

Panocide: The Past – Section Seven

Bea & Alexi

<Date: 5/23/28,633 Standard. Location: Lantänger's Trustier colony. A world noted for its resorts, recreation, gambling, and numerous honeymoon retreats.>

An elderly Lantänger man looked over the data on the display before him, waiting for a secure identity and medical report requests to be returned.

On the other side of his desk sat a young Lantänger couple who were there applying for a marriage license.

The young man asked, "Which wedding chapel would you recommend?"

The older man held his hand up. "I'm sorry. I must remain impartial, sir. There are plenty of chapels about this city, so I would suggest you browse through their various web kiosk listings to find one the two of you like."

The couple's identification, medical, and genetic reports popped up on the man's display. The man glanced over the report. Then looking over at the young couple, he said, "Sir. Ma'am. Your identities and viabilities are confirmed. How do you wish to pay your registration fee?"

The young man said, "Card." He removed a small, plastic card from his wallet and held it out for the man to see.

"Very good, sir." The worker gestured to a slot on a card reader. "Allow me to congratulate the two of you on your future life together." As payment was entered, the older man tapped a key on his keyboard and a printer rapidly spat out an Alliance endorsed marriage license. Picking up the license and handing it to the couple, he smiled and said, "Live long and happily together and may your union together be greatly blessed."

"Thanks."

The couple kissed each other and quickly darted out of the office.

Leaning back in his chair the elderly man sipped on his coffee as he awaited the next couple to apply for a marriage license.

There was a knock at his door.

"Please, come in."

He was surprised to see a young Terran man and a vaguely Terran looking woman with a fairly long Lantänger tail entered. She was the first Lantänger-Terran he had seen.

The young man said, "We're here to apply for a marriage license." He added with a slight nervous inflection in his voice, "We're planning to be wed elsewhere, however we plan to return here for our honeymoon."

"Very good, sir. I'm a government worker and as such make no recommendations where people should get married or have their honeymoons. It's policy." The older man extended his hand to the young couple and shook their hands as he spoke. "I'm Hume O'Brien. Do you have your personal identification and passports with you?"

"Yes we do." The woman reached inside her purse and pulled out two Alliance passports and her identification and handed them over to Hume. Likewise, her fiancé handed over his identification.

"Thank you." Hume opened their passports and glanced over them. "Alexi Denvearson-Bourques and Bea O'Jii-Warren, is it?" His eyebrows rose slightly. "I believe I've heard of a few of those names before."

"Could be." Bea shrugged her shoulders. "Likely our parents or grandparents."

Hume scanned their passports into his computer. "This may take a little while." He eased back in his chair. "Do either of you have a family history of genetic diseases?"

“We’re both cleared our genetic compatibility scans.” Bea handed Hume a small disc. “We rated at 99.9 plus percent compatible. Our children should only have the normal childhood diseases to worry us over.”

Hume popped the disc into a reader. “That’s good.” He opened the disc and its contents up on his computer and quickly eyed the lab results. “Good.” He gestured to a retinal scanner with his right hand. “I’ll need a quick scan and a cheek swab for ID confirmation.”

Alexi stood and asked Bea, “Do you want to go first, dear?”

“No. I’ll wait.”

“Okay.”

Hume said, “It’ll only take a few seconds. Just look in the eyepieces and you’ll hear a ding when it’s finished.” He opened a small, long sterile wrapper and handed Bea a swab. “Just rub it on the inside of your cheek, please.”

“Sure.” Bea took the swap, rubbed it briskly about on the inside of her cheek, and handed it back to Hume.

“Thank you.” Hume dropped the swap in a machine off to the left side of his desk.

A bell went off and Alexi looked up. “That was a little bright.”

“Sorry. This scanner is somewhat antiquated. It needs more light to scan your retinas than the newer models.”

“You make do with what you have.”

“Right.” Hume handed Alexi a swap. “Ma’am.” He gestured to the retinal scanner. “If you would.”

“Certainly.” Bea stepped over to the scanner and put her eyes up to the eyepiece.

“Here you go.” Alexi handed Hume his swap.

The scanner dinged and Bea looked up and blinked her eyes several times. “Yeah, that is a little bright.”

“Again, sorry about the light.” Hume motioned to their seats. “Please, take your seats. As I said, this can take a little while.”

“No rush. We’re in no great hurry.” Bea wrapped arm about Alexi’s left arm. “Although I know someone who is just itching to get on with this.”

Alexi glanced down at her. “Who’s that?”

“Why you...!” She pinched his hand. “You big silly.”

“Guilty as charged.” He kissed her on her forehead and then on her lips.

Bea’s tail flickered about as they kissed.

Hume paid them no mind for over his many years of government service he had seen countless thousands of parties come before him for their marriage license.

A red flag popped up on his display screen.

“Whoa! I’ve never seen this alert before.” He read through the message as his gut grew an odd sensation.

“There’s nothing serious, is there?” asked Bea.

“I don’t know... No. It’s requesting your identities be kept hush. Your marriage is authorized and endorsed, but it is not to be made public at this moment.” He read further, and the further he read the wider his eyes grew. “This is a royal wedding!”

“Yes.” Alexi nodded. “We’re well known on Terra and Lantänger, so we decided to come here for our marriage license.”

Alexi squeezed Bea’s hand and said, “My beloved Bea is the daughter of Lord Erik Warren and Princess Fii O’Jii.”

Smiling at Alexi, Bea said, “And my Alexi is the first born of Queen Aprii Bourques and Prince Hyran Denvearson.”

“Whoa...!” Hume remained silent for several long seconds. “That’s going to make quite a

splash in the news when it hits the air.”

“That is why we came to your resort world to file for a license. It’s remote and known for its discretion,” said Alexi.

“And...” continued Bea. “We also love to vacation here. It lacks so many of today’s modern tourist trappings....”

Hope

<Date: 2/12/29,540 Standard. The dark recesses of an ancient imperial palace.>

A lone and deeply sadden catlike woman stared down from her window onto a courtyard where several children were playing. It saddened her further that none of the children were hers.

The spots on the woman’s face lent her an exceedingly freckled look. Her small physique, slim hips and bust imparted her with the appearance of a quite young woman; however to the few people who personally knew her, she was nearly ageless.

Quietly, the woman smiled as she watched the children’s playful antics.

Alas for her, however, her passion for life was dwindling. She had witnessed the passing of countless generations on her world. For nearly all of her life, she had waited, sometimes in near seclusion, for the fulfillment of a promise given long ago by the Elders.

She leaned closer to the window. The faint breath of laughter escaped her lips as she watched two of the playmates arguing over a small toy. As a syntient, she knew the odds of her ever having children were so insignificant as to be incalculable. Such was the high price for her extended life.

Sensing the approach of an aide, she turned her attention back to the dimly lit room she stood in. After a moment, a second woman entered. Though older in appearance, she was vastly younger.

“First Syntient.” The woman started to bow but was stopped by a wave of the first woman’s hand. “There’s news from the Alliance: the Terrans have just witnessed the birth of their first syntient.”

“Who...?” She asked nonchalantly. She had been disappointed far too many times to allow her hopes to arise.

“The first born of their royal family. Commodore Ko’Rii and Field Marshal V’shan’nos were on hand to personally confirm the child as a syntient.”

The First Syntient’s eyes widened slightly as she bit her lip. She turned towards the window and leaned into its opening, softly thumping her fist against its sill as a faint glimmer of hope arose from deep within her breast. “Maybe this time...”

“First Syntient.”

“Yes?”

“It was reported the child matched within seconds of his birth to a guardian who had earlier lost her matched syntient.”

“Yes... yes,” the First Syntient whispered as she stopped thumping her fist. Then, ever so hesitantly, she allowed herself to smile.

Ly

<Date: 4/14/29,550 Standard. Location: Quandus.>

Young Lycom “Ly” Denvearson-Bourques stood next to his mother, Princess Sarah Bourques. Ly’s great-great-great-grandmother Fii stood behind them.

From their observation platform, they and other honored guests looked down upon the blue orb of the Alliance colony world, Quandus. A world that was very earthlike with about three quarters of its surface covered by oceans and fairly active tectonic action.

Ly was technically third in line to the Terran throne but he was also a syntient. Under Terran law concerning syntients, guardians, pscanners, and any other advanced sentient forms of people who may arise from the people of Terra—he was forbidden from ever ascending to the Terran throne.

Although only ten-years-old, Ly's abilities as a syntient went far beyond those of other syntients. Thanks to his grandmother Fii, he also sported a somewhat short furry tail as did most of the males in the royal Terran lineage. Of course, being ten-years-old, his youth would show itself from time to time and Fii would then gently tug on his collar whenever he acted up to remind him of his position in life.

Sarah glanced back at Fii as the station's commander touted the achievements of the colony below. The facts he pointed out were quite interesting but his vocal delivery was so monotonous as to bore all those within earshot to the verge of falling off to sleep.

Ly looked out a side window of the station's observation platform at several Alliance ships floating motionless in orbit about Quandus. He extended his senses and picked out every living soul in the surrounding vessels. From the planet below he sensed the buzz of thriving life itself on the world's surface, in its atmosphere, and deep within its rocks.

He turned his head to face their host when another of his childhood waking nightmares ripped through his mind. Fire, death, and images of flowing blood coursed through his mind. Pain crept into every joint of his body as an intense pressure filled his head, forcing him to cry out. "It's coming!" He dropped to his knees as he grabbed his head with his hands. "This one's nearly here! Death is coming!"

Everyone stared at the young prince and his outburst. Many in the court knew Ly had random outbursts and they kept hush about it. But this outburst was far worse than any of his earlier waking dreams.

Ly stopped screaming and stood. "It's here!" He pushed his mother backwards against Fii and all three of them fell to the deck.

As nearly everyone on the deck rushed to help to the three, a brilliant reflective flash scorched through the observation window. Those caught within the reflective flash were severely burned.

Outside the station, several vessels were caught within the direct beam of a short-duration gamma ray burst. Many of the ships burst into flames as the volatiles aboard were set off. The flesh of those aboard the vessels stood little chance against the onslaught.

On the planet Quandus, a large crescent of scorched earth and boiling seas could be seen from the station. Where the GRB beam impacted the world and cut across its face, all life was extinguished. All living matter degenerated into its base constituencies as the gamma rays shredded the molecules of its cells.

Sitting up and nursing a bruised elbow, Fii said, "Ly somehow sensed this disaster was coming." She glanced about at the carnage on the observation deck and grimaced at the sight of burned people and a decimated planet and fleet outside the observation window.

Ly didn't wait to be told what to do. With his senses tingling, he jumped to his feet, grabbed a fire extinguisher, and proceeded to help out the people who were on fire by extinguishing their flames.

Cadet

<Date: 11/30/29,558 Standard. Location: Ammahna Cadet Training School, Darkon System.>

Syntient Cadet Aura D'Vey cringed as dread fear gripped her mind and soul. She sank low, as low as she could possibly get in the miry bottom of a shallow ditch as a persistent and heavy barrage of artillery pounded and scarred the terrain about her. Syntient Cadet Petrev Koulov huddled next to her, curled up in a fetal position. Every muscle in his body shook from the deep, primal fear ripping through his mind.

"Damn it! We can't stay here any longer!" She shouted as another deluge of dirt and rock rained

down upon them. “We’re going to get our butts shot off for sure!”

Suddenly Aura’s vision blurred and her head began to buzz. She reached up with her hand and touched a bloodied mark where a small rock shard had pierced her left cheek and rocked her brain within her skull. Her blood soaked fingertips felt her flesh swelling around the wound.

Aura was amazed she could feel pain, real pain. As a syntient she had never before felt true physical pain, no matter how badly she had injured herself. Before, she had only sensed and felt the sensation of her bodily tissues being damaged, and the form of pain she felt was mentally different and more endurable. It served in place of a normal being’s pain to remind her of her injury without real pain’s normally debilitating effects.

Now a computer was interjecting all the sensations a normal person would experience directly into her and Petrev’s mind.

“We’re in no real danger,” she shouted out loud, more to herself than Petrev. She whispered, “This is all a dream. It’s just a computerized combat training aide. We *can’t* really die.”

Petrev yelled as he felt a sharp, burning sting in his lower right leg. “It’s real enough for me, Aura!” He glanced about, then ducked again as another salvo of artillery rounds walked across the terrain. The sting in his leg quickly became a fiery sensation. He jerked his head down, staring down past his knees. “My foot! It’s gone!” He grabbed at his stump, trying to stem its gushing flow of blood. “Oh, God! My foot! My foot...!”

She grabbed him at the nape of his neck with her hand and turned his face towards hers. “Snap out of it! It’s all an illusion. Remember!” She let go of his neck. “Now, stay calm! Let’s stem your blood lose and let’s get our butts out of here!” She retrieved a field tourniquet from his med kit and started applying it to his stump.

An explosion shattered the ground before Aura, flipping her over, slamming her back hard against the ground, stunning her. As she regained her senses she saw Petrev lying on his right side, his lower jaw missing. She tried to sense Petrev’s lifeless body but couldn’t. *Damnable trainer*, she thought as she tried to sense any form of life in her vicinity but couldn’t. She knew a synt’s powers were useless inside the simulator, but she still tried anyhow.

Her head was now alight with fiery pain. She shook her head then turned her attention to a growing numbness in her left arm. “Ah, shit!” Her face grew flush and hot. The sight of her missing left arm caused her stomach to churn, nearly to the point of expelling its contents. Within seconds, she felt deadly effects of shock attempting to overtake her as she stared at the two bones jutting out from where her forearm had once been attached. She concentrated harder than she had ever done so before in her life to stave off her approaching unconsciousness.

“Damn! We waited too long...!” She wiped excess moisture and dirt from her eyes with her right hand, then popped open her own med kit. Her eyes darted about as she studied the burnt and battered fields about her. “I’ll never get out of here...!”

“*That’s right, cadet!*” Their instructor’s voice boomed out of the overcast virtual sky. “*And, this is only the fifth level, too. Now, how do you plan on getting through to the hundredth level?*”

The battlefield faded from Aura’s mind as the training computer brought her and Petrev back to reality. She felt the reassurance of the padded chair once again beneath her body. She smiled, nearly crying, as she stared at her still intact left arm.

Though they had only been in the trainer for a matter of a minute, the trainer’s temporal compression had turned their nightmare into an agony lasting several virtual-hours.

Their instructor, Sergeant G’Taurus, turned around to face the remainder of his class. “Now, listen up all of you synts as I repeat myself one more time—syntients and guardians cannot sense life-forms while they are inside the trainer. Everything you see or feel is a projection within your minds. Likewise, pscanners cannot feel emotions while inside the trainer.” He leaned against a podium. “As for you normal born cadets, keep that important fact in mind for when we play war games in the trainer later on.” An almost imperceptible smile raised the corners of his mouth. “Syntients, guardians, and

pscanners cannot sense us inside the trainer. For those of you who have dealt with syntes before, you'll find this is one of the few times you'll be able to sneak up on them without being sensed."

The corners of G'Taurs' mouth dropped as his lips drew tight against his clenched teeth. He jabbed his right index finger out before him. "However, it is very important that you remember that in the future, should you ever find yourself in a real combat situation, an enemy synt will sense your presence and have their troops and artillery raining hell down upon your position so fast you'll never know what hit you. And, an elder synt may well bring all that hell down upon you all the quicker." He glanced at an unconscious Petrev. His eyes then darted to Aura. "Cadet D'Vey, please inform Cadet Koulov he's not scheduled for sleep at this time. Remind him he's on *my* time."

"Yes, sergeant." Aura slowly stood on wobbly legs. She blushed as she noticed she had wetted herself. Not one of her fellow cadets mentioned the obvious fact as they themselves would soon enter the trainer. Aura put on her shades to avoid direct eye contact with others in the room and cautiously walked over and nudged Petrev's shoulder.

He awoke with a start. "Damn! I'm dead! I'm dead!" His knuckles paled as he squeezed the chair's armrests. He took a deep breath as his eyes darted about the room. "I'm still here...?" He glanced at G'Taurs. "I'm still alive. I'm not dead!" He ran his hands along his legs and trunk, happy to find himself fully intact. His face also reddened as he found that he had more than just wetted himself. There would be many a wet and dirty diaper awards given that day.

Petrev patted his chest one more time for reassurance. "I'm not even harmed!"

"No, but you will soon be if you don't get your butt out of my chair, cadet!" G'Taurs snapped. He sternly crossed his arms over his chest. Petrev's actions in the trainer had left much to be desired.

"Yes, sergeant!" Petrev jumped to his feet. His legs gave out and he fell backwards. He caught and pulled himself up by grabbing the chair's armrests. He then stood there before G'Taurs with an odd smirk on his face.

G'Taurs pointed towards the rear of the room. "Sit, rest, and—if it doesn't tax your brain too much—pay attention. And whatever you do, don't forget to study the holograms of your actions tonight. Maybe you can glean some hope for yourself out of them. I know I sure didn't," he quipped.

Aura and Petrev quickly, and quietly, made their way to the back of the class where they found two empty seats. Nearly every other cadet, synt or not, followed them unconsciously with their eyes.

A Dycinian sergeant gestured for Aura and Petrev to step out and cleanup from their accidents.

"Uh-hum." G'Taurs cleared his throat as he clapped his hands together to regain the cadets' attention. He gently stroked the striped fur of his chin as he glanced about for a newly arrived syntient named Lycom Denvearson. G'Taurs had taken an instant dislike to Ly the night before, and a particularly nasty dislike, at that. He felt this particular syntient had too many friends in high positions. Ly had shown up the night before, a good month into the other cadets' training.

G'Taurs looked about the room of nervous faces then smiled as he spied a training partner for Ly: Cadet Pscanner Moé Alza, an outcast from a far off society, located within another spiral arm of the Milky Way galaxy. She was a highly erratic pscanner of Saja and Tahrvey birth. Her father was a small Saja human and her mother was a very large semi-human Tahrvey. As unlikely as the chances of the genetic throw of the dice were, Saja males and Tahrvey females produced viable offspring, although not when the sex roles were reversed.

Moé had been both shunned and rejected by both of her parent's worlds. At the age of eight, upon her parents' deaths at the hands of a lynch mob, she was forced to survive in the dark back streets by her own wits. Furthermore, she had not been recognized as a pscanner until she had drifted into the territories of the Alliance five years past. And because she was an unrecognized pscanner, she had spent many of her earlier years in and out of sanitariums.

I'll fix this Terran hot shot! G'Taurs thought as his stare fell upon Ly. "Now for our third and fourth victims of the day," he uttered in a low, guttural tone. "Cadet Denvearson, you're next. You'll be with Cadet Alza."

Moé Alza jumped to her feet. “Sir...! No!” Several startled cadets leaped aside to avoid her vaguely human, 300kg body. Her long, bushy tail slapped two fellow cadets in the face when they were slow to move out of her way.

G’Tours glared at her. Her outburst didn’t annoy him as much as being referred to as sir. “That’s Sergeant G’Tours, cadet! Watch yourself.”

Moé caught her slip of the tongue along with her excessive actions. “I mean, sergeant.” She motioned to Ly and spoke with a shaky voice. “He’s... He’s really spooky.” Her large hands twitched nervously. Earlier that day she had a confrontation with Ly and presently didn’t feel like having another.

“Sergeant G’Tours,” Ly interrupted as he stood. He made sure his dark glasses were firmly seated. “There’s no need for her to worry.” He smiled. “Might I now speak with you? I wasn’t able to pull you aside earlier when we entered this facility.”

G’Tours nodded.

“I’ll be leaving your institution shortly.” Ly turned towards Moé, gesturing to her with his hand. Though Ly wore glasses, he still avoided making eye contact with her. “Cadet Alza, if you like, you can choose to come along with me and I’ll see to it you get the best training in the galaxy. You have a great pscanning potential that has never been restricted by a *proper* pscanner upbringing. I like that.” He smiled, somewhat devilishly. “I’m offering you the chance to hone your skills to their finest under the direction of some of the best syntns in the Alliance.”

With clenched teeth and a snarl on her lips, Moé shook her head no. “I think not. I’ve made it this far on my own.” She glanced over Ly’s body. *He’s barely out of adolescence. Hardly a man*, she thought. *But there’s something about him that isn’t quite right, and I damn sure don’t want to be around to find out what it is, either.*

“It’s your decision to make... Think about it, if you would. I won’t be leaving for another hour or so.”

“Hold it! Who the hell said you’re going anywhere, cadet?” demanded G’Tours. He didn’t take kindly to being dropped out of a conversation. “You leave here when I either pass or fail your miserable hide.” He planted his fists firmly on his hips. “I don’t give a crap about whom you are or where you’re from, Cadet Denvearson!” His eyes blazed. “You’re in my charge, and until I receive further orders, your ass is mine!” He strolled over before Ly and stared the cadet straight in the eyes. He’d decided to gain an inkling of what Ly’s abilities were. “So, you think you’re hot shit, do you?” He stared at Ly’s shaded eyes. “Just how good do you think you are, cadet? I’ve seen some good syntns in my time and you damn sure don’t come close.” He stood on his toes to bring himself closer to a somewhat taller Ly. “Well...? Just how good are you, recruit? Why the hell is someone pushing to advance you so quickly?”

Ly briefly raised his glasses, allowing his eyes to be seen for a fraction of a second and thus allowing G’Tours to gain an inkling of Ly’s syntient strength.

“Whoa!” G’Tours staggered back, falling over a chair. “Burr...!” He shook his head to remove the fog from his mind then leapt to his feet. His eyes were blurry as he broke out in a cold sweat. His knees shook uncontrollably. “Damn! Where the hell did they find you...?” He steadied himself with against chair. In his mind, he knew Denvearson had to be some sort of *rouge* syntient. He had never seen such powerful a syntient before, and that was only through a split second of eye contact. “I bet you haven’t had any required training, have you?” He glared at Ly. “I’ll see to it you get the proper training to control your sensing.”

Ly slowly shook his head. “No can do, sergeant. Field Marshal V’shan’nos herself is personally training me.”

The room grew eerily quiet as the cadets’ breathing momentarily stopped at the mention of V’shan’nos’ name. The silence was broke by the dull buzz of whispers.

Ly stared at G’Tours through his shades.

G'Taurs could still feel the power of Ly's syntient abilities, even through Ly's glasses.

"I'm only here to use your trainer as proof of my abilities to the Alliance, and then I'm to continue my training with the Vishahntien-Sha'kal Shock Corps, sergeant." He allowed a slight smile to show on his lips. "The imperial branch."

The whispers rose to a loud din.

"Quiet!" G'Taurs ordered, glaring at his charges. He knew he couldn't afford to lose control of the situation—especially to a young rouge syntient.

Ly gestured to the virtual combat machine with his hand. "Last night on our personal time, I received permission to use the trainer on my own. I passed all of its levels, and then notified Commodore Ko'Rii, who is currently on his way here to transfer me to my next assignment."

"Now hold on!" G'Taurs's hands lashed out in quieting gesture to the rest of his class. "I won't have you stepping over my head." He folded his arms back across his chest. He debated what to do with Ly as he motioned for Moé to be seated.

"I'm not stepping over your head, sergeant. Field Marshal V'shan'nos is stepping over your head."

"All right, let's see how good you really are, Cadet Denvearson. If that is your real name." He looked up about ten meters to the trainer's control room. "Sergeant Rko-Jhan. *If* Cadet Denvearson has made a run through the trainer, pull up his record."

The Maukator sergeant bent over the controls of her console high in an upper level of the training room. "Yes, Sergeant." Her fingers quickly applied the proper keystrokes to a keyboard. She then read the data as it appeared in a holo-display. "I show him having completed all one hundred levels successfully."

G'Taurs' jaw dropped as he stared up at Rko-Jhan. *No one has ever made it past the 44th level successfully*, he thought. *Hell's bells. I'm having trouble on the 27th level myself*. He cleared his throat. "Everyone, take your seats. Sergeant, pull up Cadet Denvearson's record for the 27th level." He glanced about the room. "Now pay attention, everyone. At the very least, this should prove interesting." He spoke again to Rko-Jhan, "Take us to where Cadet Denvearson finds the knife, and send it on the big screen, too."

Over the years, G'Taurs had run the gauntlet of 27th level numerous times in the past. He had made it through alive twice, although severely maimed.

"Roger, sergeant." Rko-Jhan watched her holo-screen for the correct time mark needed to start the replay. "Slowing to normal speed... now."

Ly's image appeared in the chamber's main holo-projector. His image stood silent and still for a moment then he cautiously retrieved a 25cm knife from its small alcove shelf. Stepping back, he reread the signs on the wall. To his right was the route leading to the level's exit. It was guarded by soldiers who spotted any trainee long before he or she could bring their sole weapon, the knife, to bear. As fast as the trainees might run, there was no possible way they could get through unscathed, and most would die trying in their attempt.

The left passageway, as with Ly being a male, lead to a large harem of women. A female cadet would find numerous tempting men awaiting her, however most women weren't likely to fall to temptations such as this, except for a few nationalities such as the Vishahntiens who vastly outnumbered their males. In either case, the computer loosened a person's morals and inhibitions to where they were tempted to spend their allotted testing time engaged in nothing but sex—and ultimately, failure. It should be noted, however, that many officers and enlisted would run this level after hours just for the sex. Albeit, one couldn't remain long in this computer generated heaven as guards checked the harem from time to time and would execute anyone who lingered too long.

Ly's image stood for a moment in silent thought. His lower jaw hung slightly open in his concentration. He took the left route.

"Stop the playback." G'Taurs drew his finger across his throat for emphasis. He turned to Ly.

“Didn’t get enough before you left home, huh?”

Ly sat emotionless. “I needed an enemy female to complete the mission.”

“The guards on this level are programmed to kill any hostages you may take or converts you make. That only leaves sex, lover-boy.” G’Taurus contemplated the young syntient for a moment. Was this all a game to Ly or something else? After all, he was a few years younger than most synt cadets, even though he was technically an adult. Outside of his strong syntient abilities, what did V’shan’nos and Ko’Rii see in this Terran syntient? “Take us up to where lover-boy here comes face-to-face with the guards, sergeant.”

“Yes, sergeant.” She touched a button and the view scrambled as the replay flew forward. It then took Rko-Jhan a few seconds to put on a headset that allowed her to view the image even when it was in fast forward mode.

After a second, the holograph unscrambled and the view of two Ülnar guards came in to view at the base of a tall brick wall. A small, sheltering hollow was situated to their right. However, Ly was nowhere in sight, but a young Ülnar woman was.

“Where’s Denvearson?”

Rko-Jhan frantically ran her fingers across the controls. “The machine is insisting he’s there, sarge.”

Everyone watched the holo-viewer as the young woman walked closer to the guards. She drew her fingers up along her bare stomach and then traced the faint outline of her four small breasts as her long silky tail trailed behind her, twitching from side to side. Two guards atop the wall watched, hooting and jeering their luckier comrades below.

“This level the program won’t allow you persuade one of the harems’ women to aid you,” G’Taurus reiterated. “The guards will likely kill her before she gets within an arms-length of them.”

The young woman reached the first guard, smiled, then kissed him. She slowly reached her left hand out and laid it upon the second guard’s shoulder. With a gentle nudge, she guided them both towards the wall’s niche and out of the sight of the guards atop the wall.

“Say goodbye to your convert, cadet,” G’Taurus whispered.

A gurgling sound emanated from the second guard as the woman’s hand collapsed his trachea with a dull crunch. Still kissing the first guard so he couldn’t shout a warning, as well as using him as a shield against the punches from the second guard, she slipped the knife into the first’s belly. She cut upwards through his diaphragm, then, with a flick of her wrist, the blade severed his aorta. She withdrew her knife, allowing the first guard to drop to the pavement. She then pressed the second guard hard against the wall, holding him there until all signs of life were vanquished from his body.

Without flinching, the woman wiped her bloodied hand on the first guard’s uniform and stripped the second guard of his clothing. Next, she grabbed the second’s legs and flipped him over spread-eagle onto his stomach. She then ran the knife down along his spinal column from his head to his buttocks and then slowly started to peel his skin back.

“Hold it!” G’Taurus signaled for the replay to stop. “What the hell’s going on here?” He stepped before Ly.

The image in the holograph froze. A few in the class stared at the partially dissected guard, though most averted their heads.

“Where the hell are you?” G’Taurus demanded. “I know damn well this program won’t let you have a convert help you through this level. The computer is firmly programmed not to allow it.” He stared at Ly, not giving a damn if the young synt stared back at him. His lips drew taught, leaving a deep impression of his teeth along their backsides. “Or did you have someone reprogram our trainer for you? No doubt you have the contacts who can arrange such a feat.” He tapped his fingers against his thigh, debating what actions to take against Ly.

“Sergeant.” Ly raised his head up towards the control booth. “If you will advance the recording ahead, you’ll comprehend my stratagem.”

G'Taurs glanced over the class. Perspiration was beading the fur about his eyes. "Take the replay forward until you can positively identify Denvearson's face and then back it up a bit, sergeant. Then we'll all see what our sick lover-boy here planned." He placed his right foot up on the seat of a chair and rested his forearm on his knee as the recording advanced.

"Temporal compression off," Rko-Jhan announced. "Backing up." The hologram-viewer's image cleared as it dropped back to normal speed. The view showed the Ülnar woman laying the first guard's bloodied clothing aside in a pile. She then reached behind her head and appeared to fiddle about as though untying a knot. Her elbows flexed out to her sides as she pulled her hair forward. Her face wrinkled then crumpled as it slid away from her head and Ly's emotionless, blood-caked features emerged.

The chamber grew still, except for numerous retching and splattering sounds hitting and running across the floor.

Ly glanced down at the now pale G'Taurs. "There was something missing in the way I moved her tail." He ran his tongue across the bottom of his upper teeth as he thought. "That might cause me trouble in the future if I have to emulate a humanoid species who make more use of their tails as part of their mating ritual."

G'Taurs turned his head away, whispering, "You're sick, Denvearson. Real sick."

Ly smiled, then turned and spoke to Moé. "The offer still holds. I'm leaving soon to train with the Vishahntien-Sha'kal Shock Corps. And, yes, they have waved the minimum age requirement in my case. Like I said, I could use an extra-sensitive pscanner to work with myself and my guardians."

Sickened, Moé stared back at Ly, both shocked and intrigued. For a pscanner with her past, she could use all the breaks she could get to advance in the synt services. But at what cost? This Terran synt was young—and apparently utterly ruthless.

G'Taurs took a deep breath. Ly's image in the holo-viewer began carefully fitting the second guard's skin about his body. "You have more than one guardian, cadet?"

"I currently have five." He raised his sight high up the side of the chamber. "My first guardian, Field Marshal Taby Neokryatain, is presently watching us from the observation platform." He smiled and chuckled. "No doubt I'm testing her patience about now."

The image Denvearson of the viewer buckled the belt on the second guard's surprisingly clean uniform. The first's uniform lay crumpled between the guards, stained with blood.

Next, Ly's skinned Ülnar guard image stepped out and away from the wall's nook so the two guards atop the wall could see him. He signaled with his hand for one of them to come off the wall and enjoy his self. He then started up a set of stairs to exchange posts with the descending guard.

"Mm..." The real Ly studied his form on the viewer. A faint look of disappointment grew on his face. "I still need to find a way to put a bit of female flair in my tail movements." He glanced up at Taby who was leaning over the observation deck's railing. He mouthed his words knowing she would read his lips. *I need to get with you about a problem tonight, Tab. I need to sense out exactly how your muscles move your tail and how I might imitate it.*

She mouthed her answer, *Kinky. But you had better asked Gayle first. She hasn't seen you in a month and I'm sure she has "more important" plans.*

"Sergeant G'Taurs," Rko-Jhan leaned across her console to better see him. "Commodore Ko'Rii has arrived on base."

G'Taurs sighed as he glanced up at her. "Thank you, sergeant. Please warn us before he enters the chamber should he elect to come here."

Ly turned towards Moé. "Last chance. You can either stay here and finish your training or come along with me." Even through shades, his stare bore deep into her. "I'll make no promises. What you make of yourself is solely up to you."

Moé fought back the growing smile on her face.

“Bea & Alexi,” “Hope,” “Ly,” and “Cadet” are sections of text from the story *Panocide*.
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