing with defiance, her skin a darker shade of milk chocolate.

Angered by her pouty look, the officer had given the command to fire again, and the weapons roared anew, this time bringing the entire wall down on Kyreen. She merely dug herself out, and then flew off, her clothing seemingly the only thing that was the worse for wear.

Morrison leaned back in his office chair now, eyes closed, recalling how angry the military officer had been. He wasn't used to seeing his powerful weapons defeated that way. Fortunately, or unfortunately for Kyreen as Morrison saw it, the military leadership

began to pay a great deal more attention to Genetics after that demonstration. They were intelligent men and they had good imaginations, and they were busy imagining facing an invading army of such superbeings. Which made them afraid.

Morrison pushed the startling images of that day away, losing himself instead in his far fonder memories of a more grown-up Kyreen. She was nineteen now, and their intimacies of the weekend had been a catharsis for him, allowing him to express for the first time the emotions he'd held inside his heart for the last ten years. They'd also left him feeling guilty about becoming far too involved in a project he abhorred.

Lost in his fond memories, he didn't hear the door open to admit Dr. John Abramson to his office.

Abramson was in his early sixties, still very fit, his closely-cropped beard graying along with his hair to give him the distinguished look that only academic's seem able to pull off. He looked appraisingly at his protégé as he sat in his chair, dreaming, the obvious flush of his skin and tightening of his pants telling Abramson more about his dreams than he wanted to know. Yet instead of retreating, as propriety would normally dictate, Abramson cleared his throat before asking gruffly, "Tough weekend, Dave?"

Morrison started so quickly that he nearly fell out of his chair. He quickly regained his balance and then his composure, finally grinning sheepishly up at his boss. "I'd be the last man on Westfold to complain."

Abramson nodded, the stern look on his face never fading. He was very aware of Morrison's weekend plans, and Kyreen's agenda in seducing him. For despite her remarkable beauty, she'd formed few relationships with men in the past, preferring the company of women.

She was also Abramson's most remarkable student, having earned straight A's since Kindergarten. She was now a pre-med student at WLCA. She was a quick study with a photographic memory, and many considered her to be the brightest young med student to come to WLCA in a long while. It was that unusual blend of academic brilliance and supreme athleticism combined with stunning beauty that kept her fellow students off-balance whenever they were around her. Fortunately, her female friends spoke more confidently about her, gossiping in hushed voices about her seemingly insatiable libido.

Morrison arranged the papers on his desk, then looked up at his boss. "What I will complain about, John, is that nobody but me is figuring how to keep Brigitte from executing her 'next great leap'."

Morrison could speak freely here, as he and John Abramson were among the small handful of people who knew that WLCA had been engaged for the last decade in human genetic enhancement. They'd found ways to harvest DNA from the occupants of the crashed ship, and had recently found a way using gold and extremely high-energy x-rays to extract some scrapings from Kyreen's mucous membranes. They'd recently used those harvested genes to complete an in-vitro fertilization of one of Kyreen's ova, using enhanced sperm from a human donor.

Dr. Dave Morrison's sperm to be exact.

It was too early to tell, only a month had passed, but there was hope that Kyreen was about to bear a daughter who shared most of her remarkable traits.

Morrison abhorred the project, especially since he'd not given his consent to use his DNA, nor had Kyreen's family authorized her involvement. More importantly, despite his fondness for her, he had no intention of handing over the future of humanity to a super-race of her offspring.

Even worse, he worried that her extravagant passion of the last weekend was merely an attempt to legitimize his fatherhood. Or her pregnancy. Either way, she made a point of telling him that he was her only sexual partner now. At least until she was too far into her pregnancy to wear gold. That wouldn't be long, Morrison figured, for her daughter's kicks would soon be those of a young Prime. Kyreen was going to need all her fabled invulnerability to carry such a child.

"And here I thought you and Kyreen were going to hit it off?" Abramson observed. "She's been an obsession of yours since she was nine."

"I think she discovered women before men." It was no secret that bisexuality was the norm on Westfold, leaving Morrison as one of the rare breed of straight men. "Brigitte and Kyreen have their own passions. No need to be distracted by mine. This is the 30's after all. Live and let live."

Abramson was Morrison's department chairman and the Genetics chair for WCLA Medical. He'd done most of the pioneering work in Enhancement Genetics, and that's what had drawn David Morrison and Brigitte Johansson to the school. Together, they'd perfected a gene manipulating retrovirus that passed on the special genetic material they'd harvested from the dead occupants of the Arion ship.

He'd had a falling out with Brigitte a year ago, and had since become a dissenter, trying to slow the military side of Brigitte's research. That decision had put him at odds with both Abramson and Brigitte.

Fortunately, Abramson had been one of a handful of people who'd sided with Morrison when it became known that Brigitte had used his DNA without consent. They both seen it as Brigitte's transparent attempt to end Morrison's dissent by involving him in the core of the project. How could he tell the public that he wasn't involved, when he was both a member of the Genetics faculty and the father of the first *Uber* who was expected to be born on Westfold?

What no one knew was that Morrison almost bought into Brigitte's ambitious project. If not for the heavy hand of the government, who had turned most of the university's programs black, he knew he'd still be in the middle of it all.

Instead, he'd opted out of that branch of genetics and had refocused his work on applying the new genetic knowledge to curing diseases. Arion genetics were capable of amazing feats of self-regeneration and disease resistance, and years before, he'd gotten permission to work with Kyreen, back when she was twelve-years-old. He'd exposed her to every pathogen in the book, including the most deadly military bugs. The worst she'd gotten was a sniffle.

Unfortunately, while finding genetic cures for disease was an interesting field, especially if you were sick, his work was under-funded and buried behind the glamour of defending the planet. Everyone was working to create an army of enhanced warriors, all of them female so far.

Brigitte claimed to be working to fix what she called ‘the gender side-effect’. Morrison wasn’t so sure she wasn’t doing the opposite, for Brigitte had long ago joined a sisterhood composed of lesbian women. She was increasingly buying into the lesbian propaganda of female superiority, and he’d overheard her laughing about ‘supremacy in a test tube’ more than once.

Brigitte had also restricted her work to using strictly African-based DNA after she’d found she could get a much greater response from that genetic mix than she could from their paler counterparts. It was a finding that was in complete opposition to what little was known about Arion genetics. But given that Kyreen shared such a heritage, and that 80% of the residents of Westfold had come from central Africa, most of the remainder from the United Kingdom, they would fit into the majority just fine.

Morrison suspected that if Brigitte got her way, Westfold would someday be populated by black, female superhumans. Morrison wasn’t sure what role men would have in that social order, if any.

Fortunately, Kyreen, to her credit, hadn’t found Brigitte’s lesbian chic agenda interesting at all. Nor her focus on black power. Which was one more reason that Morrison found himself intrigued by Kyreen. She wanted to live a normal life, to become a doctor, a researcher like himself. To use her brain, not her brawn. To live a bisexual, not a lesbian, life.

Morrison picked up the handwritten note from his inbox, and handed it to Abramson. “Any idea what this is about, boss?”

Abramson studied the note, his eyes opening wide as he saw the signature. “Jesus! Where did you get this?”

“It was on my desk this morning. Nice handwriting.”

Abramson sat down hard in the desk chair, a worried look on his face.

“Okay. So what’s the big deal?” Morrison asked. He’d rarely seen his mentor looking so concerned.

“I... I can’t tell you.”

“Excuse me?” Morrison said darkly. The ever-increasing secrets of WLCA Genetics were starting to get to him.

“I swore to keep... someone’s secret.”

“Someone? Like who?”

Abramson shook his head as he read the note again.

“Does this have anything to do with Brigitte’s work?”

“Yes... and no,” Adamson said with another shake of his head. “Brigitte has no idea that Alisa even exists. Nor does Kyreen. And I’m trying to keep it that way.”

“I thought you guys were working together?”

“Brigitte has got her head way too far into that female superiority shit,” Abramson growled. “Trust me... Alisa is the last person in the universe she needs to meet.” Abramson looked up to see the blank look on Morrison’s face, and shrugged. “And God knows what would happen if Kyreen met her.”

“Yeah?” Morrison asked cautiously, completely confused. “What else?”

Abramson sighed. “Let’s just say that I’ve found another source for genetic enhancement. Possibly a better one.”

“Better than Kyreen? That’s impossible.”

Abramson shook his head. “There are forces at work of which you have little understanding. A universe in collision.”

“Colliding? With what?”

“Alisa, for one.”

“Damn it,” Morrison said angrily. “You’re talking in riddles. Are working for the military or what!”

Abramson turned back to smiled crookedly at his protégé. “Strangely, you’re almost right. But also completely wrong.”

“Now I’m totally confused,” Morrison sighed, sagging back in his chair in obvious exasperation.

“Wrong military.”

“Okay,” Morrison said, glaring at Adamson. “Do you have to kill me if you tell me?”

Adamson took a long breath, and let it out slowly. “You remember the data on that Arion ship, Dave?”

“How could I forget? The weapons were right out of those SciFi flicks.”

“I was talking the DNA.”

“Obviously. We’ve got Kyreen,” Morrison shrugged. He didn’t say, “*and her baby.*”

“Well, Alisa’s genetics are just as pure. Another complete overlay of human genes. But from a different perspective. More Nordic.”

Morrison just stared at him. “That means she’s...”

“Not an Arion,” Abramson confirmed with a shake of his head. “Try the other side.”

Morrison just stared at his boss, jaw falling open, with a cold sliver of fear twisting his gut. He’d seen videos from the Arion records showing Enlightenment soldiers tearing armored vehicles apart with their bare hands, not to mention tossing soldier’s around like rag dolls, bullets and GAR beams splashing harmlessly against their skin. Like Brigitte’s warriors, they were all female.

He’d also seen Kyreen’s abilities, but she’d never injured anyone. She never would.

“Then she’s a...” The cold fear in Morrison’s gut twisted tighter. He could not say the hated word. It was a common fear on Westfold that the Enlightenment might someday find them.

“Alisa says we already have to have the technology to protect from the Arions, who she claims are the real despots of the universe.”

Morrison blinked. “But how can that be? The Empire is trying to unite all humanity.”

“United in the same chains, or so Alisa claims.”

“But we have Kyreen, who has been our protector. And we’ve decoded their logs...”

“Which portray only one side of the conflict,” Abramson interrupted. “The Arion side. You should know enough of Earth history to realize that each nation had its own propaganda, especially during wars. After a war is over, history was always rewritten by the winners.”

“You mean, a war is about to fought here?” Morrison asked in horror.

Abramson shook his head. “I don’t know. I only know that we have been offered a different perspective on that conflict, and an opportunity to build a different genetic legacy on our planet.”

He paused while Morrison tried to absorb what he was saying.

“What I also know is that this Enlightenment woman has asked specifically for you.”

Chapter Two

The rest of Morrison’s day passed with agonizing slowness. He read what information he had on the Enlightenment, but that only scared him more. Everything he read said they those Protectors were violent savages.

Eight PM came and went.

When he couldn’t procrastinate any further, he tossed his PersComp into his bag. Also a small needle gun, not that it would be any use if this woman was anything like Kyreen.

He strapped his pack and a helmet on and walked out to the darkened parking lot. His BTW motorcycle waited there, its liquid hydrogen reservoir giving off a faint curl of steam in the damp air. He fired up the engine, and the bike purred between his legs, the powerful internal combustion engine burning hydrogen and oxygen to produce water as a combustion byproduct. It could propel him from zero to seventy miles per hour in four seconds flat. He’d taken it to 190 MPH once.

He calmed his ragged nerves by riding fast, racing through the evening traffic, squirting between lines of traffic, accelerating at incredible speed only to brake hard enough to make the gummy tires squeal. Maximum acceleration alternated with maximum braking, moving so fast that the cars and trucks seemed to be immovable objects. He felt as if he was traveling in a time warp, his adrenaline surging to speed up his reflexes.

As always, riding this fast made him feel keenly alive.

Slowing as he approached the neighborhood where Mickey's was located, he allowed his memories of Kyreen to intrude on his thoughts. He could still see her face and feel her body as they lay on that beach. She was a delicious mixture of femininity and otherworldly athleticism, yet she'd proven to be so passionate and gentle in her loving.

Smiling, he decided there was now one thing he liked more than riding fast. His moments with Kyreen.

He parked his Beemer beside Mickey's and tossed his helmet to the valet, combing his longish hair out with his fingers as he walked toward the front door. The sweet sound of Jazz floated out the doorway. He recognized an ancient Pat Metheny tune that had come from Earth itself.

The crowd inside was no different than usual. A number of professors from WCLA, most of them early thirties, and their wives and girlfriends. Also a handful of younger women. Grad students mostly. The business world had become increasingly competitive on Westfold, and anyone who didn't have the highest recommendations from faculty was doomed to obscurity or unemployment once they finished their Masters. Based on the way several of the women were flirting, it was obvious that they believed there was more than one way to get a good recommendation.

He scanned the room a second time, but didn't see anyone who looked alien. He assumed the Enlightenment woman would be blonde. Such hair color was uncommon on Westfold. He walked through the crowded bar and out onto the back deck. The usual volleyball game was underway, a mixed doubles team battling it out as their friends roared their encouragement at every point won or lost. One of the women was blonde, but it didn't take long to decide that she was merely human. He was looking for someone with Kyreen's fitness level.

Merely? he smiled as he heard himself, realizing just how jaded he'd become at WLCA. The players were all tall and beautiful and young. One in a hundred on Westfold, which would have made them one in a million on old Earth. If not for his intimate rendezvous with Kyreen, he would have been dazzled.

He turned away to enter the last room of Mickey's. Four pool tables filled the space, a small bar occupying the far corner. Mickey's trademark Friday night entertainment, which in reality took hours to prepare for, was body painting. Two local artists were famous for their craft, and every Friday, they chose a willing volunteer, invariably a beautiful young woman, and they painted clothing on her. That paint was all she was allowed to wear in Mickey's.

A small group of people he hadn't seen before were gathered around one of the tables, and a dazzlingly tall blonde who was this week's canvas was leaning forward to make a shot, her body paint a very convincing version of an archaic sports uniform from old Earth. The paint imitated a shirt that was open to her waist and a tiny pair of red shorts that were, literally, skin tight. If he hadn't known better, he would have sworn she was wearing clothing, not just paint. She had an incredible figure, with large breasts that rode high and firm on her chest.

Despite her remarkable appearance, he immediately dismissed her as Alisa. He was convinced that Protectors would look violent and warlike, not cute. He was looking for a muscular kick-ass blonde. Someone he knew was going to scare the shit out of him just from his first glance.

Still, he paused, unable to take his eyes from the painted woman. She was Nordic looking and outstandingly fit, although a little older than Kyreen. His heart leaped as he traced his eyes down the leanest and cutest legs he'd ever seen. Powerful muscles flexed beneath her tight skin as she leaned further over the table. He'd only seen one other woman with that degree of fitness. Kyreen.

The blonde grabbed a beer and settled into a corner with two shorthaired neatly dressed men, giggling as one of them traced his fingers along the edges of her painted on clothing. No way they were students, Morrison decided. They looked vaguely military.

He scanned the rest of the room, and saw another blonde slouching against the blue wall at the back of the room, next to the Open sign. Her hair was unbrushed and windblown, and she was wearing a wifebeater t-shirt. His heart leaped as he saw impossibly firm nipples tenting from beneath it. Despite her casual almost sloppy attire, he could see that she was just as remarkable a woman as the body-painting model.

She straightened up and retrieved her cue stick, and walked over to the green felt table. Leaning over the table, her hair falling over the felt, she took her shot: a three banker around a group of balls in the center of the table that knocked two balls directly into opposite pockets at the far end of the table. An impossible shot for anyone but a pro, and a very low percentage one even then.

The shooter stood back up, acting as if that had been a routine shot for her, twirling her hair in her fingers as she playfully challenged her companion to beat her shot. She was very tall; almost six feet, and her hair was slightly curled as it cascaded down her back nearly to her waist. Standing under the lights now, he saw that it was the most amazing blend of colors he'd ever seen -- a mixture of a half dozen shades of gold. Her skin was flawlessly tanned, glowing like polished in the simulated sunlight.

Despite her casualness of dress, Morrison decided that she was the most desirable woman he'd ever laid eyes on. She was exuding an unconscious sexiness that permeated the air of the room.

Abramson's last words echoed in his mind: *"There will be no mistaking her for merely human."*

Was this Alisa? The deadly enemy of all humanity?

Ridiculous.

He pulled his eyes away from her to look around the room, only to find that his heart was really pounding. He saw the woman's pool partner staring back at him, while the body-painted blonde linked arms with her two companions and disappeared out the back door, heading toward the darkened surf.

The remaining man, seemingly in his early forties, turned to the shooter and whispered something. She turned to look Morrison's way, revealing the brightest, bluest eyes he'd ever seen. She promptly put down her cue and started to walk his way.

Morrison's mouth went dry and his heart beat funny as she approached.

"Dr. David Morrison, I presume?" she asked in a musically accented voice.

Her English was very good, although he guessed at a mix of Swedish and French. A very uncommon accent on Westfold. Even more, her words sounded flat, lacking the local twang.

He swallowed hard, realizing that this almost certainly was the alien. *A dangerous one?*

"Alisa, I presume?" he asked, his voice surprisingly calm despite his inner turmoil.

"I'm Major Alisa Liddell." She nodded toward her partner. "And this is Captain Andre Kalik."

The older man held out his hand. Morrison took it, and found the man's handshake firm to the point of being punishing. He gratefully switched to Alisa's hand. Her skin was cool and very smooth, her fingers long, and her handshake gentle and feminine.

He was suddenly embarrassed to feel his body rising despite the tendrils of fear that still twisted his gut. He forced himself to look away from her, only to find the man watching his reactions, a look of amusement on his faces. It embarrassed him further to realize that he was amusing himself by observing his reaction to the blonde.

Morrison closed his eyes for a moment as he tried to slow his racing emotions. When he opened them again, the analytical part of his brain had woken up again. He recalled that the men had all wore a similar cut of clothing. That and the alert way they'd been looking around the room confirmed his worst fears.

"You're military?" Morrison asked disappointedly.

"Not exactly," Alisa replied brightly as she reached up to tie her hair off into two crude ponytails. She pulled on a white shirt to cover her shoulders, but didn't button it up. "Exploratory Service. We're part of a ship's science staff."

"A ship? What kind of ship?"

"A starship," the Captain Kalik offered softly.

Morrison smiled nervously, half considering for a moment that this was some kind of SciFi prank set up by Abramson. A lot of students were fans of the science fiction movies that dominated the cinema on Westfold. Stories of warp-capable starships, impossibly dangerous or ugly or beautiful aliens, take your pick. All pure fantasy, as Westfold ships hadn't found a way to escape orbit. In fact, other than the little they knew about Arions, everything else had been left to the imagination of writers and movie producers.

No, that wasn't it, he told himself. He was convinced this woman was more than merely human. She had no wrinkles, no sags, nothing that would suggest the imperfections of the human genome. He thought of Kyreen again, then of the digitally-enhanced characters in the movies. They were remarkably alike. Except that Alisa appeared to be both intelligent and graceful despite the expanse of blonde hair and her terrific figure. Hers was an intense beauty, almost angelic in its perfection, yet somehow athletic at the same time.

His heart caught in his throat. *Enlightenment military?* “So... ah... how did you guys get here anyway?” he forced himself to ask.

“Alisa did the flying,” Kalik shrugged. “From where we hid the shuttle at least.”

“You’re a pilot?” Morrison asked her, admiring the incredible sharpness and clarity of her eyes. She could probably see like a hawk.

Kalik chuckled as he answered for her. “You could say that. Haven’t you heard about Velorians?”

Morrison’s gut twisted again. “You mean... like in that movie?” He wasn’t going to admit to having seen that term in the Arion databases.

A very provocative SciFi movie had recently aired, featuring a costumed blonde who could fly. Supposedly she was the scourge of the Arion Empire. The dark mythology of the Velorian race had come from the Arion ship’s databases.

Morrison continued. “I mean, everyone on Westfold has. *Velorian* was the biggest grossing movie of the year.”

“A movie?” Alisa asked, looking confused.

“Culture briefed me on their cinema,” Kalik whispered to her. “Seems as if Velorians are just an outrageous myth here. Something they read about in an Arion database. Partial entries apparently, but augmented by unrestrained imagination. They think you guys are the enemy.”

Kalik’s detached description of Westfold culture removed any last doubts about a prank. His mouth went even drier as he realized how dangerous his situation was. These aliens knew about him, about his work. They’d invited him here.

To kill him?

No, he told himself, pulling his eyes from the blonde to notice the half empty mugs of beer the men had left behind. These men hadn’t come to fight. Nor had the women. They had to be on some kind of shore leave, and were trying to blend into the local culture. Just blowing off steam and having fun.

But why meet with him?

“I understand from Dr. Abramson that you have carnal knowledge of an Arion femme,” Alisa answered his unasked question, her voice smooth and controlled. “A Tset’lar to be exact.”

Morrison’s heart fluttered as her luminous eyes drew him in even deeper. They were like windows to another world, a world of beauty and promise. *Carnal knowledge*. The strange choice of words brought him back to reality. He was suddenly worried about Kyreen. “I don’t know what you think you heard, but...”

Alisa interrupted him with a wave her hand as she slowly sank into one of the chairs, crossing her long legs. She moved as if she was weightless, her eyes never leaving his. “You don’t have to play your games with me, Dr. Morrison. We know all about your work, and that of your associates. You are playing an extremely dangerous game, what

with injecting Arion DNA into your population. Especially trying to bear a child with a Tset legacy. Surely you know the history of that damnable race?"

Morrison blinked. He'd said essentially the same words a hundred times while arguing to stop the military enhancement work that Brigitte was doing. "I know only of the deprivations and violence of the Enlightenment, Major," he replied as he sat in the chair opposite her. "The way they create chaos and anarchy, encouraging worlds to fragment into clans and fight each other."

The older officer sat down beside the woman as he listened. Morrison noticed that Kalik and Alisa were wearing identical silver rings on their left hands. *Husband and wife?*

"You can call me Alisa, and my husband, Kalik," she confirmed his glance. "He's also my Captain."

"Then why don't you contact the government..."

"We're not exactly here on official business," Alisa interrupted with a wave of her hand.

Morrison swallowed hard, trying to take it all in. "Then it's Dave to you," he granted, finding to his surprise that his fears were gradually fading. This woman didn't seem hostile, not dressed as she was. The more he thought about it, the more he realized that she and her husband had the bearing and speech patterns of scientists, not soldiers. He daringly asked the only question he could think of: "So why are you guys here? Why do you want to meet with me?"

She smiled beautifully. "Because you are a geneticist who has been opposed to your planet's military work from the beginning. You believe in curing diseases, but you are close to the people who are causing all the problems."

Morrison nodded enthusiastically. "History is too full of megalomaniacs and their attempts to exploit some 'perfect race'." He was going to blame that all on the Enlightenment, but he held his tongue as Abramson's words came back to him. *"Each culture has their propaganda. History is written by the winners."*

Alisa smiled softly. "And given that you are intimate with one of the most powerful superhumans in the universe, you are the only man who could understand what I'm about to offer you."

Morrison took a leap, connecting the dots and Kalik's comments. "So you're Velorian, and you are offering a different legacy to our world." It felt very strange to call anyone such a thing, outside of a provocative fantasy at least. Or a nightmare.

"See. That wasn't so hard, now was it?" Alisa beamed. "Yes, I am a Velorian, although perhaps not like the ones in your movie. I'd have to see the video to let you know how close your writer and director came to reality."

Morrison's head was reeling with the implications of his daring declaration, and her simple acknowledgement. "So... if that's all true, then you're here to put a stop to my associate's work, aren't you?" A stab of fear sliced through his belly as he thought of Kyreen again. He licked his dry lips. "But what about Kyreen. Or her child?"

“I couldn’t hurt her no matter how hard I tried, but she could kill me and my daughters without effort. It is we who are at risk here, Dave, not you or your world.”

Daughters? The body-painted girl? “So what... why?”

“My associates plan to contaminate your DNA stocks, making them useless. Yet at the same time, we would like to support some adjustments to create a well-intentioned plan of protecting yourself against the Arions. Living this far out on the Rim, you must remain independent, of both Empire and Enlightenment. I’d like to balance out your use of the Supremis genome.”

“Supremis genome?” He’d never heard it called that before, and he didn’t like the implication of the word. “But without the borrowed DNA, we can’t enhance...”

“What you don’t know is that Supremis genetic manipulation carries a big risk if done in a laboratory. A time-bomb was put into our DNA if it is manipulated the way you are. Kyreen’s daughter will not be born unless I help you.”

“Her baby will die?” Morrison asked breathlessly, the cold fear in his belly growing sharper. Despite his anger over the unauthorized use of his DNA, he’d found that he was increasingly thinking of Kyreen’s baby as his own.

Alisa nodded. “Fortunately, we have recently found a way to ensure that an in-vitro fertilization doesn’t trigger the bomb, although it’s a difficult and expensive treatment.”

“You can heal her?”

“I think so. But after that, I’d like to offer you a different way to build a protective army. In a more natural way.”

“I don’t understand. We believe that her child is already invulnerable, despite being just a fetus.”

“That’s why you are here. You... the reluctant researcher who abhors the military. The only person on Westfold I can trust with this knowledge. With this gift. And the only man who can deliver it where it’s needed.”

“Gift?”

“I can make you capable of passing on Velorian genetics. First to your child. Then to others.”

Morrison’s jaw dropped. His head was really spinning now. “How is that supposed to work?” He glanced at her husband and then at the other men. “Everyone knows that you can’t change a person’s DNA after the moment of conception.”

She just smiled. “Not true. Didn’t you find some references in your Arion logs to Enhancement? Transforming one’s body from head to toe?”

Morrison just stared at her, then at the scowl on Kalik’s face. His mind raced, remembering some speculations that he and the rest of the scientific community had quickly dismissed. A single, partially corrupted reference in the logs had talked of a retrovirus. Such viruses were his stock in trade, delivering DNA from one cell to another. But not on the scale Alisa suggested. “You can’t systemically change a person’s DNA, all their cells... that would be fatal!”

“There is a chance of that, I won’t deny it,” Alisa nodded, her golden tresses flying. “But I do have some experience in this area.” She glanced at her husband, then back at Morrison. “And we have your Tset’lar, who you have been sleeping with.” She paused to smile at him. “I’m fairly sure you’re the only living human in the universe able to make such a claim.” Her smile grew coy. “I will say, you guys were amazing on that beach the other day. There are some things we Vels know about, and...”

Morrison just gaped at her. “That island was deserted!”

“Not eight miles up it wasn’t.”

Morrison swallowed hard, remembering his enthusiasm that day, yet strangely not feeling embarrassed that this Velorian knew his secrets. That she’s watched them.

“Kyreen should come and help ensure that the moment of passing the virus will at least be safe. Fortunately, she is an innocent, or neither of us could survive this.”

Alisa slipped her hand into her pocket, and returned with a small data card. She handed it to Morrison. “This contains most of what is published about my people. It also contains the location of our landing ship. Meet me there at dawn tomorrow.”

With that, she rose to slip her arm around her husband’s waist, and they returned to the table to continue their pool game.

Chapter Three

Morrison was lost in an erotic daze as he walked out of Mickey’s. Alisa’s words were echoing in his brain. “*Only living man in the universe to be able to make such a claim.*” That was preposterous. Kyreen was a superbeing, that much was obvious, but there had to be many more like her. Alisa for one. Her daughter likely as well. The universe was very, very big.

Still, he found he was literally vibrating as he sat on the saddle of his bike. He wasn’t sure if it was Alisa’s presence or something in the air, maybe her daughter’s painted nudity, but he’d never felt so alive as he did now. Every one of his senses was tingling wonderfully; leaving him feeling like he was sixteen again, and he had a date arranged with this impossibly beautiful girl.

A date he was supposed to bring his girlfriend on?

That last thought made him pause. Kyreen wasn’t exactly his girlfriend. Mother of his child? That was a strange title if it stood alone.

Smiling as his odd sense of the ironic surface, he began to run the odds on his knowing two such superwomen, and having been intimate with one. One in a trillion at least. Yet if his guess about the discussion they’d just had was correct, he was being invited to be intimate with the other as well.

A trillion times a trillion?

No, something far more than mere chance was at work here.

He thought of Kyreen again. While the two of them had a bond, and the last weekend had been exotic and intimate, he told himself that if not for the baby, she'd not be interested in him. Even with the gold she wore, he knew she'd been working to keep him safe as they made love. Despite his dreams of being her lover, even his wife, raising a child together, reality told him she was only to be his for a short while.

But if what Alisa had alluded was true, enhancement, then that could change. He was going to become a man who could give her children?

Outside the lab? He shivered with excitement. *There was only one way to do that.*

Another thought sobered him. *Would they be Arion, Velorian, or human children?*

He paused to consider the degree of enhancement necessary to impregnate her naturally, for he'd seen the data from Kyreen's empowered physical exams, and realized he would have to be hundreds of times more vital. Possibly thousands. His sperm would have to be as well.

He scoffed at that ridiculous comic-book fantasy. He was a geneticist, and with any science he knew, one couldn't manipulate DNA for the purpose of changing the basic structure of a person's body, bones, muscles, and ligaments. Nor any organs. That could only occur prior to or during the act of conception. Altering a disease-causing defect was possible after, that was his life's work after all, but beyond that, a person's base DNA could only be damaged, but never improved.

With any science he knew.

He was lost in that thought as he fastened his helmet and raced off toward Kyreen's apartment. He'd been there once before. She had a student's loft over the river, the interior brightly lit with colored lights and a great deal of audio equipment. She was trying to record some songs in her spare time, hoping to add one more skill to her already impressive resume. The world's protector, a brilliant medical student and perhaps a singer. Accomplishments that no one but an Arion would be capable of.

He parked his bike twenty minutes later, and pushed the buzzer by her door. She answered quickly.

"Ky... this is Dave. Can I come up?"

She paused for a long moment, and then said, "Sure."

The door lock buzzed.

Morrison began climbing the forty flights of steps to her penthouse apartment. He was huffing and puffing before he was halfway there, reminding himself that she floated up these steps like a child, not even breathing hard at the top.

He was breathing very hard by the time he finished the last set of stairs. Being in shape was one thing, but racing up forty flights of stairs was another.

Her door was open slightly, so he slipped through. Kyreen was kneeling in the middle of the room, her head turned his way. She was dressed in a tiny black halter and miniscule g-string bottom. Significantly, she wasn't wearing any gold, and her halter-top stretched tightly over her impossibly firm breasts. Her skin was a delicious chocolate

brown as always, her eyes a dark, luminous blue. Her body was so slender and so perfect that it was hard to remember that she had thousands of times his strength. Or that she was bulletproof, not to mention fireproof.

He tore his eyes away long enough to see that she'd been working on her music. Headphones and a microphone were by her side, along with some recording equipment.

"So what's going on, Dr. Morrison?" she asked.

Her formal use of his title and last name told Morrison that he wasn't exactly welcome. He'd heard her talk about her problems with obsessive and possessive men. She was beyond possession.

"What do you know about Velorians, Ky?"

"You mean the flying blondes in that movie? The ones who could punch out a Prime while looking like some kind of sexy angel?" She laughed. "Just some silly fantasies."

"What if I told you that were real?"

She slowly rose to sit on the metal table behind her. "Then I guess I'd be worried. They were mentioned in the Arion logs as having the power to match or even beat a Prime." She shrugged. "But I suspect I could take her."

"And here I thought you were a modest girl," Morrison quipped.

"I've compared my strength to what was described in the logs for a Prime," she said with a tilt of her head. "I've got many times the strength of a typical Prime. Since reading that, I've decided I don't have to be modest all the time."

"Right," Morrison smiled. "But it is one of your more endearing qualities."

"So what about this Velorian person?"

"One of them is here on Westfold and she wants to meet you. At dawn tomorrow. Something about a genetic defect in your..." he caught himself, "in our baby's makeup."

Kyreen suddenly looked worried. "What?"

"How are you feeling?" Morrison asked.

"A few hot flashes," she shrugged.

"You ever felt them before? Or ever felt any discomfort?"

"I've never been pregnant before, Dave. But normal women have all kinds of hormone swings during early pregnancy. Why shouldn't I?"

"Because you aren't normal. I'm betting this is the start of the problem that Alisa mentioned?"

"Alisa?"

"The Velorian."

"Right." Kyreen fell silent, but she looked even more worried now.

“I suspect she was referring to some kind of devolution,” Morrison continued. “Maybe an unwinding of the child’s DNA. It’s the kind of defect I’d build into illicit DNA if I could.”

Floated upward before folding her long legs in mid-air, Kyreen settled weightlessly on the couch. “Assuming I accept all this, how do we know she’s telling the truth? She’s supposed to be the enemy of my people.”

“I don’t think she’s going to hurt you. In fact, she said you could easily kill her if you got into a fight.”

“She said that!”

“I really think she’s here to help, Ky. That she’s for real. I had a good feeling about her and the men with her. She even brought her daughter to the meeting.”

“And what, did she fly around or something?”

Morrison shook his head. “I could see it in her eyes. And her body. She was as utterly perfect as you.”

“Utterly perfect, huh?” Kyreen smiled. “You always were a sweet talker.” She lifted off the couch to float closer to him, lowering her legs until her feet touched the floor. Her height matched his own 6’2. “Dawn comes very early this time of year. You sure you want to go all the way home and then back here by then?”

Morrison felt his heart race at the suggestion in her words, which wasn’t helped by the fact that he could still feel her body against his as they lay on that sandy beach. Or the sudden flowery sweetness of her perfume. He thought of her wearing gold again so soon, and decided it probably wasn’t a good idea, what with being at this early stage of her pregnancy.

“We’ve got to get ready for the meeting, Ky. Hell, I don’t even know where her ship is, and we need to understand what we’re getting into. Put this into your player, will you.”

“As long as you promise to keep me warm tonight,” she purred, taking the card from his fingers.

She floated gracefully across the room to insert it into the wall-sized player.

Chapter Four

They were sitting side by side on the couch two hours later, neither of them daring to breathe. They’d just watched the compact history of the Supremis race, detailing the Velorian and Arion sub-races, along with their social and political structures. They’d also learned about the reach of the Empire and the desperate battle by the Enlightenment.

“Her story is like my ship’s logs, but reversed,” Kyreen finally said. “And man, are they ever afraid of people like me! Tset’lars they call us.”

Morrison was equally fascinated. “Abramson warned me about this. How warring cultures have their own propaganda, how they rationalize and edit their histories.”

Kyreen let her breath out with a whoosh. “Well, we got two super-races who are trying to wipe each other out, with you humans caught in the middle. And I’m supposed to be some kind of kick-ass assassin.”

“Not only that, but if her story is correct, we’re both from the dark side.”

Kyreen stood up, her eyes flashing. “You mean, I fucking am. My black skin. My people’s killing instincts.”

“No, it can’t be that simple, Ky. Black and white, good and bad. This is just another flavor of propaganda.”

Kyreen shrugged. “Who the hell knows.”

“What I do know is that Alisa talked about fixing some DNA problem. A timebomb. A flaw that’s already in our baby.” He paused, hating himself for what he was about to say. “She even wants to help us create an army to oppose the Arions before they come back.”

“What about the Enlightenment?” Kyreen asked. “Are they our enemy as well?”

“No idea. But I don’t think she’d be helping us in that case. She claims that she wants to keep us neutral but free.”

“By building an army of people with half Velorian, half Tset’lar genetics? Created to fight all other Supremis? Is that what she’s creating?”

“We don’t know where the truth lies,” Morrison shook his head, hardly believing he was involved in the same kind of project he’d always opposed. He walked up behind Kyreen to rest his hands on her shoulders. Without her gold, her body felt like it was carved from a solid block of steel. “All we know is that powerful people are out there. And other than you, everyone here is very, very weak.” He paused, his thoughts racing as he felt his spirits rising. “But we’re still human. Inside at least. And we still have free choice.”

“Spoken like a true human,” Kyreen said despondently.

“Yes. Ordinary humans and enhanced-humans, but all of us very human at the core. Especially you.”

She lifted her hands to hold his, and turned to look into his eyes. “She really said I was capable of killing her? That seems incredible after what we just saw.”

Morrison nodded. “Yeah.”

“Then I guess we have nothing to fear. If she acts up, I’ll kick her ass and we and our baby will be happy forever more.”

“I don’t think that’s what she has in mind, Ky. She was serious about helping us. She’s taking a risk to do it. A risk that you’ll destroy them.”

Kyreen turned in his arms to gently kiss him. “Am I really that dangerous?” she whispered, her soft lips teasing with his.

He held her tightly, and kissed her deeply, hungrily, forgetting that she wasn’t wearing her gold. She smiled and began to kiss her way across his cheek, finally running

her tongue gently around the inside of his ear before whispering, “Maybe I can put just a little gold on, Dave. I want to hold you close tonight.”

Morrison’s heart leaped, her whispered desires combining with the erotic touch of her tongue inside his ear. The flowery, sweet taste of his deep kiss lingered, her natural perfumes turning musky with need. He held her tighter while remembering the strength of her wild lovemaking while wearing all her gold: belly chain, heavy necklace and bracelets. She’d been a tiger on that beach, the warm waves washing over the two of them, as she was so demanding yet so infinitely appreciate of his manly skills as he took her, crying out in sweet pleasure. Far stronger than him even then, she was many orders of magnitude stronger than that now.

Losing himself in that thought, an unbidden but disturbing memory flashed through his mind. He tried to push it away, to lose himself in her loving, but he couldn’t escape the images from a very illicit video he’d once seen.

It had come from one of the IT technicians who’d been asked to replicate it. Concerned by what he’d found, the technician had come to Morrison, clearly disturbed. Morrison had inserted the data card into his PersComp, only to find himself watching a young Kyreen folding the bar of a dumbbell. She was bending the nearly inch-thick steel in her slender hands like it was made of soft rubber. She couldn’t have been more than thirteen or fourteen, but her strength had been mind-boggling from at a very young age.

She continued to shape the folded steel bar as the camera focused on her hands, essentially pressure welding it into a solid bar two inches thick and eight inches long, all to the sexy laughs and ribald encouragement of two other women. The audio quality was too poor for Morrison to make out the voices, but what he’d seen on the video had changed his perspective on Brigitte’s research forever more.

Once Kyreen had formed her ‘toy’, the women had encouraged Kyreen to insert what became apparent was a handcraft dildo completely into herself. She was clearly reluctant, but he could make out someone saying ‘Supergirl’ and laughing, but nothing more. Unable to tear his eyes from the video, he’d watched in horrified fascination as Kyreen did as the older women wished, taking it to herself, all of it, then bearing down with her inner strength. She closed her slender legs tightly, a teenager’s abdominal muscles tensing into a hard grid. Within seconds, a brilliant inner glow lit her sex, and a minute after that, rivulets of white-hot liquid began to run down her inner thighs

Morrison remembered how he’d gasped in shock as she melted the steel inside herself, the heat coming from pure compression alone. Far from being an erotic event, he’d seen it as a vulgar demonstration of raw feminine strength!

He’d promptly destroyed the original video and sworn the technician to secrecy. And while he couldn’t prove it, he suspected Brigitte’s twisted lesbian sisterhood had been amusing themselves with their young ‘Supergirl’. Taking advantage of an innocent and naive girl.

He felt his body go stiff even now as his anger returned.

Kyreen sensed the change in him. “What’s the matter, baby?” she cooed in his ear, her hand tracing the hard outline of his erection. “Can’t handle your Supergirl?”

The fact that she used the same label as the women in video left him feeling even colder.

She held him tighter, bringing back his ardor. “Don’t be afraid. You are the only man who will ever lie with me. The father of my baby. I would never hurt you.”

“Ky, we really shouldn’t...”

She hushed him by shrugging out of her top, revealing those most perfect of breasts. She lifted his hands to place them on them, encouraging him to hold her tightly as her lips found his again, her warm breasts pressing his hands so firmly against his chest, her nipples feeling like two small thumbs as they awoke in his palms. “I’ve been practicing. You know, so we can do it with only the belly chain.”

Her fingers fumbled with his pants zipper now, opening him, her warm fingers encircling his hardness as he became all the man he could be. She slowly guided him backward, one arm behind his back, the other holding him so intimately, her feet never touching the floor as she lowered him gently onto his back. She reached up long enough to tear the rest of her clothing away, revealing that she was so wet, so ready.

He held her breasts tightly now as she straddled him, marveling at her fullness, his hands overfilled, his ardor pressing hard against her lower abs.

She smiled at the excitement in his eyes as she lifted the long chain from the table beside her, and fastened it around her slender waist. Her eyes closed for a brief moment as she settled more heavily over him, and then she regained control of the remnants of her flight power. She rose to guide herself to him, testing his human flesh at its hardest against her inviting flesh.

She took him slowly, gently, like a virgin, a half-inch at a time, her inner slippery tightness finally swallowing him with luxurious warmth as she took him deeply. She began to ride him, using the feathery touches of her powerful muscles, floating upward until he was about to slip free, and then falling over him, taking him deeper yet, holding him at the bottom of each stroke more tightly than any human woman could, both of them very aware that she still had a hundred times his strength.

Morrison abandoned himself to this unique loving, guiding her with his hands on her breasts, her body moving so weightlessly. He thrust upward as hard as he could to meet her descent, moving harder, faster, forgetting those earlier images, and desiring only to bring her pleasure.

Her eyes were glowing with blue warmth when she smiled, her hair floating in the air, her kisses hungrily finding his lips, her body moving faster and faster, taking him right to edge.

He started to groan with accustomed release, but she paused with him full inside her, holding him tighter yet, delaying him, forcing the pressure within his body. He tore at her like a savage beast, trying to thrust harder against her, yet unable to move as she used her supreme strength to hold him. He grew more frantic, his orgasm like a tsunami wave that had been frozen as it approached a shoreline.

She finally relented, and he cried out hoarsely as he rolled her over to finish like a man. He thrust himself as hard as he could into her, slamming her head against the wall

as her long legs wrapped around him, her heels pressing into his ass to give him even greater strength. He violently rutted against her body with every ounce of his strength, and finally came with a hoarse shout of wondrous relief, his seed filling her as she softened herself inside and let it all come.

Expended, and exhausted, he collapsed on top of her, thrilling to the wash of pleasure from the best fuck of his life. Strangely, beyond even the wonderful glow of fulfillment, he felt the sense of elation he always felt after a fast, dangerous run on his bike, after having avoided the hazards of death by millimeters. The adrenaline rush of a thrill-seeker blending with the mellow backside of his powerful orgasmic release. He'd just taken her with so much of her strength intact... leaving him feeling like a victorious warrior after a battle.

Kyreen rolled over on her side, and he spooned up behind her. His ardor quickly returned. No words were exchanged, only sighs of contentment as she opened her legs and shifted her pelvis, letting him slide between her still wet nether lips. She held him gently inside her as she moved slowly, encouraging him to pleasure them both so gently. He nuzzled her ear this time, gently biting her earlobe as he began moving faster, harder, focusing his efforts on bringing her comfort.

A tremendous weight seemed to lift from Kyreen's heart after he came again, soft and gentle this time. He was no longer afraid of her strength.

Happy at that, they both drifted off into sleep as their loving faded into their separate happy dreams.

Chapter Five

Morrison awoke before dawn to see Kyreen floating in the middle of the room, her eyes glowing an eerie blue. Her gold had disappeared again, and she was staring at the blank wall beside her.

"I can't find their ship," she declared. "Yet according to that map, it's less than ninety miles away."

"You can see that far?" Morrison asked, clearly surprised. He followed her gaze, only to have his end at the weathered brick that made up the north side of her apartment. "Plus through the wall?"

"Usually. But something's blocking my sight this morning."

She blinked her eyes back to normal vision and floated down to straddle him on the bed, smiling playfully. "Maybe all of your seed inside me has made me a bit more human this morning."

"You were incredible, Ky. Even with all that much of your strength..."

"Told you I've been practicing. I loved the way you felt inside me, without the strange dulling tingles of wearing all my gold. So different."

“We could always get you some more practice,” he suggested sexily.

She quickly rose from the bed to float over him, her sex only inches from his face, her unwashed nudity driving him crazy with her musky sweetness. Morrison reached up to hold her smooth legs, trying to pull her closer, only to find himself lifted off the bed as she rose further. She wrapped her arms around him to lift him into the air, the two of them landing softly on the rug beside the bed.

“I want to ride with you this morning, Dave, not on you. And we don’t have a lot of time if we’re going to get to that ship by dawn.” She took his hand and led him toward the oversized shower in her bathroom.

They took turns washing each other, barely escaping the renewed wave of passion that gripped them both.

Kyreen finally slapped him hard on the butt as she slipped from his arms, leaving him standing with his ardor erect in the warm water. She quickly dried herself and began to dress.

Morrison followed, finding his lingering ardor made it difficult to get dressed at first. But he managed, and minutes later they were racing through the pre-dawn mists on his bike.

He glanced at his SatNav display as they cleared the city boundaries. At his current 110 MPH, it would take them fifty minutes to reach the designated location, and that would leave a bare fifteen minutes to spare before sunrise.

He rode very fast and clean, Kyreen molding herself to his back as they headed into the forested, mountainous region just north of Smythville, the home of WLCA. Their bodies moved as one as he played his bike like a fine instrument, leaning it far to the left and then the right as he snaked his way along the twisting roads, his powerful engine making the most wondrous of sounds.

It was just starting to get light when he rode past the designated coordinates. He saw nothing but a lonely clearing between two small hills. He continued on, Kyreen scanning both sides of the road, her eyes glowing.

“Turn around,” she suddenly said.

He braked to a stop and spun around on the dirt road to head back toward the original coordinates. This time the lightening sky revealed a larger mound of leaves next to a small pond as they entered the clearing. “It’s under there,” she pointed.

He turned off the road to motor awkwardly across the rough field to stop beside the mound. Kyreen floated off the bike to hang a few feet off the ground. She seemed reluctant to approach the ship.

Morrison hung his helmet on the handle bar and started to walk around the mound, not sure how you knocked on the door of a hidden alien space ship, not even sure what end was which. He was distracted by a swish in the air over his head. Glancing up, he saw a flicker of white, moving fast, darting from tree to tree, barely visible in the pre-dawn light. If not for the speed it moved at, he would have assumed it was a large, white bird. He knew it wasn’t.

He looked back down and finished his circuit, only to have that apparition float down to hover only a few feet in front of him. It was a young girl, no more than seven years old, long, blonde hair flying in the breeze. She was dressed in a vaporous, white gown that made her look like an angel.

“My mother said you’d be coming,” the girl said softly.

Morrison recognized the same foreign accent he’d heard in Mickey’s bar.

The girl turned to look at Kyreen. “Is that her? The Tset’lar?”

Morrison swallowed hard. He hadn’t expected this. “Her name is Kyreen, and she’s my friend.”

“She’s going to have a baby, isn’t she?”

“Yes. My baby.”

“Good,” the girl said with simple satisfaction. “It gets lonely being around grups all the time. I hope she likes to fly.” With those words still hanging in the air, she leaped from the ground, heading directly toward the glow of the rising sun. In seconds, she was gone.

Morrison looked back at Kyreen, only to see her blue eyes glowing larger than normal. “What a beautiful little girl,” he exclaimed.

“A Velorinna,” Kyreen guessed correctly.

Feeling as if he was lost in a dream, Morrison resumed his circuit of the mound. He was almost back at his starting point when the leaves begin to fly upward in front of him. A shaft of white light emerged, and then a much taller blonde floated out the opening to hover in mid-air. She also looked like an angel in the pre-dawn darkness, the same kind of vaporous white gown floating around her, her hair wet. It was the young blonde from Mickey’s, minus the body paint. He guessed she was 17 or 18.

She crossed her arms under her breasts and floated toward Kyreen, both superwomen staring at each other. Morrison saw the blonde shiver slightly as she stared into Kyreen’s oversized eyes.

“So you truly are what I’d surmised,” she said softly. “A Tset’lar.”

Kyreen returned her gaze, her eyes glowing even brighter. “Whatever that is. I’ve had no contact with my people.”

The blonde held out her hand. “Which is why I’m still alive.” She smiled tentatively. “I’m sorry I didn’t introduce myself earlier. My name is Ensign Lillith Liddell. You just met my little sister, Trina.”

The fact that he was dealing with a family of Velorians strangely made Morrison more comfortable. “That body-paint was insanely cute,” he said lamely. “I had no idea at first that it was just paint.”

Lillith smiled as she took Kyreen’s hand in hers. “The artist was more modest. He credited the canvas for his good work. Inspiration he claimed. But my friends and I were just having fun.”

Morrison noticed the sudden display of hard tendons across both women's wrists as they shook hands. It didn't take a detective to see a hint of pain appear in Lillith's eyes a moment later.

"So you are as strong as your reputation," Lillith said, pulling her hand back to massage it.

That's when Morrison became aware of another woman. The Major. Alisa was also dressed in the same flowing white gown as she floated in the air just behind her daughter.

"And an innocent as well," Alisa said softly. "How fascinating."

"Innocent?" Kyreen repeated, sounding insulted.

Morrison gawked at the way the women's eyes glowed in the dark. Alisa and her daughter's blonde hair reflected the last bit of cool moonlight, while Kyreen's brown skin caught the first warmth of sunrise as she floated higher in the clearing. They were all incredibly beautiful, yet he tried to sense any tension in the air. If he'd learned anything from the Velorian's data card, it was that these warriors were ordinarily deadly enemies. *But warriors by nature or nurture?* he wondered.

That worry was overwhelmed by a sense of being completely and totally out of place standing between these women. Like a wandering mortal standing before warring goddesses, his heart leapt as he remembered that he was the sole reason they were here.

He suddenly felt very inadequate to that task. Whatever it was.

He hadn't a reason to worry, as Alisa held her hand out to Kyreen, who hesitated only briefly before taking it. Without another word, Alisa led the way toward the lighted opening of the ship, and the two wonder women floated down into the hole in the leaf pile. Lillith winked at Morrison and then performed an acrobatic backflip in mid-air to follow them.

Suddenly feeling very alone, Morrison shuddered as he looked around at the pre-dawn coolness, looking for the young girl. He saw only the lightening sky. Overhead, nesting birds were beginning to awake, their early morning songs encouraging the sun to rise faster.

His feet felt very light as he walked closer to the opening, only to find the ship's inner light so bright that it hurt his eyes. He sheltered them with his hand as he slowly walked down a half dozen metal steps and through a complex airlock. Inside, a white hallway stretched a hundred feet forward to end at a round hatch.

He wiped his tears away and walked gingerly down the hallway, feeling as if he had just been transported into one of the many SciFi movies he'd watched. Most of which involved some very nasty aliens.

He reached the hatch at the end of the corridor, and it whooshed open in front of him, revealing the ship's Bridge. The man he recalled had introduced himself as Captain Andre Kalik looked up from his work. He was leaning over a transparent charting table, a series of holographic images filling the middle of the table, giving it depth. Morrison didn't recognize the stars or solar systems.

“Do you have any idea why you’re here?” Kalik asked without greeting. His voice had a clipped edge to it, like he was suppressing an angry emotion.

“Good morning to you, too,” Morrison replied, restraining his sarcasm as best he could. He sat down in one of the large contoured crew chairs to look around further. The equipment in the Bridge looked impossibly advanced compared to anything he’d seen on Wildfold.

“So, do you?” Kalik asked again.

Morrison didn’t answer as he studied a screen that showed a view of Wildfold from space. The terminator of day and night was creeping across the center screen. He slowly turned back to meet the Captain’s eyes. “I think your wife is going to do something to me. To Kyreen perhaps as well. Something to stabilize our child’s DNA.”

Kalik laughed mirthlessly as he walked closer, sitting in a chair across from Morrison. “Stabilize, huh?”

“I don’t know the correct term.”

“It’s called enhancement, Dr. Morrison, and it’s dangerous as hell.”

“So why tell me that now? You were both recruiting me pretty hard in that bar.”

Kalik studied his hands for a moment, and then looked back up at him. “Alisa is determined that Westfold can play a role in holding back the reach of the Empire in this quadrant.” He paused for a long moment. “And you have one of only two Tset’lar’s that we know are still living. The other is an ally of ours. She lives on a planet named Rostran.”

Morrison shook his head. “Never heard of it.” He wasn’t going to admit that he’d never heard of **any** other populated planet, except Aria. And now, Velor. But he suspected there had to be hundreds of such worlds in the universe. Possibly millions.

“It’s not in this quadrant.” Kalik said, frowning at the sound of his own words. “Possibly not even in this time continuum.”

“You travel in time, not just in space?”

“Not deliberately. We were exploring some phenomena in this wormhole, Cygnius 275, and we seemed to take a wrong turn, so to speak. If not for Alisa and Lillith being outside the ship at the time, we would have been torn apart. They quickly pushed us down this parallel arm of the wormhole.”

“Parallel arms? Wormholes?” Morrison asked, clearly confused.

“Think of it as a jump matrix that branches off perpendicular to the wormhole’s main axis. But inside, the effects of distance and space are congruently replaced by temporal effects.”

“And that lets you travel in time?”

“Or through alternate continuums. We aren’t sure how to define it yet. All I know is that none of these stars match anything in our databases. And that yours is the first populated planet we’ve found.”

“You’re lost?” Morrison asked incredulously.

“Not exactly,” Kalik said through clenched teeth. “We just haven’t found ourselves yet.”

Morrison smiled at the man’s bravado. “Sounds like lost to me.” His smile faded as he suddenly worried about Kyreen. Where had the Velorian taken her? “So, that was Alisa’s younger daughter we met outside? When we first arrived.”

“Our third daughter. Her name is Trina.”

Morrison nodded, and screwed up his courage to ask the question that had burning in his thoughts. “So, why are you really taking an interest in our world, Kalik?”

“Initially because it’s the only one we’ve found. But Alisa is fascinated that you have a Tset’lar who doesn’t know she is one.”

“You guys seem very worried about that.”

“If you knew what I know, you’d be worried too,” Kalik said darkly.

“Kyreen wouldn’t hurt anyone.”

Kalik laughed mirthlessly. “That’s the most bizarre thing anyone has said about a Tset’lar. Hell, man, her sisters have been known to sterilize entire planets. Tens of billions of humans have died as the result of Tset’lar attacks, thousands of Velorians too, yet there were only a few dozen Tset’s born.”

Morrison stared back at him, shocked by what he’d heard. “Billions? And only two live?”

“A plague wiped them out, released by the Galen. We’re guessing it didn’t reach your isolated world.”

“Is that why our baby’s genetics are unstable?”

Kalik shook his head. “No, that came from a far earlier event. Controlling the reproduction of the Supremis has always been a Galen objective. They put in some safeguards.”

“Galens?”

“A master race. Nearly extinct.”

“Well, then it seems as if the threat is over now. With only two left, and Kyreen being peaceful. You said the other one was an ally.”

“Three if we include your unborn daughter,” Kalik said grimly. “Fortunately, the way you’re reproducing won’t work to bring your daughter to full-term.”

Morrison swallowed hard, pushing back that growing fear. “Alisa said as much. Which is why I’m really here. To fix that.”

“A bad idea, keeping Tset’lar genetics alive. Even worse to create more. But Alisa is determined.”

“Saving our baby is a bad idea?” Morrison exclaimed angrily. “What kind of monster are you, wishing death for a month old fetus?”

“If you’d seen what I’ve seen those bitches do,” Kalik growled, “you’d do anything to destroy those monsters.”

“This is bullshit,” Morrison shouted back, rising to his feet, his anger boiling over. “I didn’t fucking come here to have my girlfriend or my unborn daughter referred to as monsters.”

“Your girlfriend?” Kalik smirked. “Tset’lars don’t have friends. Only victims.”

Morrison turned and walked toward the hatch. He nearly collided with it when it didn’t open for him. He turned back to glare at Kalik. “Am I your prisoner now?”

Kalik pushed a button and the door swished open.

Morrison stalked through the opening to find himself alone in the long corridor again. One of the other men he’d seen in the bar came out of a doorway and nodded silently to him as he headed toward the Bridge. Morrison tried a half dozen doorways along the corridor, but none would open for him. He finally found one at the far end that seemed to use an old-fashioned handle, except it was made of incredibly heavy steel. He tried to turn it, but it seemed welded in place.

He was about to exit back out the hatch he’d entered through, when the young girl floated back down to hover in front of him. Not quite four feet tall, her shimmering blonde hair fell to her waist and her eyes were as clear and blue as polished glass, yet smaller than Kyreen’s. Her skin was the most flawless shade of tan he’d ever seen, her vaporous white gown floating around her.

“You’re supposed to go in there,” she pointed to the door with the huge handle.

“I can’t open it.”

“Of course not,” she said in the matter of fact way that young children do, “you’re human.” She floated over to the door and easily twisted the handle 90 degrees counterclockwise. The door gave off a deep thud and creaked open. Turning back to him, she floated down until her bare feet landed on the floor, then glanced back up to give him a strangely adult look. “Fortunately, I’m not.”

Morrison watched her walk off to swish through one of the doors that had refused to admit him. Alone again, he turned his gaze back to the partially open armored hatch. It was dark inside, but with a flickering glow that looked like candlelight.

Leaning against the door, he strained to open it enough to slip through. The room was surprisingly large, much bigger than a hotel room, and the air was filled with flowing white silk banners that hung halfway to the floor. A hundred candles lit the floor, formed into elaborate patterns.

The candles flickered softly as he slowly walked toward a raised platform in the middle of the room. The platform was surrounded by heavier drapes of red silk. Reaching out to part the drapes, he was shocked to find Kyreen and Lillith kneeling in the middle of the platform, their bodies slick with sweat. The young women were kissing passionately, arms wrapped around each other, blonde and black hair intermingled, fragrant with sweat, their chocolate and tanned skin intermingling. They seemed

unconscious of his presence. Kyreen was busy kissing her way down Lillith's body, pausing at her breasts. Lillith gave off a soft cry of pleasure.

Morrison felt like a voyeur, and his first instinct was to leave. Except that Trina had said he was supposed to be here. That bothered him enough as it was, but now that he was here, he was going to stay, especially after his adjusting eyes took in the fact that neither woman was wearing gold. Fascinated by that, he found he was incredibly turned on. Stepping back to hide in the banners of silk, he watched as Alisa appeared now, her body as naked as the others.

Lillith smiled up at her mother as she floated backward, opening her long legs. Kyreen's hands played skillfully over her inner thighs, her kisses following. Lillith leaned her head back as she floated on her back, her long hair spilling across the blue satin sheets. Guiding her hands to cup Lillith's buttocks, Kyreen's kisses moved higher, finding the beautiful, nude mound of Lillith's sex. She began to run the tip of her tongue gently along those intimate folds, opening Lillith so gently, enticing her body to awaken fully in the way of a Velorian.

That most feminine of organs obediently peaking upward between the tight folds, and Lillith cried out softly as Kyreen's tongue encircled her passion, her chest heaving as she gasped for air. Kyreen continued her seemingly delicate ministrations, playing Lillith's body like a fine instrument, skillfully taking her closer to her peak of passion.

Morrison suspected that nothing he was seeing was delicate in the least, not in human terms anyway. Still, he was fascinated by the girl-on-girl loving. Unlike that horrible video he'd seen before, this lovemaking was tender, gentle and caring. Beautiful. And like most men, he suddenly envisioned himself somehow joining in, pouring his wild passion in to the heady mixture of scents that filled the room.

That thought had no soon crossed his mind than Kyreen slipped to the side, rotating her body in mid-air, spooning herself up beneath Lillith's back as if to support her levitation. Alisa floated closer and joined them, wrapping her long legs around her daughter's, pulling them backward as she opened them wider, entwining her arms in Kyreen's as well.

She turned her head to smile at Morrison. "The rest is up to you, my new friend."

Morrison gulped air as he saw Lillith squirming, needful of being touched further, the word "please" escaping her moist lips. He was also very conscious of Kyreen and Alisa's eyes on him.

It all crashed in on him. Kyreen and Alisa restraining the fully empowered Velorian after Kyreen had taken her to the edge of orgasm.

It was going to be his job to finish her!

But clearly not in the way of a man, as Lillith wore no gold.

He felt as if he was floating on air himself as he walked closer, easing his body between the women's legs, kneeling down on the firm mattress. The warmth of Lillith's sex was only inches before his lips. He leaned forward, guiding his hands along Kyreen's powerful legs, then across Alisa's slender hips, finally closing his hands around the cuteness of Lillith's tight ass.

He touched his tongue to the fragrant wonder of her wetness.

An avalanche of taste instantly enveloped him, like flowers and honey mixed with a hint of sexy musk. His body surged with desire as he tried to pick up where Kyreen had left off. Tracing his tongue slowly up Lillith's sex, he pursed his lips and pulled her tiny nub of passion inward, holding it gently with his teeth, swirling his tongue around it at the same time.

Lillith began to buck wildly, but the other women used their immense strength to hold her back.

Morrison held Lillith's ass tighter as he gripped her passion with his teeth, knowing he couldn't hurt her, and attacked her with a passion he'd previously felt only in Kyreen's arms.

Bare seconds had passed before Lillith cried out and her body began to jerk even more wildly. He heard Alisa gasp as she strained to keep her daughter's legs opened, and Kyreen lent her greater strength to the effort, protecting him, holding back the Velorian's impassioned arms as well, anchoring Lillith's orgasming body into that tiny bit of space.

Lillith's cries of passion went on and on, as she was seemingly caught in an endless peak of ecstasy. Morrison increased the fervor of his ministrations, hoping to earn her release, and then something remarkable happened. A single drop of glowing nectar appeared from the very tip of her clitoris. Without thinking, Morrison drew it into himself, just as Lillith cried out and went crazy beneath him.

A soft explosion of color erupted from behind his eyeballs, only to be washed away as a warm wave of white light enveloped him. Morrison stiffened and slumped to the floor, and the white wave was quickly replaced by a soft blanket of darkness.

He was unconscious seconds later when Alisa released Lillith, and Kyreen turned back to face her, their bodies rotating back upright in the mid-air, their deep kisses resuming as Kyreen's strong fingers replaced his loving.

Alisa carried Morrison away, his body seeming weightless in her arms.

Lillith followed them down the hallway much later, after Kyreen had exhausted her.

Kalik returned with Alisa to join Kyreen. He slowly undressed in front of the two women.

Alisa smiled at her husband, then at Kyreen. She knew the Tset'lar's passion was only beginning.

As was her own.

Chapter Six

Kyreen awoke hours later. Smiling, she curled up in the satin sheets, feeling the warm glow inside her. Alisa had shared her husband's passion, and he'd proven to be as fantastically enhanced as Alisa had promised Morrison would become.

She'd never known that lovemaking could be that way with a man... somehow tender and athletic, almost violent, yet loving at the same time. Or perhaps it was the lovemaking without gold, a delicious treat that filled her body with wild pleasures that she could not even name. All she knew was that she loved it as he took her again and again, fucking her until they were both exhausted.

She rose to dress in the clothes she'd brought. She glanced through the walls to find Morrison, spasming from the effects of a painful illness. Kalik sat across the room, smiling back at her.

"Is he going to be okay?" she asked, worried.

"Yeah, probably," he replied. "Lillith and Trina are taking care of him. He'll probably be more vital than I am when he wakes up."

A delicious shiver raced through Kyreen's body at that thought. "That would be incredible. No, beyond incredible."

"So you enjoyed me?"

"Most certainly," Kyreen cooed, unable to resist smiling. "Any more where that came from?"

His smile brightened as he rose. "Alisa permits me a few discretions. But not all. As I do her." He laughed softly. "She is Velorian, after all."

Kyreen guessed what he meant by that, so she changed the subject. "Supposedly your wife and daughters are my mortal enemies. Yet I feel a strange closeness to them today."

"Alisa does that to people. But it does prove one thing. The hatred between Protectors and Tset's is nurture, not nature."

"She's a Protector? Don't they have uniforms and stuff?"

"She's not officially one. Unlike Lillith, who did graduate from the program. But Lara's enhancement has assured that Alisa shares a Protector's sweet strength. And then some."

"Lara?"

"A remarkable young woman. Like you, she lives in a remote corner of the galaxy. Her foster mother, Tala, is much like you, The Galen's vengeance didn't reach her either."

"Then I know who to avoid."

"Easy enough. Not many people have met a Galen..." his voice drifted off as he fell into thought. "Or known that they did."

"So how is David?"

Kalik looked back up at her. "He'll survive. Not all those with the fever do. Although his exact degree of enhancement remains to be determined."

"When?"

“Tonight. Possibly tomorrow. The course of his transformation seems to be very rapid. I suspect you had something to do with that.”

Kyreen looked questioningly at him.

“It has often been found that those with prior intimate contact with Velorians are significantly more enhanced,” Kalik explained. “I was a case in point.”

“What you were was incredible,” Kyreen said sexily, stretching herself catlike as she savored the strong, warmth that still filled her. “So strong. So passionate.” She didn’t say, “*so big, so hard*”, but she knew that was part of why she felt so good inside.

Kalik smiled. “Now I know I have to leave.” He paused near the armored doorway. “Your friend is down the hall. Go to him.” He turned and disappeared.

Kyreen looked through the wall to watch Kalik return to his quarters, feeling a bit jealous as she watched him slip into bed to lie beside Alisa, who was still sleeping. She couldn’t help but feel a sense of envy. He probably made love to her every day. Maybe more than once.

She sighed at that sexy thought and forced herself to look away.

Scanning the rooms on the other side of the corridor, she saw that Morrison’s spasms had passed. Yet he was still clutching sweat-soaked sheets to his chest as he breathed raggedly in his sleep. The younger daughter, Trina, stood beside him, sponging his brow. When she was done, she poured the remaining water from her basin over the sheets to cool him.

The girl was so beautiful, so perfect. Kyreen couldn’t help but wonder if this was what her daughter would look like, except for having her own dark coloration, of course.

She suddenly felt a strange desire to see her baby, to make sure she was okay. She stared at her abdomen, her eyes glowing brilliantly enough to light the room, but she saw nothing but the surface of her skin. Despite being able to look through any other substance in the universe, her own skin was as opaque to her as it was to a human.

Sighing, Kyreen looked around for a place to shower, the scent of her lovemaking strong. The only bathroom on the ship was occupied by one of the crewmen. Searching her cabin instead, he found only the sparse clothing she’d brought with her.

Feeling lonely after getting dressed, she headed to the Bridge and the company of the crewman who was on duty there. Most importantly, she had to find out how long their ship was going to be here.

After all, Wildfold’s date with destiny was due in a few months, and her pregnancy was going to interfere with that.

But three Velorians... they might just do.

To be continued...