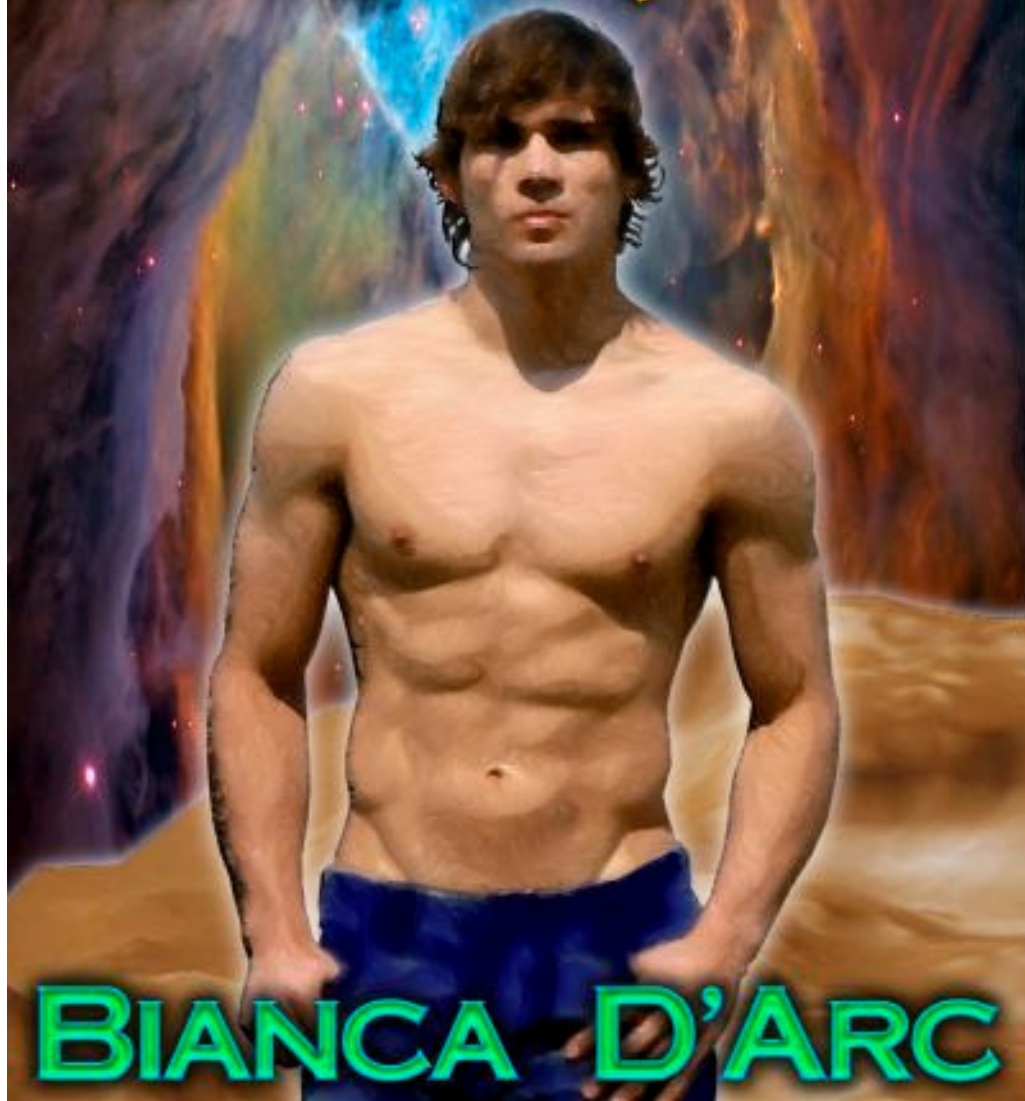


SONS OF AMBER

Ezekiel



BIANCA D'ARC

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Sons of Amber: Ezekiel

A novella of sci-fi erotic romance by

Bianca D'Arc

Sons of Amber: Ezekiel

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Prologue

Dr. Amber Waithe looked at her sons with pride. They were all the finest specimens of manhood, most of whom clearly exhibited the dominant and protective genes she'd labored over, and some showing signs of being risk-takers and pioneers. They were all physically strong, but were mentally superior as well. They had high-level intelligence and steady personalities, the best she could design.

And they all bred true.

Each and every one of them was totally immune from the Jit'suku virus that so cursed many others. The Jits thought they had struck the final blow in the Unwinnable War, but they were wrong. It was Amber and her sons who would prevail in the end. The Jits had not ended humanity within three generations, as they planned when they had been defeated at Markesh.

Their doomsday weapon—the virus intended to attack the human reproductive system—had ultimately failed. Not solely because of Amber, though her genetic research did have a lot to do with the recovery of the human race, and would well into the future. No, it was their failure to really understand human reproduction in the first place that had been their downfall.

Amber's research revealed their grave miscalculation. Jit genetics, while closely resembling humans in other ways, actually defaulted to the male. By contrast, *Homo sapiens* generally defaulted to the female. The Jit virus, which had mutated through the human population to eventually infect the Jit'suku themselves, was designed to kill off all male humans—even those still in the womb. It was a point of Jit'suku honor that they did not make war upon women, but their bioweapon was more deadly than they'd thought and it did kill some women, sickening and scarring many others with the result that they became infertile as well.

Humans were just different enough from the Jits in the microscopic ways that counted, though the vast majority of human children born after the virus attack were female. With Amber's help, and the few males who were immune or otherwise able to avoid being infected, some male children were born to perpetuate the species, but not enough to keep it viable. Which is where Amber's sons had their purpose.

Designed in the lab, they were sex machines with high intelligence. Add dominant alpha male traits, killer physiques, and the skills to match, and they were all completely immune to the Jit virus. She had carefully planned the first generation of her boys so they would breed ninety-seven percent male offspring. Successive generations would equalize over time to the human norm of about fifty-fifty, but by her calculations, that would be well into the recovery of the species as a whole. They would have done their jobs by then, and the future generations' genetics would normalize.

All as she had planned.

One

Zeke looked about and grimaced. The dark earth beckoned to him, but he couldn't drop yet. He had to find shelter before the sun rose higher, or he would burn to a cinder on this godforsaken rock.

Zeke had more than his share of stamina. It was a gift of his genetics. Designed and raised by Dr. Amber Waithe and her team of geneticists, he knew he had a mission in life: to spread his seed far and wide, bringing his fertile offerings to every woman who would have him. By the Maker, he enjoyed his job.

But even his enormous strength was taxed by the huge binary stars that were just a little too close to this dry, arid planet. Too bad his Risker's nature had brought him here but he was usually able to roll with the punches. Riskers had to be able to deal with the results of their actions, and he was one of the best at making lemonade out of lemons.

This time, however, he might just die for his troubles. The suns were rising all too quickly, and he was caught out in the open. He took one last, long, weary look at the suns and kept on trekking. Minutes, or maybe hours later, he felt himself fading under the onslaught of oppressive heat and strong solar radiation. He saw the dusty ground rush up at him as if from a distance, then he knew no more.

* * *

Zeke woke hours later, feeling a cool wetness on his face. He had to be hallucinating, but he didn't feel the merciless suns pounding down on him anymore. No, instead he felt the coolness of earth, the scent of dirt and dampness in his nostrils, as if he were in a cavern. Cautiously, he cracked one eyelid just enough to see.

There was a woman at his side, mopping his brow with a damp cloth. The suns were blessedly absent. He was in a chamber somewhere underground if he didn't miss his guess. He had no idea how long he'd been out or who had saved him. Somehow, they'd transported him to his present location—wherever that was. He searched his memory, but didn't remember anything after passing out in the heat of the twin suns.

"Sister, he wakes."

The treble voice came from somewhere off to his left as the cool hand abruptly lifted from his brow. He wanted that cool, wet cloth and gentle touch back. Badly.

"Are you well, brother traveler?"

The soft voice caressed his senses, and he opened his eyes to behold the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. His savior was an angel, he was sure, her face heart-shaped and lovely, even devoid of the usual cosmetic alterations women of the upper classes habitually made. No, her face was pure and natural, one hundred percent human female. She was soft, slightly rounded, and perfect.

Her delicate eyebrows drew together in concern as she studied him. Her hand touched his face once more with the cool cloth and it was bliss.

"Are you well, brother?"

"Just keep doing that." His voice was a deep rumble. "Your touch is comforting."

He looked up in time to see her slight blush, but she continued stroking his brow with the wet cloth. A hesitant smile lit her curvy lips. Lips he suddenly longed to kiss in passion.

But his body was telling him something was definitely wrong. He felt achy all over and weak. He had never felt so feeble before in his life.

"What happened?"

His angel spoke as she tended to him. "I found you on the surface at midday. I don't know where you came from or how you came to be on the surface at such a dangerous time."

"Ship crashed." His strength was waning and he damned the weakness that stole over him. His eyes drooped with weariness.

"You came from the stars?" He heard her hesitate and his eyes reopened. He read fear in her gaze now and he didn't like it. "Are you human?" She seemed to steel herself for his answer.

"Be at ease, lady. I'm as human as you. I'm one of the Sons of Amber, designed to rebuild the human race."

Usually all he had to do was mention his illustrious mother and all doors were open to him. Males were that rare. Breeder males even more so. But this attractive little woman did not seem to understand what his words meant.

"You're not Jit'suku. That's good." She seemed to want to reassure herself. "It's just that we have not seen anyone from the stars in many, many years. Our Order selected this inhospitable planet as a retreat when the war came too near our home on Espia. Our elders cut off all communication with the outside so that we might hide from the Jit'suku."

"Then you don't know what happened?"

His angel shook her head, and he noticed the other women drawing near to listen in. He had to tell them, but he was so damned tired. Still, he could give them the bare bones at least, before his strength gave out completely.

"We defeated the Jit'suku at Markesh, but they released a virus that infected just about everyone. It killed most males and caused what few babies that were born to be female. They intended to wipe out humanity within three generations," he paused to breathe through the fatigue that plagued him, "but Dr. Amber Waithe genetically engineered a group of male children that were immune to the Jit virus. I'm one of them."

The angel sat back, looking stunned.

"Did you hear, Sister Angela?" The other little nun was back now, moving closer on his other side. She was younger than his angel, but cute as a button.

For the first time in his life, he realized he was looking upon an eligible human female without any trace of lust. That thought had him rocking back on his heels, figuratively at least. Perhaps it had something to do with his illness, but no, he wanted his angel as much as he ever wanted any woman. Actually, more so. He didn't think he had ever wanted a particular woman this badly.

The realization confused him, but he was too weak to sort through it now. He decided to concentrate his energies on getting well first, then he would bed his angel and figure out why she was so irresistible.

"I heard, Sister. We must tell Mother Rachel."

"I know already, children. Be at ease." A new female voice floated through the chamber to him, coming closer. With it came a fragrance of flowers and earth, and a beautiful, slightly older woman stepped into his line of view. "Your arrival was foreseen. Be welcome, Son of Amber. Can you tell us your name?"

He didn't know why, but he wanted to tell this lovely older woman whatever she wanted. He would reveal all his secret plans, if she but asked, but she only wanted his name. That he could give her before his strength failed.

"Ezekiel."

"Be welcome, Ezekiel." She placed her hand on his forehead and he felt a peace he'd never experienced before wash over his senses. "Rest now and recover."

* * *

That was all he knew until he woke a full day later. The angel was gone but the cute little nun was at his side, watching him with wide, almost frightened eyes. He tried to sit up, but found himself in too much pain to move very far.

"Oh please, do not move, brother."

"What's wrong with me?"

"Tis the aftereffects of the *tessla* we gave you to deaden the pain. Your head will clear in a few moments, but you must lie still. It will take much longer to be free of the *tessla* if you do not." She moved back as he resettled, then went to the doorway, calling for someone before returning to his side. "Sister Angela will come shortly. She will want to see how you're feeling."

"Who is Sister Angela?"

The young girl giggled. "I'm sorry. The other woman who was here when you woke last. That is Sister Angela. She is one of our most talented healers. It was Sister Angela who set your leg."

"My leg?" He tried to lift up again but sat back abruptly as the room began to spin.

"Your leg was fractured." A new voice sounded from the doorway. Zeke swiveled his eyes up to see the angel who had tended him. She moved softly into the room, her strides brisk but feminine in a way that caused his gaze to linger. "But it is knit well now. After the *tessla* wears off, you should be ready to sit up for a bit."

"You're Angela?" She nodded, and he liked the blush that came over her pretty face as she moved closer. "Thank you for tending my injuries. You, too." He turned toward the younger girl with a small smile. "I didn't get your name."

"I'm Agatha." The younger girl blushed, too, though it didn't have quite the effect on him that Angela's blushes had.

"Thank you, Agatha. You both have been angels of mercy in my hour of need."

Angela moved closer. "It's part of our calling."

For a dreadful moment the pit of his stomach fell, as if he were in free fall. "Are you part of a religious community? Are you, uh, nuns or something?"

Both girls chuckled and it somehow reassured him. "We're part of a fellowship, but it's not religious in nature. Our ancestors banded together because of their shared abilities and left the homeworld as a group."

"Then you're not under any kind of vows or anything, right? You're not, uh, celibate?"

The blushes returned even fiercer than before, and both sets of feminine eyes darted away, but there was excitement in the air as Angela answered. "No. We're not bound by vows of celibacy, though I've read about those kinds of religious communities in the histories. As a healer-in-training I'm bound only by the ancient Oath of Hippocrates."

Relief zinging through him, Zeke waited a moment more, then tentatively tried for a sitting position. Surprise filled him when his head remained clear this time.

"So there are males in this settlement?" he asked, curious. He'd never met another human male who wasn't one of his genetically engineered brothers.

"Yes, of course," Agatha replied.

"Amazing." Zeke knew he'd have to get word back to Command about these people. To his knowledge there were no other uninfected colonies anywhere.

His angel took a seat beside him, her cute little butt resting on the bed near his hip as she faced him. He thought he saw admiration in her eyes as she looked at his bare chest a moment before she shuttered her gaze.

"How do you feel now?" Her voice was low as she busied herself with the items on the tray she'd brought.

"Better, thank you." How he wished she'd look up at him, but he had to get his mind off her and onto business. There was a reason he crash-landed on this rock, and it had to come first. "Did any of your people have a chance to look at my ship?"

That got her gaze back to his. "Ship?"

"I suppose that answers my question." He pulled the covers down, ignoring the fact that he was naked, and examined his leg. It looked sound enough, but standing would be the real test. He shifted himself to the side of the bed and stood.

* * *

Angela held her breath, shocked at his behavior. A look from her sent Agatha scrambling from the room to get help.

"I said you could sit up, not get up." Her voice was breathless even to her own ears as she got a good look at him, naked as the day he was born, testing the support of his newly healed leg. She moved around the bed to stand in front of him should he need her help—at least, that's what she told herself she was doing. She didn't really want a better look at the marvelous male flesh revealed so enticingly before her. Did she?

Angela had seen naked men a few times before in her role as healer, but the men of the colony didn't look like this! This male was totally out of her experience. Ruggedly handsome and muscled in a way that made her mouth water, this male was like those in the storycubes from beforetimes. He was magnificent.

"It feels good as new." He put his weight on the leg that had been broken and smiled at her. There was a twinkle in his eye she had never seen before in any male. It appealed to her on some basic level with which she was altogether unfamiliar. "Thank you, sweetheart."

He leaned in, impossibly closer, until his warm lips settled over hers. Her eyebrows went up in alarm as he pulled her in with his big hands until her open palms rested against his warm, naked chest, his hardening cock poking against her thighs through the thin fabric of her dress.

He was becoming aroused! And he was kissing her like she'd never been kissed before. It felt like he put his soul into it, his tongue seeking entrance to her mouth and slipping in as she gasped. The gasp was from the action of his mobile hands, one cupping her ass and pressing her firmly against his erection, the other slipping between them to pinch one nipple hard enough to make her moan.

"Little Angel, do you feel what you do to me?" His lips nibbled down her jaw, lingering at her ear and biting down on the lobe just enough to make her squeak. Then he buried his mouth in her neck, his tongue laving her skin as if she were a sweet treat.

Now both of his hands kneaded her ass, pulling her into his hardness with a rhythm she followed almost helplessly. He felt so good!

* * *

"Are all the Sons of Amber as randy as you, Ezekiel?"

The woman's commanding voice came from the doorway, breaking through the sensual spell. Zeke pulled back but he could not let go of the petite bundle in his arms. He merely looked to the door where the Mother of this little enclave waited, an indulgent and slightly amused expression on her lovely features.

"Yes, ma'am." He winked. "Especially when in such lovely company."

His little angel blushed, delighting him. He felt so drawn to this one lovely little woman, it amazed him. Never before had he felt such an immediate, soul-deep attraction for a particular female, and he had bedded thousands since he was grown enough to do so. First he'd been clinically taught how to pleasure a woman by the female doctors and scientists in Dr. Amber Waithe's facility. His performance had been graded, his semen

collected and tested repeatedly for viability. He'd had no real youth. Accelerated growth in the incubators meant he had come to consciousness in early adolescence, just as his reproductive organs stirred to life.

Dr. Amber had overseen his progress, along with her team. They were all female and each of them had taught him and his brothers a thing or two about how to please a woman, in their own way. By the time he was ready for his duties outside the lab, he had fucked most of the women there for training purposes and some just because they wanted a male between their thighs. Sex was never in short supply for him, either at the lab or since he'd left there to assume his duties with the defense forces.

It was part of his duty to bed willing females, as well as producing sperm deposits at regular intervals so females from many different human planets and colonies could be impregnated with his or any of his brother's sperm whenever they wished. He didn't know exactly how many children he had fathered by now, but Amber and her scientists kept meticulous track. He knew there were probably hundreds, if not thousands, of little boys running around the various human worlds with his DNA by now, and the thought gave him solace.

Something of him would live on to help humanity survive. At least in this way, his life up to this point had some meaning. Still, in the dark of night, something about his life bothered him, leaving him unfulfilled. He had come to realize that something was missing, but he wasn't exactly sure what it was. The old storycubes he'd seen from beforetimes showed a much different existence than the one he was living now, where one man and one woman would live their lives together in partnership, and love.

He'd never felt love, and it was something he wanted to experience at least once before his Risker's nature led to one risk too many. He looked down at the gentle creature still held tightly in his embrace and realized that if he could experience love, he would want to try it with someone exactly like this little angel. Perhaps he could make her love him, though he hadn't a clue how to go about it.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" his angel whispered, her dewy eyes staring up at him.

"You are the most beautiful thing I have ever beheld."

Her eyes melted and her lips softened with desire. He would have claimed yet another kiss from her at that moment, but the Mother cleared her throat rather loudly, reminding them both of her presence. How could he have forgotten she was there?

Zeke turned to face the woman in the doorway, keeping Angela in his arms. He shifted so she stood slightly in front of him, both facing the woman by the door. His hard length pressed between the cheeks of her ass, with only the thin barrier of her dress between them, as if it had found its home.

"Mother Rachel, I—" Angela didn't struggle in his arms, which he found intensely gratifying for some reason. He could tell by the rising flush on the delicate skin of her neck and the heat of her cheek against his hand that she was embarrassed.

The older woman held up her hand to forestall his angel's words, a benevolent smile on her serene features. She advanced into the room and took a seat in the chair at his bedside, inviting them to sit with a wave of her fingers. Zeke levered himself down on the bed to sit, keeping Angela in his arms. She was such a little thing it was easy to maneuver her about, like a little doll. He kept her in his lap, turning her cheek into his chest as he leaned back against the headboard of the small bed, facing the other woman.

"Ezekiel, I have the gift of foresight. It's that gift which has helped me lead this colony for many years. Most of our people have gifts of one kind or another, but the one in each generation with the strongest foresight is chosen as leader." She bowed her head modestly, but her knowing eyes did not leave his. "I have foreseen the danger you bring

to our people—and the hope of salvation for all humanity. Your actions in the next few days will bring either disaster or epiphany."

Zeke shook his head, barely able to believe what this woman claimed. Sure, paranormal abilities had been documented among humans from time to time, but it was a rare thing indeed. For certain, he'd never met anyone who claimed to be able to see the future before.

The woman smiled and he saw a light of challenge in her eyes. "You crashed here on the run from Jit pirates, is that not so?"

"Well, yeah." Zeke was amazed by her knowledge, but then it could be she'd arrived at the conclusion through a process of deduction. Or maybe a lucky guess.

"They search for you. Within three cycles, they will find your crash site. You must get there first."

Zeke felt the back of his neck itch. "I'd planned to go out as soon as it got dark. There are some things on my ship I could use and I have to try to contact my base."

The Mother nodded. "Good. It will be dark soon." She checked her chronometer. "Sister Angela will accompany you."

"Begging your pardon, ma'am, but I work better alone." He felt the little woman in his arms stiffen. "Sweetheart, you'd only slow me down. I'll be back before you know it."

The Mother stood. "No. You don't understand. There are creatures that hunt in the darkness on this planet. You don't know their ways. Sister Angela goes with you to protect you."

He couldn't help it. He laughed out loud at the idea the little woman in his arms would need to defend him from any sort of predator. She struggled to leave his embrace, but he wouldn't allow it.

"Whoa, there. I'm sorry, angel, but I'm a trained warrior. I'm not used to the idea of a woman protecting me. It's usually the other way around."

"Not here," the Mother said with finality in her tone. "You'll soon learn why, so don't question what you don't yet understand. We've lived here for a long time. We know this planet and its creatures."

Zeke could see the wisdom in that and backed down as graciously as possible. Besides, having his angel nearby made him feel good in a way he didn't quite understand.

Two

An hour later, Zeke found himself in a rattletrap of a land vehicle, chugging along the darkening surface of the most inhospitable ball of rock he'd ever seen. If not for the hidden settlement below ground, there was no way human life could last for long on the hard-baked surface. The all-too-close binary suns saw to that.

He heard a strange barking call off to his left at the same time he noticed Angela scrambling to add some kind of cone-shaped device to the gunnery position in the rear of the vehicle. She'd given him a basic course in driving the thing, then taken up a vigilant stance behind the gunmount after they left the series of tunnels and emerged onto the surface.

"What is that?" He sped the little craft along, homing in on his crash site using the small handcomp that had been in the pocket of his flight suit. It was a minor miracle the somewhat delicate handcomp had come through the crash and Zeke's ordeal on the baking surface of the planet without a scratch. Good thing the short-range locator beacon on the ship was still functional, too. He knew he could at least find the ship, but what condition it would be in when he got there, he had no idea.

Zeke was in a lot of pain when he left the ship days before and not focused on its post-crash condition. Instead he was more concerned with finding shelter from the binary suns and a little delirious with pain from a nasty head injury. He couldn't recall exactly what had been damaged on his ship. He knew it was in reasonable shape, but also that it wouldn't be flying anytime soon.

"*Gaks*." Angela spit the word at him and he took a moment to look back at her disgusted face.

"What?"

"*Gaks*. They hunt in packs. Depending on the size of the pack that's tracking us, we can probably handle them. They have huge ears and hunt by sound. That's what this is for." She pointed to the conical device now on the end of her energy cannon. "It's a wave amplifier. I can chase quite a few of them away with one well-placed shot, but they come at you from all directions. How we do will depend on how many there are following us."

He listened to the sounds of the desert night, understanding almost immediately why the colonists had named the creatures *gaks*. It was the sound of their cries. Like short coughs, multiplied over and over, the creatures called out to each other with that eerie noise. Judging by the number of calls, there were at least fifteen to twenty of the things coming up on either side of them, but luckily, they were nearing the ship.

If he could get them to it quickly enough, maybe he could use what remained of the shielding to keep the *gaks* at bay. Nothing on the surface of any planet could get through the energy shielding on his ship. It was designed to keep interstellar debris from fouling his engines down to the level of cosmic dust. It would surely keep out a bunch of odd sounding pack animals.

Without warning, Angela fired the cannon mounted atop the rickety land vehicle. The whole thing shuddered. Zeke turned his head in time to see three of the most hideously ugly creatures he'd ever seen scrambling away. They had long, pointed ears and big snouts filled with sharp teeth. They were an indeterminate gray color and ran nimbly on four legs, using an additional two front appendages like short arms.

Angela fired again and five more went running from his right.

"Keep driving!" she called, aiming and firing again. More creatures ran, but even more came rushing in to take their place.

He pushed the little rattletrap vehicle as fast as it would go. They were almost there.

Angela was firing continuously now, but the creatures kept coming. Zeke tried to devise a plan to get them inside the ship and hopefully to safety, but he wasn't sure if the ship was whole enough to keep the *gaks* out. It was a risk, but then, he was a Risker. This was the kind of thing he'd been born to do.

Tapping out a series of commands on his handcomp, he prayed to the Maker that the bay doors were still functional. When he saw a growing light in the distance he released the breath he'd been holding. The bay ramp was lowering and the light from within the cargo hold shone brightly as it was revealed. Now if he could time this just right, he could get himself, Angela, and this crazy little land vehicle inside, the bay door shut again, and the shield up before the *gaks* found a way in through any of the wrecked areas of the ship.

* * *

Zeke's risky plan worked like a charm. Only a few of the *gaks* tried to follow them up the ramp but Angela repelled them with a final blast from the energy cannon. The rise of the bay door prevented any of the other creatures from entering that way.

Zeke vaulted from the land vehicle and headed for the computer console as soon as he was inside. He felt Angela following at a slower pace.

"Thank the Maker." Zeke input his codes and raised the ship's shield. It was intact and more than powerful enough to repel the night creatures. He turned to look down at his little angel, standing quietly at his side. "We're safe for the moment. The *gaks* can't breach the shield."

Adrenaline pumping through him, he couldn't help but reach for her. She came willingly into his arms and raised her lips to his. The feel of her made his senses swim, the taste of her fired his blood, but he knew there was something he had to do first, before he gave in to the temptation of her lush, young body. Straining against his desire, he set her away from him.

"We have work to do, before pleasure." He couldn't resist swooping in to place a silly kiss on the tip of her nose. "I assume the *gaks* will scurry away just before the suns rise?"

She nodded. "All the hunters and prey retreat in the hour before dawn."

"Good." He turned back to the console and tapped a few more commands. "Until then, I have to check the status of my ship and communications gear. I need to try to get a message to my base." He looked over the readouts to be certain the shield would hold. He could also access internal diagnostics from this station to make certain nothing indigenous to the planet had already found its way into the ship to lie in wait for them.

"Everything looks clean. At least I remembered to seal the hatch before I took off across the surface in search of help." He laughed at himself and the damage a little bump on the head could do to an otherwise sane individual. "I don't know what I was thinking." He paused a moment, facing away from Angela, but he could almost feel her curious eyes boring into his back. "At the time, I could've sworn I heard someone, or maybe something, calling out to me."

He turned to face her as she shrugged. It was not the reaction he expected.

"Why aren't you surprised?"

"Maybe you did hear something. Such things happen among our people. It's not that astonishing to think a higher power would help you find your way to us." Her eyes evaded him as she went on, her cheeks flushing just the tiniest bit. "I normally don't make

a habit of roaming the surface in the middle of the day either, but I knew I had to go out that day. Perhaps you were calling to us as much as we called to you."

"Fate?" he mused, reaching out to slip a finger under her chin, raising her eyes to meet his once more. "You think it was meant to be that you found me and saved my life?"

She nodded slightly. "So the Mother said. How else can you explain it?"

He let her go and shook his head, starting for the inner bay doors. "I can't." He waited for her to join him before heading out into the corridor that led to the command center of his mid-sized ship. He'd have to do the rest of his checks from there, and if the comm systems were working, that's also where he'd find them.

* * *

An hour later, Zeke threw the wrench he'd been using to the floor in disgust.

"There's no way to conceal a transmission. The scrambler's dead."

"What does that mean?" Angela came up beside him, her warm presence reminding him of the reason for his haste.

"If I send out an unscrambled transmission, the Jit pirates will be able to see exactly what I'm sending. Even worse, the scrambling unit also holds the camouflage circuits. If I send out a broadband signal without them engaged, there's no way to hide its point of origin, so the Jits will know exactly where we are in addition to what we're saying." Frustration ate at him.

"That's not good."

"You're good at understatement, aren't you?" He looked up into her eyes, finding humor there, and immediately his tense shoulders relaxed. There was something so comforting about her mere presence, even when the comm system was shot to hell and back. All she had to do was smile at him and everything was suddenly okay. Even if it wasn't.

"Is there a way to narrow your transmission? To aim it so that only your people receive it?"

Zeke sat back, thinking for a moment. "You just might have something there. It's old tech. Narrow beam hasn't been used in years since it requires precise calculations and maps, but I was on a mapping mission as I approached your planet, so I have the most up-to-date data available. If the mapper isn't fried as well." He stood, taking a quick moment to cup her shoulders and deliver a smacking kiss to her lips before putting her aside so he could get to a different console in the tight command area.

He felt her watching over his shoulder as he tapped some commands into the state of the art mapping unit. She jumped when the holo display zipped to life, its gentle glow lighting the cabin as he brought up a three dimensional representation of his route from the base on Atlantia Prime to his current position.

"Is that where you came from?" Her voice brushed past his ear, reminding him how he wanted this dark night to end—if he could just get his transmission sent. With the Jit threat looming, duty had to come first.

"Yes. Atlantia Station is headquarters for the Quadrant Regimental Command. If I get this right, I might be able to tight beam directly to them." He tapped out a few more calculations, feeding coordinates into two consoles now, utilizing both hands.

* * *

"How do you do that?" Angela was amazed by the way he could perform two tasks at once, as if both of his hands operated independently of the other.

"Sweetheart, I was genetically engineered by one of the most brilliant minds in human history. All the Sons of Amber were designed to be multi-taskers with above average intellectual abilities. It's no big deal." He looked up at her and shrugged, his hands continuing their work all the while he talked to her, further astonishing her.

"Amazing."

"Hold on, I think we're about ready to try this." He winked at her and put all his attention on the comm console, leaning in to the vid pickup. "There's some risk involved in this," he took a moment to meet her eyes, pausing before he input the final commands, "but I believe it will work."

"Mother Rachel believes it's our only chance. Without help from your people, the Jits will find us anyway. If your signal goes astray, it will only speed up the inevitable."

He touched her hand with his, squeezing softly. "Have a little faith. I may be a Risk Taker, but I never take foolish risks."

"I trust you, Ezekiel."

"Call me Zeke, Angel." He squeezed her hand once more and turned back to touch the final sequence on the console. After a few flickers, the screen came to life.

"Atlantia Station, this is Ezekiel Amber. Mayday. Mayday. Mayday. Come in Atlantia Station. Over." He sat back and reached for her hand, pulling her down on his lap. "It will take some time for the signal to reach them and a few moments for any return signal. I'm keeping the beam open so they'll know to piggyback on it and not blow my location. It's standard operating procedure when comming with someone in my position."

"For a spy, you mean?" His muscles twitched slightly under her and she realized with some satisfaction that she'd managed to surprise him. "Well, isn't that what you are? Why else would you be roaming out here alone, mapping empty space?"

He kissed her nose. "You're a pretty smart lady, but the proper term for what I was doing is *reconnaissance*. I was gathering intelligence on the buildup of Jit pirates in this sector and ran smack into the middle of them."

"Not such a good spy, then, are you?" She teased him, and he retaliated with a kiss. His lips devoured hers, his tongue tangling with hers so deliciously they almost missed the crackle and hiss of the comm system as the response came in. She could see the excitement in his eyes as his gamble paid off. He had such beautiful eyes.

"Zeke! Where the hell are you, brother? I've mobilized half the fleet looking for you. Over."

She pulled back, surprised by the handsome man's image on the comm screen. He looked a lot like Ezekiel in build and the sharpness of his attractive facial features, but his hair was dark as midnight, where Zeke's was a lighter shade of honey brown. His eyes however, were harder, harsher, and darker, almost as if they had seen too much of the worst of life.

Ezekiel didn't seem to mind that she was on his lap as he answered, though she was clearly in view of the vid pickup.

"Michael! I'm glad you're there. I got hit by Jit pirates and crash landed on a planet with binary suns. There are people here, Mike. An uncontaminated colony of humans. I repeat: uncontaminated. The Jits are coming back for me and I need your help, buddy, before they find me and bring the virus to these good folk. I'm sending the coordinates layered under the vid on this message, plus any other data that survived the crash. I hope your techs can make some use of it. Over."

He sat back again, taking her mouth with aggressive joy that she felt down to her toes. "We did it!" He came up for air long enough to beam at her. "Mike will send help. I'm betting some of our ships are already in the sector, looking for me. We'll be able to defend your people against the Jits."

He kissed her again and again, sending her senses swimming as her passion awakened. The man knew how to kiss! And his hands weren't still, either. Those talented fingers of his were multi-tasking their way through her buttons and up under her skirt until one rested between her legs and the other inside her bodice, cupping her bare breast as he lightly pinched the nipple.

She squeaked at the unexpected pleasure of his touch, but then the comm system crackled to life again and he sat back to listen.

"I'm sending *Regent*, *Regulus*, and *Reliant* to you directly. They'll secure orbit around the planet and keep the Jits away. Zeke, Dr. Waithe is here and she wants you to hang tight. She's readying the *Sultana* as we speak and they'll be heading for you. She wants to examine the colony, if they're agreeable. The first of the battleships should arrive within five standards. Dr. Waithe will arrive on board *Sultana* in twenty. In the meantime, you are to protect the colonists at all costs. I don't need to tell you how important they could be to the survival of humanity." Angela watched the harsh man's serious eyes turn amused as he winked. "And judging by the pretty little girl on your lap, you won't mind this duty at all. Over."

"You got that right. I can't complain at all." Zeke squeezed her waist with the hand he had thankfully removed from her bodice. She was covered, but just barely. "This is my angel of mercy, Sister Angela. She saved my life after the crash and healed my broken bones. The colony here, from what little I've been able to observe, is about fifty percent male, Mike. Regular, normal, healthy human males, like from the beforetimes. I never thought I'd see such a thing. They're led by a woman who claims to have the ability to see future and she believes the Jits will find us sooner rather than later, so we'll definitely need the firepower those three battleships can provide. My ship is badly damaged and not space worthy. The scrambler's toast, hence the odd manner of transmitting this message."

He raised his eyebrows as he looked around the command cabin. "According to my calculations, we'll be losing the direct beam in another few minutes, so this is probably my last transmission. The Jit pirates patrol this sector in force. Hopefully you'll be able to pull my logs off the sub-channel I've been streaming. I have a working handcomp and not much else. Please tell the captains to comm me directly when they reach orbit on my registered access number." He paused, and Angela could see the relief in his eyes. "And thanks, Mike. I owe you one, brother. Big time. Over."

He sat back and ran one hand through his hair in relief. Angela moved to cup his stubbly cheek in her hand, rubbing gently. He felt so good.

"Now, where were we?"

His eyes danced as he moved the chair back, hitting a lever that turned the command chair into a couch-like surface that many solo pilots used for sleeping on long hauls without leaving the command cabin.

Ezekiel's lips latched onto hers as his hands lifted her dress up and off, exposing her skin to lightly moving air in the ventilated cabin. It felt good, brushing delicately over her skin, but his hands felt even better.

He held her over him, her breasts dangling over his mouth as he raised her. With a playful snarl, he nipped at her heavy breasts, catching the nipples between his lips. He drew lightly on the tips, then harder as she began to shiver with excitement. He spent some time playing with her breasts while she squirmed over him, straddling his lean hips, placing her knees on either side as her dress bunched around her waist and hips.

His hands moved lower to pull up her dress. He pushed aside her panties and squeezed the globes of her ass in both hands while he continued to suck on her nipples in turn. Tugging her down, he pressed his engorged cock up into her folds, only the material of his pants between them now.

"We've lifted your data from the beam and I'm looking through it now," Michael's voice came back over the comm. She looked back to see the man's face on the vid pickup, glad the vid was in receive mode rather than send mode as Zeke let go of her and raised up on his elbows so he could see the last of his brother's message.

"The battleship *Regulus* should reach you first. They're closest. We'll upload your data to the other battleships as well. Holy shit, Zeke." Mike's face on the vid screen

showed him reading a smaller screen at his side. She guessed that one was probably scrolling the data Zeke had transmitted. "I knew you Riskers were all a little crazy, but you ran into a lot more than you bargained for if what I'm seeing in your data stream about the enemy force is accurate. I'm amazed you made it, but then you've always led a charmed life." On the screen, Michael looked up and smiled. *He has a beautiful smile*, she thought absently, one that invited a woman closer, though his chiseled features laid down the law about who would be in charge.

"I'm authorizing full deployment on this. If you really have found yourself a colony of uninfected humans, their protection will be our highest priority. Please reassure them of that and lay some groundwork for us. If that pretty girl on your lap is any indication, they seem to like you." The dark man chuckled wryly. "We'll be there as soon as possible. Hold on 'til then, brother, and be well. I won't expect a reply. We see your charts and the planet you're on will be occluded shortly. Stay safe. Over."

Three

Zeke watched the transmission sputter out as the heavens shifted and the beam was lost. He turned back to the warm, willing woman on his lap. At least, he hoped he was reading her right and she was as willing as he to explore the passion between them. He tightened his arms around her as his eyes met hers.

"Do you want this, my angel? Will you let me make love to you?"

He paused, holding his breath. Never before had a woman's answer to that question meant so much to him. His angel was special in every way. He wanted her and wanted to please her in return. While he always made it a point to give satisfaction to his bed partners, his angel deserved so much more. He would give her everything he was, ecstasy beyond anything she had ever known before, and he knew somehow he would achieve the same—but only in the arms of this small woman, his angel.

Angela surprised him by pushing his chest back until he was reclining on the pilot's couch. She moved down until her warm breath was pulsing softly over the bulge at his crotch. Zeke groaned as her hands traced the length of him under his pants.

"The question should be, will you let me pleasure you, Son of Amber?"

Her soft voice was temptation itself.

"When you ask so nicely, how could I refuse?"

His eyes danced as he grinned at her, but soft moans came from his throat a moment later when Angela used her delicate little hands to unfasten his pants and release his straining member. She laughed as his hard cock popped free of the confining material and sought her attention. A moment later, she licked him, stroking him with her tongue. Her shy, yet bold touch affected him like nothing else in the universe.

She took him down deep and hollowed out her cheeks, sucking hard, her talented little tongue darting around his sensitive shaft. He groaned as she stroked him, her hands fingering his balls with gentle caresses. He looked down and found her gorgeous eyes looking back at him, her mouth tight around his length. Something inside him broke free and took flight.

That look. If he could just keep that happy, sexy look on her face forever, he would die a happy man. She felt so right in his arms, so precious, not to mention precocious as she played with his body. He felt her delight in the curve of her lips, the soft stroke of her fingers and the sparkling light in her eyes. How he adored her!

Many women had used their mouths on him in prelude to fucking, but Angela seemed to just want to suck and suck him. Never mind her pleasure, her focus seemed to be totally on his enjoyment. That wasn't quite what he wanted, but he was too weak to pull back. He wanted her in every possible way. He wanted her surrender, her care, her intimate attention. Why? He wasn't sure. But he wasn't up to questioning the driving instincts inside him.

"Ease up, honey. I'm coming." He tried to pull away, to spare her the force of the eruption he could feel building, but she stayed firm, her gaze challenging him saucily.

In a blinding rush, he came in her mouth, spurting long and hard. She swallowed repeatedly, but still some of his thick cum trickled out the sides of her mouth, so much did he give her. Looking down into her sparkling eyes, his heart lifted as she smiled back at him, licking and swallowing as she cleaned him thoroughly like a well-satisfied kitten.

"You like that?" He couldn't help the teasing tone in his voice or the smile that lit his lips. This small woman was so special to him. No woman of his experience had ever given him so much or so freely.

She moaned her agreement, licking the tip of him that still leaked the last of his cum.

"I like the taste of you, Ezekiel. Salty and sweet at the same time."

He could tell her that the Sons of Amber had been created to have pleasant tasting body fluids, but this moment was more than just well-designed parts fitting into place. This moment was magic, if a practical man like him believed in such things. He dragged her up for a kiss, loving the taste of his cum on her lips, like it belonged there.

When he drew back, he laved licking kisses all down her throat to her breasts, sucking them lightly, playing with the tips until he felt her shiver.

"Now it's your turn."

She pulled back with a question in her eyes. "Don't you need a moment to recover?"

Zeke laughed as he switched their positions, moving her easily beneath him on the couch. When he was sure she was settled comfortably, he knelt up, positioning himself between her thighs as he arranged them to his liking—spread wide apart on either side of his hips. As it should be.

He noticed when she looked down and gave a little start of surprise. His dick was hard again, ready, willing, and able. He couldn't help but grin as his gaze roved up the length of her luscious body, finally meeting her lovely eyes as he moved over her.

"One of the benefits of being genetically designed to repopulate the human race is that unlike most males, I don't need much downtime. I'm always ready. Especially for you, sweetheart." He leaned down and kissed her sweetly, meaning every word and every lick of his adoring tongue.

"Oh, my!" She gasped as he raised his lips just slightly, holding her gaze as he found his way inside her for the first time. She was slick and warm—more than ready for him.

He slid within her tight hole, going slowly so as not to hurt her. It was torture of the sweetest kind. She was wet and excited, but he could tell from the tight confines of her pussy that she hadn't done this in a while.

"Tell me if you're uncomfortable, Angel. I don't want to hurt you."

She held his gaze as he moved in further. "No. I'm okay." She was panting now, and it was music to his ears. "It's just that I've only done this once before."

He moved slightly, working his way inside her until he was settled, all the way home in her core. He stilled and looked deep into her eyes. He was glad that this meant something to her, that this was more than just a casual fuck. He knew it meant more than that to him. Never before in his life had anything felt remotely like this. This mattered. It touched his heart to know she might feel the same.

"I'm honored beyond words."

She blushed so prettily, he had to kiss her. Then as he kissed her, he decided he had to move within her. The hot center of her was heaven itself and oh, so tempting. Slowly at first, he began to rock in and out of her, watching her face and keeping his senses open to her responses. She was so precious, so perfect, so trusting of what he was doing and so open to the experience. He could hardly ask for anything more in a partner. He was fast realizing that she was his ideal woman.

Increasing his pace, he laid claim to her fully, his thrusts harder and more powerful. Her hands roved over his back, the short nails digging in when he went deep, searching for that magic spot he knew would send her into orbit.

"There?" he asked as her nails raked him yet again, the finest of tortures.

"Yes!" She nodded against his chest as he grinned and stayed deep within, rocking slowly to rub her sweet spot. "Yes, Ezekiel. Yes!"

He felt a profound satisfaction within him as her tight sheath spasmed around him. She climaxed hard, but it was only the first of many he would give her. He let her come down only a little before stroking deep and fast once more. Increasing his thrusts and his rhythm, he changed position slightly until he heard her gasp in pleasure.

"Ready for more, Angel?"

"Ezekiel!"

After that it took little to bring her to peak after peak. Zeke smiled all through the waves of her pleasure, feeling his own passion multiplied by her obvious enjoyment of his attentions. He thrust faster and harder, following the sway of her hips as she shattered in a frenzy around him yet again.

Eventually, Zeke let go, bathing her womb in his cum, planting his seed firmly within the woman he prized above all others. She came again as his hot cum shot into her, setting off waves of orgasm that took them both on a wild ride.

When Zeke could think again, he levered himself upwards, unwilling to leave her body. He kept himself planted within her, supporting her with his arms as he stood from the couch, carrying her slowly toward the hatch that led to the main corridor of the ship. His dick lengthened once more as Angela's eyes shot open. He could read the flames of passion there, banked but coming back to life even as he moved them both slowly along the corridor toward his private chamber.

He got her to the wide bed before they both climaxed again, then they dozed for a bit, wrapped in each other's arms. Waking later, they made love again and again until neither had the energy to resist sleep's call. Zeke set the alarm to wake him two hours before sunrise. He still had work to do on the ship, but it would have to wait until later. For now, he had to take care of his woman.

* * *

Several hours later, Angela woke, disoriented at first until she felt the hard, male arms wrapped tightly around her waist.

Ezekiel.

She savored his name in her mind as his arms tightened on her bare body. He slept still, but his strong yet tender hold never slackened. Even lost in the netherworld of sleep, he kept her close.

It had to mean something, but she feared she might be putting too much stock in dreams. She wanted this man from the stars with a passion unknown to her before. Since she'd found him under the burning midday suns, her life had changed in irreversible ways. Her heart had come alive and her body pulsed with yearnings she didn't fully understand, but knew he had the cure.

The cure for her woeful condition was him. His love, his passion, his cum filling her body. She wanted it all. Especially his heart.

But there were so many obstacles, not the least of which was the role he had been designed and bred to perform. If she understood him correctly, he was some kind of intergalactic super stud, sent out among the remnants of humanity to service any and all females who wanted his sperm. In one way, the thought disgusted her, but in another more perverse part of her psyche, the thought was tantalizing. To think that she held him—this man whom so many women desired—and he was with her. Not normally given to vanity, the feeling of pride sat uncomfortably in her mind, as did the jealousy.

Angela felt like scratching the eyes out of any woman who'd had him before. She wanted to mark him, to stake her claim and let all other females know that while they might bear his children, they would never have his heart. His heart was hers alone.

Or so she dreamed.

Her dreams spoke of love everlasting, but she had yet to discover whether these were prophetic dreams so common to many of her people, or just dreams of what her

inner self wished could be. She prayed the dreams would come to pass. She prayed mightily that she could keep Ezekiel in her life—and in her bed—where he belonged. Never before had she felt such a strong, deep, and instant connection in her soul for any other person, male or female.

She knew the moment she saw him, baking under the sun and close to death, that he was simply hers. Just as she was his. They were fated to be together, their hearts and souls entwined. Now she just had to see if her thoughts and hopes could truly be reality or if they were just foolish dreams.

Then there was his duty as a Son of Amber to contend with. How could she claim the sole attentions of a male so important to the survival of the entire human species? Was it fair of her to want to keep him for herself? Was it even possible? Only time would tell, and those whose authority would make the decision to separate them and send him away, or let him stay and be with her.

There was also the all-important question too of whether he would want to stay. Could she be misreading his responses? She had little experience of men, but she thought she felt possessiveness and care in his every movement against her, his every embrace. Still he had yet to say the words. Did he want her in his life on a long-term basis or was this just another pleasant interlude for him in his never-ending duties to fuck every woman he met?

She thought not, but still the uncertainty lingered.

Pushing the dreadful questions from her mind, she sighed as he woke behind her, his large body rubbing against her as he stretched.

"What are you doing awake?" His deep voice rumbled sexily in her ear, making her shiver.

Turning in his arms, she insinuated one of her legs between his, rubbing his reviving cock with her thigh. Her eyes teased him as a smile played about her lips.

"I was waiting for you to wake up, Ezekiel. I was getting lonely without you inside me. I feel so empty."

He grinned as he pulled her even more intimately against him. "That can be easily remedied, my little angel. You'll never be empty if I have anything to say about it."

With a tender shove, he filled her, rocking them both gently this time to an explosive climax. They basked in the glow for long, long moments, staring deep into each other's eyes. Angela reveled in his soft caresses as he held her close and snuggled deep in her heart and soul. It was more than just a physical thing, she would stake her life on it.

* * *

Sometime later, they dressed and made their way back up to the cockpit. Zeke ran a few more checks while introducing Angela to the various features of his ship. She browsed around while he worked, looking at the equipment and asking a few questions here and there that he enjoyed answering. She was bright and sharp as a tack. He liked her quick wit almost as much as he loved her supple body and giving, passionate nature.

He schooled his thoughts back to the task at hand. He had work to do after all, and though she was a gorgeous distraction, her safety and the safety of her people depended on him. That thought in mind, he settled down to formulate his next moves.

"I think we can fly this ship over closer to the entrance to your settlement."

"Is that safe?" Angela's voice echoed her hesitation.

"Well, I wouldn't trust the seals to hard vacuum, but it should be sound enough for a short atmospheric hop."

"No," she shook her head softly, setting her lovely hair to swaying, distracting him momentarily. "I mean won't the Jits see your ship faster if it's out in the open near our entrance rather than among these rocks?"

"Actually, they've already pinged it twice with their mapping gear, but the camo unit is still online and sending out false readings. The Jits wouldn't be able to tell if we're a ship or just another large rock formation unless they do a visual inspection. We'll see them long before that, if they head downplanet."

"How?" Her beautiful eyes scrunched up in concern. "We don't have any scanners to detect incoming ships, or we would have seen you long before I went searching after your smoke trail on the horizon."

He thought about that a moment. This young woman had set out in the middle of the blindingly bright day after an unknown smoke trail, all on her own. Her courage amazed him. She had saved his life, without a doubt. Now he would protect her and her people to the best of his ability. He'd be damned if he let the Jits bring their deadly virus to these peaceful folk.

"This ship has scanners capable of alerting me to any movement within three hundred and sixty degrees. Luckily they're still working. I can rig them to signal my handcomp when I'm not aboard if something comes near enough to be a problem and I can always fire up the engines and evade if necessary. The weapons systems are also still online, so we have some offensive as well as defensive capabilities."

"Sounds like you have all the angles covered." Her smile was complimentary and it warmed him.

"Honey, it's in my nature to take risks, but I also know and examine all the probabilities before I choose a course of action. Dr. Waithe designed it that way so our risk taking tendencies wouldn't get us killed too easily. My mind works a little differently than most humans. I can calculate probabilities almost like a computer, but with the emotional component that even the best Artificial Intelligence units can't duplicate." He stood and ushered her over to a secondary co-pilot position that was tucked up into the bulkhead. He hadn't needed the extra seat, flying solo before he crashed, but it came in handy now. "Trust me when I say I've examined all our options and come up with the best available plan of action."

She seemed to consider his words carefully before she spoke. "Okay, Ezekiel." Her eyes brightened as she turned to look up at him. "I think I'd enjoy taking a little ride in your ship. I've never been in a space worthy vessel before."

He chuckled. "Well, this one isn't space worthy at the moment, but I get your meaning. We'll just hop over to the settlement and park it among the small hills that hide the entrance. I have a map of where the Jits have already pinged this side of the planet since I crashed so we can set down somewhere they haven't already mapped."

"Good idea." She settled into the small seat he drew out from the bulkhead for her.

"Strap in and we'll fire up the engines."

* * *

Angela was a little frightened at first when the ship lurched off the ground.

"Sorry for the bumpy ride. This thing isn't space worthy, but she's just fine for an atmospheric run. Don't worry."

"If you say so." She rolled her eyes and they both chuckled.

After a few minutes of smooth movement through the atmosphere, Angela began to relax. Ezekiel brought up a viewscreen so she could observe the ground from above. According to him they were just high enough to clear the tallest of the mountains, though to her that was more than enough altitude. Still, since this craft was intended to sail the vast vacuum of space, she realized this little hop up into the atmosphere was as nothing to him.

"It's beautiful from up here."

She meant every word as the rugged terrain of her homeworld dazzled her senses. From this altitude the suns were already lighting a good portion of the land below in shimmering golds, browns, and reds. It was breathtaking.

"Pretty planet from this vantage point," Ezekiel agreed, "but damned inhospitable to live on. Someday, Angela, I'd like to show you the warm oceans of Pacifica or the rolling grasslands of Argentina."

She heard the yearning in his tone but she also knew those worlds he spoke of were infected with the Jit virus. She couldn't go there now and probably would never be able to set foot off this adopted homeworld. Still, she could dream.

"I'd like to see Espia. That's where our people originated." She remembered the beautiful green and blue forests she'd seen only in recordings. "The history cubes I've seen of it are lovely."

He leaned back in his chair as she noticed him starting their descent sequence. "Espia is truly beautiful. The mists in the capital city burn off in the morning sun and the temperature is ideal all year round."

"You've been there?" Only the oldest of the elders now remembered their home planet and they'd been children when the colonists fled.

"Yeah, I had a stopover there last year. Spent a few weeks of downtime while my ship was serviced. It's a beautiful place, but they were hit hard by the virus. There are no males left there at all."

"None?" She gasped, thinking of all her male friends and family that would die if the virus found its way to their colony.

"Some worlds were luckier than others. A few males survived here and there on many planets, but almost all were sterile after their bout with the virus and they lived with the threat of recurrence. On a few rare worlds, the males suffered through the disease badly at first, then it went dormant, waiting to strike again at any moment." His face tightened into grim lines. "Espia was one of the few planets where all the males died in the first round of infection. Certain uniquely Espian DNA sequences and physiology made your ancestors much more susceptible to the virus than other human variants. Many of the Espian females died as well, though most females on other planets did not. Your ancestors were wise to leave." Angela sent up a silent prayer as she thought of all the dead. "The cities are pretty much empty now, with many buildings vacant. There are few people to live in the leftover spaces, but the survivors are resilient. They've learned to value what they have left of their world. Music and the arts flourish still, and new schools to study medicine and science have been opened. The few young born since the virus are encouraged to study hard and help rebuild their society."

"They're still having children then?"

"With Dr. Waithe's help." He turned away to focus on the landing as they approached the hills where the entrance to the settlement was hidden. "Sons of Amber were dispatched to the hardest hit planets as soon as we were able to perform our duties."

"Your duties?" She had a sneaking suspicion what they might entail.

He took a moment to settle the ship before answering. Once the ship was powering down, he turned to her.

"I told you when I first woke, Angel. I and my brothers were designed to help repopulate human worlds. We breed true and have certain skills and qualities that are helpful to societies starting to rebuild. Some of my brothers were dispatched to Espia to help protect them from Jit raiders. Some were sent to help the scientists set up sperm banks and a breeding program. Whatever the assignment, we are always encouraged to have sex with any female that desires it."

Angela's heart plummeted. His voice sounded so clinical, so cold as he explained his bizarre 'duties.' The warmth they'd shared only hours before seeped away from her, leaving her chilled inside.

"So am I just a part of your duty, then?" She couldn't even look at him.

His warm hand tucked under her chin, raising her eyes to his. He'd moved out of his pilot's chair and to her side without making a sound.

"No." His eyes narrowed with some indefinable emotion. "You're different, Angela. From the moment I first saw you, everything about you has been completely out of my experience." He leaned in to kiss her softly, then pulled back. "And I admit I've had a lot of experience with women of every sort." He grinned, though she didn't like to hear that she was only one in a long line of conquests for him. "I don't know what it is about you, but when I look at you, I could care less about my duty, my mission, or anything else. All that matters is you."

His whispered words were so touching, so heartfelt, tears gathered behind her eyes.

Four

The captain of the *Regulus* commed him a little more than four standards later. He knew the captain, an older woman named Litus, having worked with her before. Gifted with a steady nerve and strong leadership skills, she'd put on all available power to get her ship to the planet even sooner than the original estimate. Since the entire planet was in quarantine until the scientists could determine whether the population was truly free of contamination by the Jit virus, Captain Litus informed him the battleship was taking up a defensive position in orbit. The *Regulus* would circle with the small planet until they were joined by two other ships of the line. The three of them would then defend the colony against all comers, keeping anyone who was not duly authorized from traveling to the surface.

No way would they let anyone who had the potential of carrying the Jit virus to these uninfected humans anywhere near the surface. Sons of Amber were naturally immune and had been designed so that they would never carry the virus. Scrubbers onboard all spacecraft would ensure any remnants of the virus that might be carried on inanimate objects were eradicated as soon as all hatches were shut and the air started cycling. Zeke knew his ship had been one hundred percent clean before he crashed, and it was impossible for him or any Son to carry the virus. Regular humans, though, that was another matter.

Any visitor to the colony who was not a Son would have to wear full protective gear with his own independent air supply. The risk involved in such a visit was high and Zeke knew it would not be undertaken lightly. Dr. Amber would certainly come, if she thought it was important enough, but she would take all possible precautions to prevent contamination of an uninfected human population—the first they had ever found.

Ezekiel reported all this to Mother Rachel, as leader of the colony, answering her questions about the newly arriving ships' capabilities and their crews. She seemed interested to know that each ship had a crew made up almost entirely of women, and Zeke found himself explaining how the few male survivors of the virus on each world most often stayed near their home planets at the request of the medical community. Established gender roles had changed somewhat since the devastating virus attack, and perhaps because Zeke had never known any other way of living, he was equally interested in the more traditional way the colonists divided the workload.

The men of the colony saw mostly to its defense, though occasionally a female would stand sentry duty or train in the hand-to-hand self defense style they favored. It all depended on individual interests. In this settlement, the males and females alike had the luxury of choosing to follow their own paths rather than have their roles dictated by the desperate needs of society. Watching them, Zeke realized he'd never really had any choice in what he would do with his life. He wasn't complaining. He liked what he did, but it was just a little disconcerting to realize that his choices had been sorely limited by the Jits and their despicable virus.

Still, many of the Sons of Amber were involved in the military, both because it was in their natures and because of the necessity that they travel quite frequently to the other human planets. Some served in combat posts, some in planning, reconnaissance and strategy, each according to his own specific talents. None were given special treatment,

but most of them excelled because it was simply the way they'd been designed. None of the Sons of Amber were mediocre, and all had a drive to succeed in their chosen fields.

Zeke's brother Michael, for example, was the commander of Atlantia Base, not because he'd been given the job, but because he'd earned it. He commanded all the ships in the sector and did a damned fine job of it. He had a quick, decisive mind, and as a Dominant it was in his nature to command any given situation.

"Tell me about your mother, Ezekiel." Mother Rachel startled him with her phrasing, but Zeke smiled.

"Dr. Amber isn't really my mother in the biological sense, ma'am, but she created the program that produced myself and the other Sons. She oversaw our development at every stage and contributed greatly to our make-up."

"She may not be your biological mother, Ezekiel," Rachel favored him with a serene smile, "but yet you love her as a son."

Zeke felt only a little uncomfortable talking about such intimate feelings with this foreign woman. It was surprising, actually, since he'd never discussed his innermost emotions with anyone before. He shrugged off the odd feeling that Mother Rachel's wise eyes held far more knowledge than she should rightly have.

"I guess all the Sons love her in one way or another. She's..." he hesitated slightly, trying to put his feelings into words. "She's a very special woman. She encourages us. She taught us from when we were just born. She gives us pep talks when we need them and hope to go on. She has a real, potent vision of the future."

Rachel's eyes glistened with approval. "Then she is your mother in all the ways that matter most. And Ezekiel," she placed one small hand on his arm, squeezing slightly to emphasize her words, "her vision will succeed. Never doubt that."

Mother Rachel went on to ask about the other people who were coming, but asked nothing of what might happen next. After her telling comments of moments before, he suspected she knew more about what might occur after his people arrived than even he did.

He spent a few minutes showing the sentries as well as some of the youngsters—a mixed group of young boys and girls—how to operate the small shield generator he'd brought out of his ship and set up at the entrance to the underground compound. With this small, portable shield spanning the entrance, the guards would be able to relax a bit and wouldn't have to face the daily skirmishes with packs of *gaks* and worse that tried constantly to get into the human dwelling areas.

The children were bright, and Zeke enjoyed their questions. He had never been around young humans much at all, and found himself enchanted by the little ones with such open, growing minds. The male sentries were hardened, fighting men, and they reminded him of the camaraderie he had only known to this point with his brothers. The only males he had ever really been exposed to were his fellow Sons. The opportunity to talk with unenhanced male humans was a rarity.

Eventually he made his way to the chamber Angela had shown him earlier, when they'd come in from his ship. It was her personal chamber. He had seen to all the tasks that needed doing, now he needed another taste of his angel's lips before he went crazy.

He knocked on the door and his insides lit when she answered with an intimate smile. She stepped back, allowing him into the small room, and he wasted no time pulling her into his arms.

"I've missed you so much." He breathed the words into her ear, delighted when she shivered.

"It's only been a few hours." Her girlish giggle made his dick quiver.

"Too long. I'm a starving man."

He crowded her back toward the small bed on which she obviously slept. He examined it over her shoulder for a quick moment. It was too small for what he had in mind, but he'd make do. He pushed down on her shoulders until she was sitting before him on the edge of her little bed.

Her little hands traced the ridge of flesh that twitched under his pants.

"Is this normal? As a healer in training, I've been taught that men aren't usually this...um...potent."

Zeke shrugged. "It's normal for me. At least when it comes to you, Angel."

He would have said more, but a knock on the hatch interrupted. Angela shot up from the bed and went to answer the door, just cracking it so she could talk with whomever was on the other side. He heard soft, feminine voices, and a moment later she shut the door and returned to him.

Pulling her again into his arms, he nuzzled her ear. "Let's go out to my ship. I've got a big, comfortable bed in my cabin, and no one can intrude on us there once I put the shield up."

Her expression teased as she looked up at him slyly. "Okay, but we can't be seen. I'm supposed to be studying and they'll never let me live it down if they knew you and I were...well...um..."

"Fornicating?" He placed a nibbling kiss on her neck as she chuckled. "Fucking like bunnies?" His kisses trailed lower, pausing to look deeply into her eyes. "Making love?"

She blushed and hid her face in the curve of his neck, her arms tightening as her lips trembled against the skin just above his collar.

"Would it be so bad if they knew we were together?" he asked softly. Startlingly, her answer meant more than he would have imagined just a few days before. No woman had ever had such a strong claim on his emotions. "Do I embarrass you?"

That sounded way too vulnerable, but he couldn't call the words back. He brazened it out, glad when her eyes lifted and her soft palms caressed his stubbled cheeks.

"Never, Ezekiel. I just..." she seemed to search for the right words. "I've never felt this way before." His heart soared. "I just want to keep it to myself—to ourselves—for a little while. I want to savor it. Savor this. Savor you." She kissed him sweetly on the mouth, a light brushing of the lips. "Do you truly mind?"

"Not when you put it like that." He bent to sweep a light kiss across her luscious lips. "I think I can get us to the ship without being seen. I like a challenge." He growled and bit her earlobe playfully, making her laugh. "Let's go."

* * *

Zeke was on her as soon as he set the shield. Within moments they were both naked and panting on the deck inside the main hatch. He couldn't even wait to get to his cabin, that's how strong the hunger for her gripped him. She was a need deep inside, a thirst that would never be quenched.

Zeke slid home, his hard body on top of her this time. His eyes followed her every move, her every emotion as it crossed her lovely face, riding hard but slow, in and out. He took his time now that he was where he wanted most to be in the universe. Where he belonged.

"Do you feel what you do to me, baby?" Angela moaned softly and closed her eyes, but he wouldn't allow it. He wanted her to know who was fucking her, who was part of her. "Look at me, Angel. Open your eyes."

Her eyes flickered open and she gasped, going stiff beneath him as her hands came up to cover her breasts and her eyes fixed in fright on something over his shoulder. Instantly alert, Zeke looked back and cursed.

"Dammit, Mike. Give us a minute here, will you?" He would *not* stop now. He couldn't.

"I thought you said no one could bother us once the shield was set." Angela was tense beneath him as he continued to move in her. Mike's appearance had probably killed a bit of the mood for her, he realized, slowing to give her time to adjust.

"None of your people, certainly, but I hadn't counted on Mike getting here so fast. Only one of my brothers would be so crass as to intrude on our fun." Instead of leaving, Michael, the cad, crouched down next to them, his eyes dancing with mischief.

"Go away, Mike. Go find your own girl. There are plenty of submissive females here that would welcome your services."

"Oh, I think your little lady might be a bit more submissive than you think, Zeke." Mike reached out to stroke her hair back from her face and Zeke growled. Mike just ignored him. "You like being watched, don't you, sweet?"

Zeke felt the clamping of her internal muscles around his cock, and the widening of her eyes told the rest of the tale. Mike was right. She was even wetter than she'd been when Mike walked in. Zeke wasn't sure if he liked her response to his brother or not, but he knew he would do anything to bring her pleasure. Her joy was his only concern.

"What do you say, Zeke? You need some help with her? You Riskers don't know the first thing about taming a filly."

Angela's narrowed eyes and gripping hands on his neck told their own story. "I like Ezekiel just fine, and I'm not a horse that needs taming." Her words came in short panting breaths as her passions rose again. Zeke liked the way she defended him and followed willingly as he neared the summit of passion once more. Mike had startled her and challenged her, but it was Zeke who made her whole. He just knew it. Or maybe he just prayed it was so, but either way he thought he could read it in her lovely face as she turned her lips up for his kiss.

Zeke pulled back, leaving her flat on her back on the floor while he held her legs out to either side of his hips, sitting up now with his dick firmly planted within her tight hole. He had an idea. It was a naughty one, but the Sons of Amber were up for all kinds of sexual hijinks at any time of the day or night. He and Mike had played this game before as a matter of fact, and he couldn't think of anyone he'd rather have here with them for this experiment. Of all the Sons of Amber, Mike was his closest friend.

Zeke wanted to push Angela's boundaries, to see how far she would go. He wanted to bring her pleasure, the likes of which she had never known, and make her realize he was the only man who would ever cherish her so deeply, prize her so highly. He wanted to make her come and come, then come again. Only then would he take his own pleasure.

"You know," he slid his gaze from her flushed face to Mike, "I think I could use a little help here, brother."

Mike's eyes lit up with anticipation. "Really?" He shifted his stance a bit. "And what can I do for you?"

"Well, see, I need someone to play with her clit while I fuck her senseless." Zeke's gaze challenged hers as she gasped. He could feel her pussy clamping down around his cock and he could feel the gush of excitement that followed. She was more into this than she let on. "Do you think you could help with that?"

Mike turned to look at her, moving one big hand to caress her tight nipple almost absently. Zeke felt her shiver with desire at the other man's touch.

"Can I play with these pretty tits, too, Zeke? I'd like to know what's off limits and what's not before we start."

Zeke caught and held her eyes. "Tell us, Angel. If I promise to guide you and let no harm come to you, is anything off limits? Will you take us both, any way I see fit? Do you trust me?"

* * *

Angela thought she was about to scream, but she ruthlessly bit it back. She was *not* a screamer. The scandalous ideas of these two devastating men wound her passions higher than ever before. She wanted Ezekiel. She loved Ezekiel. But, this darkly arrogant brother of his was stirring lust in her as well. She didn't understand it at all, but her pussy sure seemed to want to let them both have at her.

She didn't understand what it was about them—or rather, about Ezekiel—that made her want to let go of every inhibition and trust him with her very life. She did trust him, though, she realized. She would follow him to the ends of the galaxy and back, if he let her. She could deny him nothing and knew that he cared on some level for her as well. He wouldn't let any harm come to her if it was within his power to prevent it. She was safe with him.

Breathing deeply, she answered the plea in his eyes.

"I trust you, Ezekiel."

His satisfied smile stole her breath. Ezekiel pulled out and Michael's hard arms lifted her as if she weighed nothing at all. Her head whirled as he carried her quickly into Ezekiel's cabin. Michael apparently knew the layout of the ship fairly well, for not once did his steps falter.

He looked down at her, his harsh face lit with desire as he whispered for her ears alone. "I'm Michael, by the way. I knew you were special the moment I saw you on the end of that transmission. I've never seen Zeke so happy." Zeke moved up to the bed then, four lengths of flexible rope dangling from his big hands. Her breath caught in her throat when she saw them, and the heated expression on his face.

"I thought we could try these." Zeke grinned devilishly as he handed the ropes to Michael. A look passed between the two Sons of Amber that made her mouth go dry and her insides quiver.

"Give her a quick climax first, then we'll tie her up," Mike agreed with a knowing nod. This man was a connoisseur of women, it was easy enough to see. What had she done, agreeing to whatever they wanted? For a moment she thought of backing out, but then Zeke climbed between her thighs and started to play with her sensitive bud. All thoughts of fleeing left her mind as wetness seeped from her core, making her as ready as she'd ever been. So close now to orgasm, it would take little to make her come. He knew it, too. She could tell by the glint in his smiling eyes.

"There's something you need to know about Mike, Angel. He's a Dominant."

"Um...what?" It was hard to concentrate with him touching her like that, but she tried her best. A sudden thought occurred as she tried to puzzle out his words. "Oh. Do you mean he likes to be on top?"

Both men laughed, but not in a mean way. Zeke was driving her higher with his teasing touches, making it even harder to take in what he was saying, but she struggled to try.

"Oh, she's precious, Zeke. I can see why you want her." Mike's words sounded more admiring than teasing, so she knew they weren't laughing at her. Not that any of that would have mattered at the moment. As it was, she could barely breathe through the spiking pleasure as Ezekiel touched her just the way she needed.

"No, sweetheart." His voice was gentle as he brought her closer and closer to the peak. "When Dr. Waithe designed us, she made different types of males. Some are Pioneers, some are Moderates, some are Risk Takers, like me, and then there are also a quite a few Doms, like Michael. They like to dominate sexually, and there are many women who want and need to submit. You've already taken the first step by agreeing to this. I'm going to let him tie you up and give you pleasure, but ultimately you're mine, Angela. Never forget that." He lowered his lips to suck on her clit. "Your mine!" he whispered fervently against her straining flesh just a moment before he bit down gently,

using his lips. She came under his mouth, fingers, and tongue with a wave of pleasure that wrenched a short, keening cry from her throat.

"Not bad, little brother," Michael commented from beside the bed, looking down on them, "but I'll bet we have her screaming before the night is through."

Zeke levered himself up off her and grinned. "I bet I can make her scream with pleasure first."

Mike reached across her body to shake Zeke's hand and seal the wager. She could barely believe these two magnificent men were competing to make her come loudest. It would be childish if it weren't so darn stimulating. She had just come, but already her fires were lighting again. Only Zeke had ever been able to do that for her, and now he was introducing her to something altogether new with the addition of his friend into their loveplay. She didn't know if she could handle it. She didn't even know if it was right, but she vowed to see where it would lead.

Zeke had staked a claim just now, a claim that made her feel warm and loved inside, where it counted. She trusted him. He would be her guide into this new, unexpected ecstasy.

"Are you ready for more?" Zeke asked gently as Mike tugged on her arms, tying one, then the other, to little rings placed strategically along Zeke's large bed. Funny, she'd never questioned those little rings when she'd seen them before, but now she had a sneaking suspicion the bed had been built with just this sort of thing in mind. It was scandalous! And very exciting.

Mike's touch was a little rougher than Zeke's, his hands demanding, but he never hurt her. He pulled and pushed her around as he tied her, making her feel small and vulnerable in a delicious sort of way, but he seemed always aware of his strength and mindful that he not be too rough with her tender skin. She liked that. She liked even more the way Zeke's gaze followed every line of her body, every movement as his brother tied her securely to the sinful bed.

"She's got great tits and a shapely ass." His hands stroked over her as he spoke, firing her senses even further. "A fine looking bit of pussy you've got here, Zeke." Mike talked to Ezekiel as if she weren't there. Somehow the idea of them talking over her in such crude terms was exciting rather than insulting. She could tell from the sparkle in Mike's dark eyes that he knew it, too.

Mike settled between her splayed thighs and she tensed for a moment of delicious anxiety as he touched her intimately for the first time. His touch was different than Ezekiel's, stronger and nearly intimidating. He knew what he was doing with a woman's body and zeroed in on what he wanted. It was exciting and a little scary, but Zeke took her face in his strong hands, soothing as he bent over her for a deep, almost drugging, kiss.

While Zeke kissed her, Michael swept his blunt fingers through her folds, swirling and dipping in ways that made her squirm. Her hips nearly lifted off the bed when he plunged one long finger inside her and he pulled out immediately, slapping her pussy in reproval, making her jump again. Zeke left off kissing her to look down her body with an open, lusty grin.

"Don't move, wench, or I'll have to spank you."

"Spank me?" Her breathless voice sounded alarmingly aroused even to her own ears as Mike tapped out a light, teasing rhythm on her distended clit. She sobbed as the fire within her spiraled higher.

"You like that, pussycat? I'll give you more, but you have to hold still."

"I can't!"

He stopped petting her and slapped her quick, hard enough to startle, but not quite hurt.

"You can and you will, disrespectful wench. When you speak to me, you will address me as Master, and you will not speak unless instructed to do so or questioned directly. Do you understand?" His fingers resumed their play on and around her clit.

"Yes." She nodded, holding Zeke's gaze and knowing from the flare of his expressive eyes that he was enjoying this every bit as much as she was.

A slap stung her excited pussy.

"Yes, what?"

She blushed as Zeke's gaze held hers, a fire leaping within. He wanted her to do this, she could tell, just as much as she wanted to do it. It surprised her really, that she could so willingly give herself up to this man—to Ezekiel. For although Michael was giving the orders this time, it was Ezekiel she wanted to please.

"Yes, Master." Her voice sighed out and Michael rewarded her by plunging two fingers deep into her hole. A moment later he licked her clit, driving her higher as Zeke stroked her nipples.

Michael stroked and sucked in rhythm until she was ready to explode. She did her best not to move, but the pleasure was so intense, she had a hard time of it. He stroked her until she cried out and then he bit down, nipping with just the right pressure on her sensitive clit as she exploded, sobbing softly as her climax blasted through her core.

The two men sat back, watching her as she slowly came back to herself.

"She didn't scream that time, Mike. You'll have to do better if you want to win our wager." Zeke's cock twitched as he looked down on his angel. She was so beautiful, so responsive, so trusting. He had no doubt she was his match in every way.

"Think she's ready for more?"

Zeke moved to her side, stroking her face as he looked down into her lovely eyes. "How are you doing, sweetheart?"

"I'm okay." Her beautiful smile nearly stopped his heart.

"Sir." Mike barked from her other side, making them both look up at him.

"What?" Angela seemed confused.

Mike moved onto the bed, positioning himself at her side, kneeling there, over her. He didn't touch, only looked over her ripe body with obvious pleasure.

"I'll have to punish you for your informality, wench. You will address Zeke as *Sir* while we're pleasuring you, and what do you call me?"

She gasped as Mike reached out and pinched her nipple. "Master."

Zeke leaned down to kiss her softly. "I told you he's a Dominant, Angel. He likes to play by his rules, but if you don't want to play anymore, just let me know, okay?" His words were low, near her ear, but he knew Mike heard. He didn't care. Angela came first, and he knew Mike well enough to know he would feel the same. Mike was a Dom, sure, but he preferred completely willing women. He would never force a woman to accept his terms if she didn't truly want to be dominated.

"No," Angela gasped as Mike's hands slid down over her body, "I'm good...Sir."

He pulled back and saw the sparkle of renewed passion and a bit of playful devilry in her pretty eyes. She gave him a sultry smile that made his own breath hitch and his cock twitch. By the Maker, she was beautiful! How he loved her adventurous spirit.

"How is she at sucking cock?"

Mike's rough question brought him back to the moment. He had to get inside her as soon as possible.

"She's skilled, Mike. I don't think you'll have any complaints."

Zeke stared across her body at his brother and Mike nodded almost imperceptibly. This, he knew, was Mike's way of seeking silent approval of his plan. Zeke would let Mike fuck her mouth, but her pussy was his and his alone. Mike was a close enough friend that he knew without asking that although he was leading, Zeke was the ultimate

authority on just how far this little scene would go. The only cum he wanted pumped into her perfect little pussy was his own. He'd give it to her again and again until she didn't remember what it felt like to not carry his seed inside her.

Mike moved closer to her head, opening the fly of his uniform and letting out the monster he kept in his pants. Mike was a big man. Though all of Amber's Sons were built on the large side to please a lady, Mike was bigger than most by about a half-inch of girth. His length was about the same as Zeke's so he knew Angela could handle him, but the width might stretch her pretty lips a bit. Zeke looked forward to seeing how she managed.

With a grin, he moved between her spread thighs once more. Her pussy was swollen with renewed need and wetter than ever as he dipped three fingers inside her tight passage. She moaned, looking down at him for a moment before Mike's hand brought her face back up so her eyes could meet his.

"We're going to fuck you now, wench. I'm going to fuck your mouth while my brother Zeke fucks your pussy." Zeke felt her walls tighten in anticipation as he slowly pumped his fingers in and out, preparing her. "I want your eyes on me, girl. I want you to look at me when you swallow my dick."

Without looking back, Zeke watched Mike feed her his wide cock. He felt her excitement in the clenching of her pussy around his fingers and the movements of her restless hips. She was hotter than ever, and ready for more by the time Mike had his entire length buried in her straining mouth.

Mike nodded to him once and Zeke removed his fingers, taking up his position and entering her by slow degrees as Mike started to stroke lightly in and out of her mouth.

"Suck it now, wench. Use your tongue." Mike directed her as Zeke slid home within her hot, wet depths.

"Damn, Mike. She likes fucking us both at once. Her pussy is clenching me like a fist."

Mike laughed like the master he was. "She's a good little girl, Zeke, and she likes cock." Mike pulsed in a little more quickly as her cheeks hollowed. "Oh, I'll have to think of some reward for you, wench. You suck me so well. Harder now, girl. Give it all you've got." Mike increased his pace, as did Zeke. Watching his angel suck off Mike's monster cock was making him hotter than he'd ever imagined. He could practically feel her lips around his own cock, remembering the pleasure she'd given him, knowing Mike felt the same amazing pleasure at this very moment.

Mike stopped moving and Zeke guessed what was coming next. Mike was a master of his own response.

"Tell me now if you don't want to swallow my cum, wench."

Mike backed off until just the tip of his cock was inside her lips. She would be able to pull back completely if she didn't want him to come in her mouth, but she didn't pull back at all. Instead, she lifted her head up, eager for more. Mike growled at her response and pushed back into her mouth. Zeke knew it wouldn't be long before his brother came hard and long. He'd seen it before with other wenches they had shared.

Mike erupted with a shout as his hips jerked and he knew streams of cum were shooting down her throat. She swallowed hard and fast, but a lot of it slipped out to paint her chin and cheeks, and dribble down her neck in an erotic display. Zeke plunged in and out of her hot hole faster and faster, teasing her clit with his fingers until she spasmed around him. A moment later, he shot his cum up into her, over and over, on and on. His kind were made to have nearly endless supplies of sperm, and Angela was getting every last drop in both her pussy and her mouth.

Zeke thought he'd never seen anything hotter. He pulled out of her slowly and collapsed at her side for a short rest. Even a Son of Amber had to rest just a bit after

coming so momentarily. Zeke saw that Mike was stretched out at her other side and smiled wearily. His little angel had drained them both, and that was something not easily accomplished.

"You know," Mike observed dryly from the other side of the large bed, "I still didn't hear her scream."

"We're going to have to try again another day, brother." Zeke reached up to untie her arms and rubbed them gently as he lay bonelessly at her side, enjoying the afterglow.

Five

"So what brings you here, Mike? I didn't expect to see you."

"We're putting up a planetary shield and surveying for an orbital space station. Dr. Waithe wants to set up the tightest possible security around this colony. I escorted her down here to meet with the elders."

Both men were sated and a bit weary, sitting in the small lounge outside the cabin while Angela slept within. Uneasy thoughts bothered Zeke. He needed this time to talk to one of his brothers about the odd things occurring within him. Mike was one of his closest friends, and he knew he could trust the other man with his confidences.

"Dr. Waithe's in full protective gear, huh? Knowing our Amber, she's not going to be comfortable in it for long. Will you have to shuttle her back or did you bring others with you?"

"Only Sons are allowed down here right now. We're the only ones they can be sure won't carry the Jit virus to infect these folks. Dr. Waithe took the chance because she wanted to verify the status of the colony for herself before going any further." Mike checked his chronometer. "But, to answer your question, Gabe will shuttle her back if I ask him. Why?"

"Mike," Zeke ran a frustrated hand through his hair, "something's different in me. I don't understand it, but ever since I opened my eyes and saw Angela standing there, I don't want any other woman. Only her."

Michael sighed heavily. "I thought so." Zeke was startled by Mike's knowing tone. "You're not the first of our kind to tell me this. Dr. Waithe is aware of it. She's studying the phenomenon, trying to figure it out, but I don't think she's ever going to find a scientific explanation for it. I've seen it happen to two of my best men in the last few months. They each found one special woman and they don't want to perform with any others. Sure, they still make their donations to the sperm banks, but they just don't want to fuck any other woman than their special girl."

"Who were they? What happened to them?"

If this condition were spreading, Dr. Waithe would want to take action. She wasn't one to sit idly by and let her plans be ruined by some random anomaly. He only hoped she hadn't resorted to desperate means to keep her Sons on track with her goals.

"Mark and Todd."

Zeke recognized the names. "They're both Moderates. Have you heard of any other Risks being affected?"

"You're the first I've heard of, Zeke. But you can stop worrying. Dr. Waithe keeps them under observation but they've both been permitted to cohabit with their women and are raising families. Can you imagine it, Zeke?" A quiet wistfulness entered his voice. "They're actually raising their own sons. I visit them both from time to time and they're happier than I've ever seen them."

"So you think there's a chance I'll be allowed to stay with Angela?"

"More than a chance, my friend. This colony will need a few of us here on the surface to help them get up to speed with the tech we'll be giving them, among other things. I wouldn't be surprised if our Amber sees the wisdom in letting you live here with your girl. The people here already know you after all, and they seem to like you, though

why I can't imagine." Mike chuckled as he rose to his feet. "I'm going to check on Dr. Waithe and see what's up. I'll make the recommendation to her that you be assigned here permanently, if you want. As far as I'm concerned, this duty station is yours, but since you're a Son, we have to clear it with Dr. Waithe first."

"I know." Zeke stood and held out his hand for a shake and quick hug. "And thanks, Mike. For everything."

Mike headed for the companionway, but paused as Zeke asked one final question.

"What do you think is happening to me and our brothers, Mike? If there's no scientific explanation, what could it be?"

Mike chuckled softly as an unfamiliar, almost envious feeling came over him. "I've read up on our ancestors, Zeke. In all the years of humanity's history and all the scientific advances they made, not one scientist or researcher could ever explain the phenomenon known as love." Mike slapped a hand on the doorframe. "I'd say you're in love with the girl, and if I'm not much mistaken, she loves you in return."

Mike left, whistling as he sauntered down the companionway. He'd given Zeke a lot of answers, but quite a few questions, too. How could he really know if he was in love with Angela? He didn't know what love was. It was something they hadn't covered in his accelerated training sessions. It had been assumed there would be no room for love in the life of one of the Sons of Amber.

He'd been designed to be a stud, providing service for any female who wanted it, supplying sperm for the next generation of babies. He hadn't been designed to find one woman and settle down the way their human ancestors had done before the virus. He didn't know if it was even possible that he could, but he was a Risk Taker, after all, and he was willing to risk everything for a chance at happiness with Angela.

He turned back towards the door to his sleep chamber, only to find her blinking up at him through teary eyes.

"Is it true?" Angela asked, something like hope filling her wide eyes. "Do you love me?"

In that moment, all of Zeke's questions were answered. If ever a man loved a woman, he loved Angela. He moved slowly forward to take her unresisting body into his arms.

"I do." He placed tender kisses all over her face. "I love you with all my heart, my angel."

"Oh, Zeke!" she gasped as he nipped his way down her neck. "I love you so much!"

Warmth flooded his heart. A pure, beaming, light of joy and radiant hope filled him. He wanted it all in that moment. He wanted her forever, bound to him and him to her. If it were at all possible, he would make it happen, he vowed.

"Do your people still have marriage ceremonies?" he paused in his kisses to ask. Slowly, she nodded. "Then," he took a moment to kneel down on one knee, holding her hand and looking up into her radiant face, "will you marry me, Angela? Will you be my wife?"

Hope, joy and love lit her sparkling eyes. "I will."

She laughed and cried at the same time, shrieking when he stood and lifted her up in his arms, twirling her around the cabin. It was a long time before they left the ship, going back to the settlement to tell the others their happy news.

* * *

A few days later, they were married and given a traditional wedding feast according to the customs of Angela's people. But only after a long talk with Mother Rachel and Dr. Waithe. Zeke was eventually granted permission to marry his love, but both women had to give their blessing first. Rachel was easy to convince. It was Amber who put up more of an argument.

"But Zeke, are you certain?" Dr. Waithe had asked gently, her voice a little tinny through the speaker on her environmental suit. She couldn't risk contaminating the settlement, so she had to wear the slim suit that provided her own air supply. "You know why you were created, and the goals we have for saving our species."

Surprisingly, it was Rachel who stepped in. "He can still fulfill his role in your plan, Doctor. But why should he and Angela be denied happiness while he does so?"

"Doctor Amber," Zeke pled his own case, "I love Angela and she loves me. I never expected anything like this to happen, but it has and now I know I'll never be complete without her in my life. I'll still do my part to save the human race. I know my duty and the contribution I can make. I don't take that lightly, but I also know I need Angela."

Doctor Waithe sighed audibly, but Zeke took her soft smile behind the clear bubble of her suit's headpiece as a good sign. "Oh, Zeke. You're not the first man to fall in love, and I doubt you'll be the last." She reached up and cupped his cheek with her gloved hand, the maternal gesture surprising him. "I just never expected my boys to want to marry. I guess I should have thought about it, but I didn't."

"It's hard to let them leave the nest, isn't it?" Rachel moved up behind Amber.

The doctor chuckled. "I never really thought of myself as a clingy, overprotective mother." Amber turned to share a laugh with Rachel, who nodded understandingly.

"Every woman has it in her to protect her young. Ezekiel is your son as much as if you had carried him in your womb. The connection between you is strong and will not diminish."

Oddly it was Rachel who reassured the brilliant geneticist. Zeke watched in awe as the two women grew teary eyed discussing his wedding plans.

"You'll have to stay here for the time being, of course," Amber said, businesslike once again. "But we have to leave a contingent here anyway for the colony's protection, so that works out fine. I'll still want sperm donations every cycle, just like your brothers who'll be stationed here."

Rachel chuckled and winked at him. "I'm sure Sister Angela will have no objection to helping him with that."

All three laughed and the atmosphere relaxed. Amber stepped right up to him and took his hand.

"I want you to be happy, Zeke. You're a special young man and I want only the best for you."

Zeke squeezed her hand. "Angela is the best. You'll see."

And so permission was granted and Zeke was allowed to marry his unexpected love. Mike stood up as Zeke's best man, while Agatha filled the role of Angela's bride's maid. Amber and Rachel sat beside each other, both beaming as a stately, older, male priest recited the traditional words that would join Zeke and his angel forevermore.

* * *

"I never expected this," Amber said a short while later to Rachel as they shared a moment of quiet before she had to leave.

"I know."

"Is it true you can see the future?"

Rachel tilted her head. "And do you, a woman of science, believe in such things?"

Amber's eyes narrowed. "I've seen many things in my time, and I've studied the human brain in some detail. I know there are still many things we cannot explain about psi abilities and that they do exist in some rare cases. I also know that the population of Espia had more than its share of psychic phenomena before the virus."

Mother Rachel nodded deeply. "We are the Order of Chion. All of our ancestors had some psychic ability when they left Espia for this planet, but it does not always breed true. Some of us have the abilities of our ancestors and some do not."

"But you do." It wasn't a question.

Again, Rachel nodded. "I have foreseen an end to this plague, and many happy marriages among your Sons. The only advice I can offer at this time is to not stand in their way. The love they find with the women lucky enough to claim them is hope for our future, Amber. There is a solution out there, and you will see it in your lifetime. Your Sons will play their role, but unexpected aid will come and when it does, you need to remember your goals, not the tragedies of yesterday. You must get past your anger and look to the future—as must we all."

Doctor Waithe thought on the seer's words for a long moment. Rachel offered hope, but intimated great changes ahead, especially for her Sons. If she was to be believed, they would start to marry in greater numbers. Amber had to make new calculations and try to anticipate what this unexpected development might do to her carefully laid plans.

"I'll take your words to heart, Mother Rachel. Thanks for giving me hope." She turned to go, knowing her ship was waiting for her to depart.

"Just remember, Doctor," Rachel called softly after her, "Fate plays a much larger role in our existence than you might envision. Do not discount the power of destiny, or that of the most unstoppable force in the universe... love."

* * *

And later that night, Zeke finally won his bet.
He made his angel scream with pleasure.

About the Author

A life-long martial arts enthusiast, Bianca enjoys a number of hobbies and interests that keep her busy and entertained such as playing the guitar, shopping, painting, shopping, skiing, shopping, road trips, and did we say...um...shopping? A bargain hunter through and through, Bianca loves the thrill of the hunt for that excellent price on quality items, though she's hardly a fashionista. She likes nothing better than curling up by the fire with a good book, or better yet, by the computer, writing a good book.

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