

Panocide: The Past – Section Five

Fixed Bayonets

Numerous rebel tanks and reserve troops were smashed as several heavy autonomous Alliance tanks tore through the rebel's right flank. Additionally, three heavy Alliance tanks moved to reinforce the shelter. These tanks, with built-in inertialyzers, proved to be nearly impervious to what rebel fire could be amassed against them. For all practical purposes the battle had been won, however the rebels didn't see it that way. They had several companies stealthily low-crawling towards the defenders' right flank. Two of these companies bore the Centralist's insignia.

Calvert drew himself behind a pile of rubble as shards of rock pelted his visor. "Damn!" He slowly inched his head around the debris as a launcher sung out in the distance. He shuttered at the sight before him—hundreds of backpacks bobbing up and down behind the rubble. "Yeah, you're right Jhade. They're belly-down and heading straight for us."

Zuza crawled up next to them. "You're learning, Jhade." She laid a box of 60-mm grenades before her then turned about. "Myra, bring that other box of grenades up here."

"Stay down!" Aalar said as she prepared her grenade launcher. A second later a faint hum was heard as the electromagnetic rail-type launcher hurled a grenade towards the rebels.

"Good shot, Aalar." Myra dove behind a stack of rusted girders as a rebel anti-tank missile flew overhead, slamming into an entrenchment behind her. "Close."

"Too close," Kala said as she brought her squad up.

Zuza sensed the rebels rise and break into a full charge. "Fix bayonets! Prepare to repel!" She activated her void sword and its thin, black line of a blade extended from its handle. She glanced back over her shoulder, reassured to see Ee watching.

Calvert and the Terrans were mesmerized by the occasional flicker of light from Zuza's sword. They couldn't even imagine that some ancient people had stopped the sword from emitting deadly radiation as matter died within the deadly grip of its blade.

"Be ready! The rebels may not realize we're this far out!" Zuza waited until all the rebels were up and charging. "Fire!"

Most of the leading rebels were dropped by the first rounds. By the time the fifth salvo was fired, the rebels were atop them.

"It's hand-to-hand!" Zuza shouted as she swung her void sword.

A surprised Terran stood horrified at the sight of his arms lying on the ground before him. Panic overtook him as he futilely tried to stem the gushing blood from stubs of his arms without the use of his arms.

Jhade kicked one rebel out of the way, planted her rifle butt squarely in the face of another then with a quick slash of her bayonet, a rebel sergeant fell, disemboweled.

Calvert had his hands full wrestling a Special Forces soldier until Aalar snapped the rebel's neck.

"Thanks," he said as his voice broke.

"You're most welcome." She pushed another back towards Zuza who promptly performed a decapitation. "These troops fight differently."

"They're trained in martial arts." Calvert let out a curse. "And at this time I wish I knew more, too!"

Kala sidestepped behind two rebels. She then slipped her bayonet between the breastplate and belly armor of a man. She knocked the legs out from under a woman then grabbed her lower leg, wrenching the woman's knee in a direction it wasn't meant to be.

Jhade dove to the ground as a missile barely missed her.

Kala looked up as she untangled herself from the screaming woman. "Look out, Delia."

Private Dowles felt the heavy weight of a rifle butt slam into her back. Half berserk, she started hammering away at her attacker with her entrenching tool. A corporal eagerly joined her in an insane, berserk fighting spree.”

“Take it easy you two,” Zuza ordered as a rebel tank round hit a supporting column, showering attacker and defender alike with shrapnel.

Myra threw a rebel over her shoulder then grabbed another while off in the distance a rebel tank fired. Flames belched within the hand-to-hand fighting as a shaped-charge round detonated. Myra’s waist and legs fell to the ground. Only smoke and a faint red mist drifted where her head and body had once existed.

“Synt down! Synt down!” shouted Aalar into her comm. She shoved the muzzle of her pistol against a rebel stomach and fired off a shot then she knelt to nox the remains of Myra’s severed lower spinal chord. In a hopeless tone, she said, “For what good it will do.”

There was the chance that full-body cloning might bring Myra back, even restore her mind to the point where she had last had her memory backed up. However, she would not likely return as a syntient.

Zuza looked about and found Calvert to be the closest to the rebel position. “Cal, see if you and a couple of others can take out that damn launcher.”

“Roger.” Calvert gestured for two Terrans, a Dycinian, and a Rychtaevier to join him.

Kala then made a grisly discovery.

“Aalar!” She tossed Myra’s shoulders and head to her. “Do you think she’ll have a chance?”

Quickly, Aalar noxxed Myra’s severed remains. “Now that we have an intact brain... Yes! Thank you!”

Kala sighed. If Myra’s severed, charred remains could be saved then *what a dream!*

Off to the shelter’s left flank a second group of rebels attacked. And, unknown to the attackers, reinforcing Alliance tanks were rounding a rearward support column and coming up behind them.

At this point, Ee and her troops fully entered the maelstrom. With feline speed, Ee sliced into the rebels. With wrist stilettos and foot scythes extended, she sliced her way through several of the rebels in a graceful dance of death.

The ground turned red as Ee’s gelf and normal born troops followed her into the fray.

Delia and a Dycinian, their rifles firing on full automatic, made a mad dash, bulldozing their way through several rebels who were staring at the hovering Alliance tanks. Zuza quickly followed behind, dispatching them as they attempted to get back to their feet.

“Behind you, Aalar!” Calvert shouted.

Aalar dove as a rebel fired his hyper-weapon. Three shots burned into her, severing her right shoulder. As a guardian, her body naturally constricted its severed blood vessels, stopping most of the blood loss, though she needed to use her left hand to stop the remaining arterial flow.

A rail-launched grenade slammed and buried itself deep into Aalar’s attackers mid section. Aalar’s attacker stared in disbelief at his stomach as the round exploded and separated his chest from his pelvis.

“Damn! Guardian down!” Zuza announced over her comm. She scrambled to her matched guardian’s side. She emptied Aalar’s first aid on the ground, grabbing a can of flesh-foam sealer. “Remove your hand.”

Aalar’s blood squirted in pulses from her massive wound as she removed her hand. Biting her lip, she reached out and recovered her right arm as Zuza proceeded to seal her shoulder shut.

Jhade hefted a rebel above her, ready to drive his head into the ground when he screamed, “I surrender! Wait! I surrender!”

Delia jerked her bayonet out of a Centralist major’s stomach and was about to plunge it in again when the officer held her hand out. “Don’t!”

“Tell the others, Major!” Kala ordered.

Major Laing turned to her comrades. “Cease fire! Everyone cease fighting! Lay your arms down!” She raised her arms and gestured downwards with her hands. “We have our honor intact. Let’s live to remember it.”

Hesitantly, the rebels in the immediate area gave up their weapons. Unfortunately, the battle raged on elsewhere.

“Jhade,” Zuza gestured to the bunker, “search the major, stop her bleeding, and then escort her back to Princess Aprii. If she tries anything... drop her!”

Laing was taken aback by Jhade’s height and the name she heard. “Princess Aprii...?” Her face grew pale. “She’s still alive...?”

“No thanks to you and your comrades. Who do you think you’ve been attacking, major? We’ve been protecting the Princess and Lord Hyran from your assault for hours.”

Zuza listened to Kabis’ message then waved her arm to acquire everyone’s attention. “Rebels troops are advancing across the ceiling on catwalks. They’ll soon be in position to fire down upon us and the bunker.”

“Cal...! Cal!” Zuza shouted as she looked at the face of one of the support columns. “See if you can find a maintenance ladder... anything at all we can climb. I want you and whoever you can grab to climb to the ceiling. We’ll join you as soon as we can.”

Calvert’s head tilted back and his heart sank as he realized the great, arduous, smoke-shrouded climb awaiting him and his comrades. As his stomach tossed and turned, he silently stepped forwards.

Maracyn

<Date: 4/15/28,541 Standard. Carlsworth Hall, New World City.>

Maracyn stood in the center of a well lit auditorium stage, his hands grasped behind his back as he spoke to his mesmerized audience. His audience was comprised of Terrans from all walks of life. Most of those who listened were from the lower classes of the social ladder. These people sought a better life—if not in this life then in the next. However, a few in the audience were from the highest levels of society. Many of them had power and through Maracyn they hungered for more.

“We...! I cannot stress this point enough! *We!* I say, *we* are the children of God! We are the righteous! And yes...! Yes...! We are the relentlessly persecuted.” He didn’t bother to wipe the perspiration soaking his forehead. “We are the ones who are persecuted by these demonic aliens from other worlds! Many of you have seen them and you know they are not like us! That they are definitely not made in the image of God Almighty!” Maracyn threw his arms out wide. “In the eyes of our most Blessed Maker, our toil and torment is a most glorious sacrifice in His Name.” As he lowered his arms as he closed his hands into tight fists. “These aliens, our ‘friends’ as they call themselves...” Murmurs of agreement with him rose from his congregation. “They have come to our world bearing false words and dark hearts.” He clenched his fists even tighter before his chest. “These aliens in their deception of friendship have demonstrated nothing but contradiction through their actions. When one of their soldiers falls in combat, do they show any human compassion...? No! What do they do...? As they save their fallen comrade’s ammunition they purposely poison and kill them. And, what do they do when they come across one of our wounded followers...?”

The audience shouted in anger. Every mouth cried out in hatred against the Alliance.

“That’s right! In cold blood they kill our fathers, our mothers, our sons, and our daughters by shooting poison straight to their brains!” He stomped his foot hard against the stage floor. The thump echoed throughout the auditorium over the sound system. “And now I must regrettably inform you Princess Aprii has fallen in with this nest of demons. As her parents before her, she has turned her back on me, on you, and on God Almighty!”

Gayle pulled back from the edge of a catwalk and glanced at Mylee. “Whoa... this Terran has

definitely gone off the deep end.”

“He’s gone out of his way to persecute me, as well as other pscanners. It’s like he had a death wish against us.” Mylee’s expression grew timid. “Do you think he’s a pscanner...?”

“Yes...” Gayle leaned back over the railing and frowned. “And he’s a very powerful one at that. A most powerful one...”

Maracyn continued with his ranting, “They cannot—and *will not*—tell us how we can believe and worship. We are commanded by God Almighty to cleanse this world, and, if necessary, we will lay down our very lives to show our fellow brethren the righteous path to God’s redemption.”

He spread his arms out to the heavens as his followers exclaimed, “Hallelujah!” and “Amen!”

Gayle slid back as Vela and Kathy reached the top of ladder to the catwalk. Kathy carried a slight limp from her leg wound, although now, thanks to her accelerated healing as a guardian, her wounds were well on their way towards being fully healed. “How did it go?”

“Perfect,” Vela said. “We were all over the kitchen, checking on everything. They never suspected a thing.”

“Thanks. You did a good job.” Gayle glanced over the side and saw a large group of Maracyn’s guards carrying several large kettles onto the stage. “Here they go,” she whispered to herself. She then activated her radio. “Kabis, they’ve bringing the poison out now.”

“Roger, can you tell what it is?”

“No, there are too many chemicals or other poisons mixed in to tell what it is. Have you heard any more on the bomb they’ve allegedly planted on Princess Aprii?”

“Yes, I have. *She was wearing the bomb. Maracyn’s followers had explosives formed into cloth. They presented it to her with a fine night shirt a few weeks back for her upcoming wedding.*” Kabis paused to speak with someone on his end of the transmission. “*The Terrans now know how Aprii’s parents died, Gayle. Several years ago her parents were found burnt to death in bed. Up until now, no one was certain as to who had committed the deed, or how they had done it.*”

“Right.” Gayle pulled back. “They’re preparing to pass the poison out.” She grimaced. “I believe they’re going to do the children first.”

“You can’t let them harm the children!” Mylee scooted to the edge to have look. “The children have done nothing. They’re innocent!”

“Sh...” Gayle pressed her hand across Mylee’s lips.

“B...” Mylee said in a muffled voice.

“We can’t rush in and overpower them. We’ll have a blood bath on our hands if the guards open fire on the people.” She glared deep into Mylee’s eyes, making sure she felt the full strength of her syntienthood. “Please be patient. Watch and learn. We’ve taken measures and the children will be just fine in a short while.”

Maracyn raised his glass for all to see. “Within this hallowed glass the Angel of Death resides. She waits with Holy Martyrdom for all those who embrace the One True Faith.” He handed the glass to one of his guards. The guard took a sip, handed the glass back, and then, with a slight sway of his body, he dropped to the floor.

Gayle watched the guard’s body twitch once. She turned to Mylee. “We had better start heading on down to the auditorium floor now.” She glanced at a small platform suspended underneath the center of the auditorium’s dome then radioed a fellow Larien syntient. “Kilt, we’re moving out, so you’re in charge up here.”

“Roger.” Kilt waved from across the catwalk. “*Good luck.*”

“Thanks.” Gayle returned the wave, then reached out and grabbed Mylee’s shoulder to slow her down. “Easy, now. You’re not eager to meet Maracyn are you?”

“No, but he’s going to kill those people.” She felt the emotional crescendo from the congregation below as the first child died. “Gayle!” She cried as shock overtook her.

Gayle gave Mylee a quick hug and then rushed her along with Vela and Kathy following off

the catwalk and inside a small service room. “We’ll recover the children soon enough, but for now use your blocking techniques. Listen... You cannot allow what’s happening down there to overtake you. You have a long life ahead of you, so you can’t let the emotions of others, no matter how innocent they might be to get to you. I know it sounds cold, but it will allow you to better help them.”

Mylee pulled herself together and they stepped into a service hallway where Urs joined them. Together they then proceeded down toward the auditorium’s main floor. Along the way, Gayle sensed Maracyn take the poison. Gayle then took her time descending the stairs. She waited for the last of Maracyn’s followers to take the poison.

After several minutes, Gayle stopped at the hall’s kitchen. She glanced over the Alliance and aligned syntients, guardians, and pscanners before her. “Maracyn’s up, and so are his pscanner guards.”

Maracyn and his guards had recovered from their poisoned drinks as the last of his normal born followers died. Since he was a pscanner, he could sense the approach of any normal born being therefore syntys had to be used to capture him.

“Okay. One last time... Mylee and I will approach Maracyn alone. Next, first squad will go right, second left, and the third will stay and cover the door. The other companies will enter accordingly.” She turned to Mylee. “Are you ready?”

“About as ready as I’ll ever be,” she sighed. She smiled nervously.

“Good enough.” Gayle spied a mop and unscrewed its handle from its head. “I’ll need this. There’s one guard who’s standing where our snipers can’t target him.” She stepped out of the room with Mylee in tow, down a corridor, and stopped at the auditorium’s side entrance. She quietly radioed, “Are the perimeter guards out of the way?”

“*They are,*” Urs answered. “*And watch the guard by your door; he is still out of our reach.*”

“Thanks, I already have something in mind for him.” She held her hand up for Mylee to wait then motioned for her to hide in a corner. “I’m going in now.” Gayle silently slid the door open. She dashed out and nearly got within arms reach of the guard when he abruptly spun about. She broke the mop handle across his shins, and as he bent over, she broke its shortened shaft across his back. As she suddenly became the center of attention, bullets shattered the chairs and walls about her as she dropped to floor.

Maracyn felt the presence of no one as he studied the area where his guard had once stood. “Who are you? Are you one of those damn aliens?”

Gayle kept her head down. “I’m Syntient Field Marshal V’shan’nos. If you’re ready, I would like to talk.”

“Talk...! Demon bitch, I’m ready to blow you away!”

“I don’t think so, Maracyn.” Gayle glanced up into the dome. “Is everyone ready?”

Numerous syntys responded, “Ready,” and the word echoed through the auditorium. Maracyn and his guards looked about at each other and found laser aiming points on their heads and chests. They were visibly shaken with the realization they were each closely covered by several Alliance snipers.

Maracyn glared at Gayle as she cautiously stepped forward with her arms away from her sides. “So, you’ve brought your demons with you.”

“Now, you know just as well as I do, those who can sense the presence of normal people cannot sense others like themselves.” She made sure she had full eye contact with him as she stepped out of the shadows. “The only people here are either pscanners, like you, guardians, and those like me, syntients.”

Maracyn flinched as the power of her stared bore through him. “You’re...!”

“A syntient.”

“No...! It can’t be...!” He nearly fell over backwards as his head felt light. “You’re like our Savior! How can it be there is another like our Savior...?”

“Savior...?” Gayle glanced over her shoulder as Mylee hesitantly slipped into the auditorium. “And, this Savior a pscanner like you?”

"I'm not sure what a pscanner is..."

"Someone who can feel the emotions of normal people. They also can't feel the presence of fellow pscanners."

"That's not like our Savior." He bowed his head. "He can sense my presence. He is our Savior. He is the guiding light who leads the true followers to God." He held his head up high, taking pride in his words.

Gayle sighed, "I can sense your presence, and I'm definitely not your Savior." She glanced about and spoke into her communicator, "We have a rogue syntient on our hands."

Maracyn's body tensed as he placed his hands behind his back. "How many fingers am I holding up?"

"None. Both your fists are clenched." She drew her pistol and aimed it over her shoulder at the face of a Terran pscanner who was slowly drawing his weapon. "As for your guard behind me, I would say he lost two toes a few hours ago from the damage I sense, and if he keeps his hand on his weapon, he'll soon lose his life. I'll shoot him so he won't be coming back!"

Maracyn grew pale and stiffened. "My faith is strong. All this has not been for nothing..."

"Your beliefs are still intact should you choose to follow them... However, you have been led astray." She gestured to thousands of bodies slumped in their chairs or sprawled on the floor. "The same way you lead them astray."

"My people!" His eyes widened and his throat tightened. Choking, he forced his words out, "They're all dead!"

"No, we were able to slip a form of our noxxing agent into your poison. Our medical teams should have them up and well about in a few minutes or so." She waved for Mylee to come to her side, and for her comrades to circle the auditorium's inner walls. "If you were to have used your weapons, then it would have taken weeks, maybe months, for many of them to fully recover. And, unfortunately, some might never have recovered." She waved for medical teams to enter. The teams quickly dispersed throughout the followers, administering antidote, although they did not allow the followers to fully awaken.

He looked at his guards and silently signaled them to surrender their weapons. "What will happen to us...?"

"That's between you and your government; however, if your world is intent upon joining the Alliance, then certain rights, for both criminals and, more importantly, victims, are to be followed."

"Victims...?"

"In our constitution, the rights of victims, not the guilty, must be assured along with the rights of the accused." Gayle watched as Maracyn's guards were taken into custody. Urs walked up beside her. "Can you get in touch with this 'Savior' of yours?"

"Yes." He pulled a small, flat communicator from his pocket. "I can call him on this whenever I need him."

"Good. Give us a moment then contact him." She turned towards Urs. "I want to know from where this 'Savior' is calling from."

"Roger." Urs radioed, "Zol, Maracyn is about to call someone. I want their exact location."

"Yes, sir."

Mylee glanced at Maracyn. "Remember me?"

"I don't... Why yes. I remember you." His face reddened. "I recall I had you placed in an asylum when you choose not to follow me. I must beg you forgiveness." He lowered his head. "I'm truly sorry about my actions. Up until recently, I didn't realize what the two of us were. When I caught sight of Field Marshal V'shan'nos staring at me..." His shoulders shuttered. "It began to don on me that we might have been... misled."

"Yeah." She nervously stared at his dead followers. "That pretty well sums up what has happened to most of us. Maybe we can start over again... a clean slate or such."

"Nice thought. However, I seriously doubt if I'll be around to see it."

"Nonsense," Gayle huffed. "Now, if you don't mind, make that call."

Maracyn nodded as he readied his communicator. He then stared emotionless at a wall.

"All right, everybody. Keep quiet," ordered Gayle. "Maracyn, allow this 'Savior' know you have successfully fulfilled your mission."

"Yes, ma'am." He tightly gripped his communicator as all eyes fell upon him. He swallowed hard as his hands shook. "My Savior, I pray Thee answer my behest. I have completed your will as you requested. As you predicted, I have returned from the dead."

"That is good, my son." A strong, extremely warm and friendly, male voice answered. "It is time for your next task. You are to proceed to 7637 West Harbor Lane. There, in the basement, you will find seven thousand of my Angels of the Inquisition. Go with them, my son. Go to the palace basement for Princess Aprii has yet to be saved as the other-world demons have stopped her eternal salvation. Once you are there, my angels will find and save her."

"Yes, my Lord. It shall be as you wish." Maracyn closed his communicator. His body trembled violently. His forehead wrinkled as deep concern fell across his face. "Angels...?"

"More like crack combat troops," Gayle commented. "They must be inside a syntient sensing suppression field."

"We have the receiving location, Field Marshal," Urs announced. "It's about a half kilometer away from the palace." He listened to his communicator for a few seconds. "We have a sighting." He activated his suit's external speaker.

"Something is happening... Roger, the subject is leaving the compound now," a Vishahntien syntient said over the radio as she watched the street below her observation post. *"He's well over two meters in height. He appears to be a Uotiner quavaygus-type species... He is self colored... He has just a trace of body hair, although that could have been removed... I'm checking my computer's database on national make-ups... No... No... Yes, I have him. Our man's from an independent nation. He's a Rhy'Karrin."*

Urs shut his external speaker off. "Rhy'Karrin...? They're preparing to join the Alliance. Why would one of their syntients choose to interfere with the Terrans?"

"Haven't you heard? There's a small splinter group within the Rhy'Karrins. Though they hold little popular support, they have the backing of several major businesses. Most of them are in either food or fossil fuel production. With plenty of food and energy coming in from our farming worlds, they probably believe they'll soon be out of business."

"Hell, they'll make more money than they've ever dreamed from distribution." Urs shook his head. He then turned to Maracyn. "Time to head to West Harbor Lane. Are you willing to help us stop this tragedy?"

Maracyn swallowed hard. "Sure... What about them?" He pointed to his followers.

"As I said." Gayle started walking away less she allow her emotions to take over and seek justice against Maracyn. "You can sense they're alive and sleeping. They will be all right." She closed her eyes and her mind to the bodies around her. She thought, *He's Terra's problem now.*

You're Nuts

<Date: 4/5/28,603 Standard. Location: McPhaer's training barracks.>

"One! Two! Three!" shouted a sergeant leading a late afternoon run.

"Four!" Replied a chorus of men and a few women.

"Platoon, quick time... March!"

The group dropped out of their run and into a brisk march.

"Platoon, halt! Left face!"

The sergeant turned, faced Ee, and saluted her. "Ma'am."

Ee returned his salute. She was barely out of breath from her part of the run. "Good run, sergeant. I'll see everyone back here at oh-four-thirty hours tomorrow morning." She spied William waiting for her by the entrance to the brigade's headquarters. "I'm releasing the troops to your charge. Carry on, sergeant."

"Yes, ma'am." He saluted Ee again.

Ee returned his salute then turned and headed straight towards William as the sergeant performed an about-face and began to address the troops.

William smiled as Ee walked ever closer towards him. "Hi."

Her right upper lip curled upwards slightly as she snarled. "Do you bother all women like this?"

He shook his head from side to side. "No, but then you're not like other women."

I'm not Terran, she thought. "You know very well that flattery won't go far with me."

He remained cheerful as she continued to scowl. "Just being friendly, my dear."

She growled, "I'm not your dear." She sidestepped him and started towards the headquarter entrance.

"Ee..." He sighed. "There's more to life than the military."

She turned and glared at him.

"There really should be more in your life besides the military."

"Just what can you do for me?" She planted her fists on her hips as she glared down at him.

"Um..." He shrugged his shoulders. "I could help you to gain your Terran citizenship."

She looked unimpressed. "I'm a citizen of the Alliance."

"Then you can help me to gain my Alliance citizenship." He hoped his eyes were as big and soulful looking as his heart felt.

She shook her head. "You're nuts."

"Granted." He smiled as he raised his hands as though pleading with or pledging to her. "But I would still like to get to know you better."

"You are persistent..." Glancing at a distant clock tower, she said, "Meet me here at seventeen forty-five hours."

First Date

<Location: Claudia's Café.>

Ee managed a smile. "Well, I'll have to admit that was a good meal."

"You're most welcome." William nudged a small bowl of after dinner mints towards her side of the table. "After you."

"Thanks." She accepted one of the mints. Biting into one, she savored its flavor. "These mints seem to race up my nose and through my head."

"Yeah, they are good." William took one for him self and gently eased the remaining mints further across the table for Ee to enjoy.

She lowered her ears. "You're trying to spoil me."

A grin broke William's lips. "True." He quietly slipped his personal card through a slotted payment interface on the dining table to pay for the evening's meal as well as adding a hefty tip. "Everyone deserves to be spoiled from time to time."

"You realize I have a lot of work to do."

"All the better reason to break the routine and get out and enjoy yourself every once and a while." As Ee reached for another mint, William placed his right hand atop her hand. "I am in earnest about my feelings towards you."

She didn't pull her hand back. "Do you have any idea what troubles you're letting yourself in

for?”

“No.” He nodded his head ever so slightly. “But it should make for an interesting life... the two of us together.”

Ee’s feline teeth gleamed from the few lights in the dim café. “Don’t get too far ahead of yourself. I’m only agreeing to check you out.”

“And that pleases me to no end...” He flashed the friendliest smile he could. “If you’d like, we can walk around and watch the cityscape as night descends.”

“Trying to get me into the mood?” She tilted her head slightly to one side.

“That’s a nice thought, but I was thinking more about burning off a few of the calories from our dinner.”

She smiled. “Sure.”

He stood but retained her hand with his. “After you, my dear.”

“Thanks.”

As she stood he slid her chair away from her.

Most of the customers and staff of the café kept their eyes on Ee as she rose. At two hundred fifteen centimeters in height she easily towered above those within the eatery.

“I tend to stick out here.”

William said with a chuckle, “Well, you certainly caught my eye.”

Ee squeezed his hand. “But unlike you, I smell their fear.”

“Bad...?” He looked quite concerned.

“A few of them.” She cautiously glanced about the café. “However, most are more curious than anything else.”

“I know there has been a lot of debate in the media over your arrival and the future relationship between Terra and the Alliance.” He released her hand as they walked and retrieved their jackets from the automated hatchback. “Here you go, dear.” He assisted her with putting on her jacket and then quickly donned his own.

“I hope the two of you enjoyed your evening with us.” The maître d’ bowed slightly with his right hand over his stomach.

“It was very good,” said William.

“Thank you, sir.” The maître d’ glanced up at Ee while a waitress nervously watched while she passed by him. “We hope you will return soon for another enjoyable evening.”

“Most certainly,” agreed Ee as she took William’s left hand in hers and the two of them headed towards the door.

The maître d’ saw the visitors from the Alliance as future customers. The waitress saw them as beings who could possibly one day pose a threat to her life or livelihood.

Ee startled several people as she and William stepped out of the café and under the covered walkway. A few people tried to walk by her without appearing to take any notice of her. Ee’s nose told her differently.

William suggested, “How about a nice walk through the park?”

“Sounds good. My legs could use a good stretch.”

He led the two of them over to a narrower walkway just to the left of the café which led to an overpass and then after a short walk to a small park.

“I’m off the next two days,” he said.

“Good.” She took in the wafting perfume from flowers in a nearby park. “I have to work tomorrow, but I’m off the following three days. Maybe you can show me some of the sights around and about this city.”

“My hours are quite flexible at my new posting. I can work tomorrow and take the next two or three days off.” He mentally cringed with the next thought entering his mind. “If we can borrow one of your Alliance’s shuttles we can easily visit some of our more distant parks and natural wonders.”

“That I can arrange.” She glanced down at him. “But are you sure? I know you’re a little shaken when riding on our transports.”

“I’m getting quite use to them, dear. It’s nothing like that first day with Gayle zipping between and barely avoiding the spires of the city.”

She slowed her pace as she smelled the odd nervousness from three Terran men hiding ahead in the shadows. The smell of drugs in their system was even more overpowering to her nose. She tightened her grip on William’s hand as low growl rolled out of her throat.

William whispered, “Trouble...?”

She squeezed his hand once.

The three men dashed out of the shadows and straight towards Ee. Being taller than William, the addicts took her as being the male half of the pair.

Ee released William’s hand and withdrew two hidden blades from her clothing. Simultaneously, she heard the safety on William’s pistol being disengaged.

All three men stopped dead in their tracks—two looking at Ee’s nasty blades and the third looking down the barrel of William’s pistol.

“Don’t!” William kept his weapon aimed at the man’s head.

“Holy...!” One of the men standing before Ee not only noticed her great height, but also her not being an earthling. “You’re one of those freaking aliens!”

Ee sensed two cleaner smelling Terran men coming up behind her and William. She then said through clinched teeth to the addict, “I’m not the one who sounds like he’s freaking!”

“Police! Everyone lower your weapons and easily drop them to the ground!” Two patrol officers approached Ee and William from behind.

Recognizing the police, the three addicts quickly deserted the confrontation.

“Officer, we’re complying.” William very slowly leaned over and placed his weapon on the sidewalk as the officers debated between themselves who and what Ee was. “Slow and careful, Ee.”

Ee was even slower in her movements as she placed her two blades in the sidewalk.

“Roger, two-one. Send backup. We have an alien involved in an altercation.” The first officer stepped forward as his partner covered him. “Lay face first on the ground with your hands straight out from your sides. Do it now!”

William and Ee complied with the officer’s orders.

“Do you have any other weapons on you?”

“Yes,” said Ee and William together.

“Officer, may I present my credentials?”

The officer stepped closer to William. “Just tell me who you are.”

“I’m Agent William Alexski. I’m presently assigned to the transition team aiding the Alliance.” He gestured towards Ee with his chin. “As you can see my friend is from the Alliance.”

The officer stared at Ee catlike body. “And you are?”

“I’m Lieutenant Captain E34-GRH523012E. If you like... Ee for short. I’m with the Larien Imperial Guards and I’m currently charged with training Terran troops to protect your Princess Aprii.”

William raised his head. “Take a look at my badge and ID, officer.”

“Okay. Very slowly take it out.” The officer motioned with his pistol. “And I do mean slowly.”

Four additional officers showed up on the scene with their weapons drawn.

William slowly removed his badge from his shirt’s breast pocket. “Here, officer.”

The officer quickly took the small pseudo leather, folded case and flipped it open. Next, he took a small pen scanner from his pocket and ran it across a data strip beneath William’s photo. He then opened a small PDA, scanned William’s face and ID code, and waited for a response from the police central database.

One of the backup officers whispered, “Gee, is she ever tall.”

The PDA came back with conformation of William’s photo and credentials.

“Okay, sir. You check clean.” He glanced at Ee. “I’m unsure how I can check on her.”

“I can personally vouch for her, officer.”

Ee quipped, “And if that’s not good enough, I can contact my empress or your Princess Aprii and have them personally vouch for me...”

Mountain Picnic

<Two days later.>

Ee shut the engines down on her borrowed shuttle and glanced at William with surprised look about her face. “You are doing much better with your problem with flying.”

“I’ve made several trips to visit your fleet in orbit.” He shrugged his shoulders. “It’s just a question of having a little time to grow use to new situations.” He pointed to the thin moustache he was growing.

She shook her head from side to side. “Some things may take a very long time.”

He looked worried. “You don’t like it?”

She forced a grin. “It’s not you.”

“Well...” He reached up and grabbed the left side of his thin moustache and peeled it away from his upper lip. “It’s just a stick-on.”

“Thank you.” She audibly sighed and kissed him on his now hairless lips. She then stood up from the pilot’s chair and stepped over to the shuttle’s forward exit. “Much better, dear.”

“You’re welcome.” He glanced outside. “I was hoping we wouldn’t have too much cloud cover.”

She spied the random breaks through the clouds by the sun and its golden rays. “It’s still a nice day for getting out and seeing nature.” She grabbed a small knapsack and slung it over her left shoulder. “Just in case we get hungry.” She gestured towards the shuttle’s small galley. “Grab the drinks.”

“Got them.” He opened the refrigerator and removed several cold drinks over to an insulated carrying bag. “Do you want any cold deserts, dear?”

“Maybe a few... I love those ice cream pies your world has.” She opened the shuttle’s hatch.

“Definitely.” He quietly placed half a dozen pies in the bag, zipped it closed, and followed her out. “Ah, look at the mountains. Beautiful.”

She looked upwards at the sunlit mountain tops. “Picturesque snow caps.” She smiled. “This place remains me of a similar place on Laria. However, La-key can become quite crowded during the major holidays. Still, it’s a fun place to vacation.” She pressed a remote with her thumb and secured the shuttle’s hatch to keep animals out.

William looked about their landing site. “Should we head up or down?”

“Mm...” She looked at the surrounding scenery and then gestured to a spot about fifty meters away. “How about that rock outcropping over there?”

“Nice. The rocks there are providing their own picnic table and chairs.”

“Oh, yeah. I didn’t notice. That was rather nice of Mother Nature.”

“Mm...” His eyes narrowed as he studied the rock table. “Then again, someone may have carved it from stone and made its formation look natural.”

“If they did, they certainly did a good job.”

She took his hand in hers and they walked quietly over to the outcropping.

“Long day yesterday?”

“Not really. Some training and a lot of questions to answer.”

He chuckled as he helped her to take her seat on one of the stool-like rock perched beside the table-like, flat-top rock. “I believe that’s what most of your job consist of nowadays.”

“I fear you’re right.” She ignored the picnic basket and helped herself to one of the drinks he carried. “But in time your Princess Aprii’s personal guards will become very proficient. We have even had numerous gelfs like my self from Laria and other worlds with imperial guards to volunteer to come to Terra and help to train or even become a part of the guards themselves.” She handed him a drink.

“Thanks.” He accepted the drink. “That sounds like even more work for you, dear.” He sat the drink aside

She grinned without any modesty. “I’m now a captain.”

“Congratulations!” He leaned forwards and hugged her. “Congratulations indeed.”

“Thanks.” She patted him on his back as they separated from their hug.

He smiled devilishly. “Oh, that could get something started.”

“Aye.” Ee smiled with an evil smirk. “But could you survive?”

He thought for a short second. “Probably not... but then who wants to live forever?”

She heartily laughed. “Actually, that’s one of the top things to do during my life.”

He nodded his head. “Well, I wouldn’t mind trying. Mind you, that is with you.”

She wrapped her arms about his neck and shoulders. “You’re not thinking what I believe you’re thinking, are you?”

“Could be...” He placed his hands on her hips. “I need someone who can tolerate me and keep me on the straight and narrow.”

“Now, you’re asking for a lot there.” She looked about at the peaceful scenery. “Still, I could call this world home.” She glanced back at him. “Well...?”

For one brief instant, William looked scared. The timing was earlier than he had planned for his big question. Then mustering his courage, he asked in the Larien language, “My dearest Ee... Will you marry me?”

She closed her eyes and leaned her fore head against his. In the past few days she had grown much closer to him. “I will, my dear.”

He kissed her and then wrapped his arms about her. He didn’t say a word—he joyfully held her in his arms.

Ee kept their lips pressed together as she started to slowly undo his clothing. She knew marriages between various species from differing worlds often did not to bear fruit, and gelfs often needed aid in reproducing between their individual genetic species. Although Lariens and Terrans had tested as very compatible, tests had showed the prospects of her and William, and those like them, having children were quite low. She had her career to keep in mind, and if things worked out between her and William in the long run, then they could always adopt children or use alternative methods.

With his shirt off, she allowed him to undo hers. Continuing their kiss, she pressed their bare chests together, allowing him to feel her four excited nipples pressing against his bare skin. She then whispered, “Like I said, ‘you are persistent.’” She rolled the two of them over onto a thick grassy patch of ground. “However, you forgot to tell me you’re a good kisser, too....”

“Fixed Bayonets,” “Maracyn,” “You’re Nuts,” “First Date,” and “Mountain Picnic” are sections of text from the story *Panocide*.

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