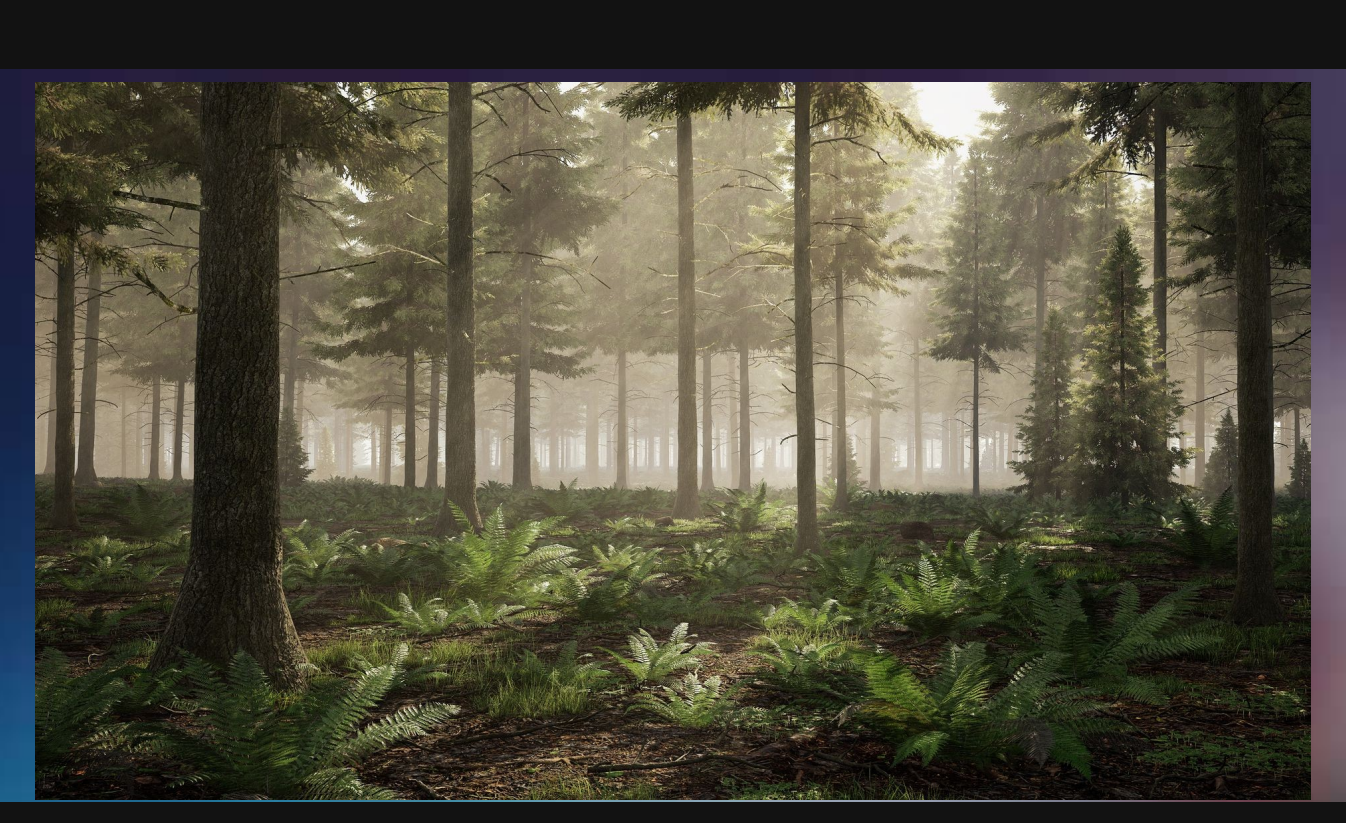
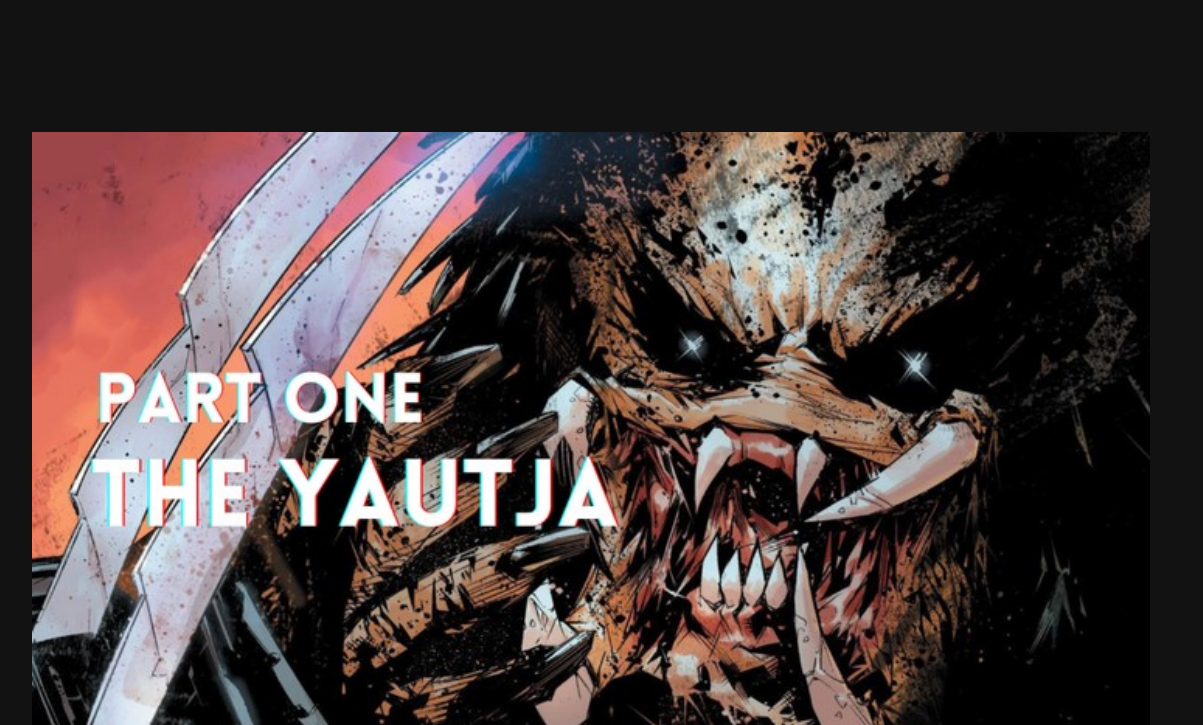


# One - Memory



**Present Day**

Ashaki couldn't remember much of her time on LV-318, but she could remember the fear. One by one, everyone she knew was dragged away by creatures in the shadows.

The hissing, oh god the hissing was something she would never forget. It accompanied a creature of the blackest night and the long slender dome of a head. In the shadows it made its hive.

Using the fallen miners, the creatures collected their bodies to incubate more of those...things. Those things ran rampant, killing and impregnating, until Weyland-Yutani showed up days later. Their drop ship would take Ashaki and the other survivors away...but they were quickly ambushed.

As Ashaki and the others ran for the ship, four people were taken. In the blink of an eye, they were swooped into the darkness; their screams cut short.

She could never remember the rest of the details after the escape or how she had ended up sleeping in cryo for seven decades. When she had awakened, it was to no one. Everyone else except for her had died decades ago. Somehow she had managed to get into the ship and place herself in cryo, but she couldn't remember how.

It didn't make sense!

The physicians had been adamant that she must've known how to use the cryo tubes. This was impossible since she had had her parents put her in cryo originally.

Everything was cloudy and muddled.
Being in cryogenic sleep for so long tended to do that, or so she was told. In time the memories would come back, they said.

But, there was at least one thing she remembered. Something odd and out of place; a figure that had lurked in the shadows, hidden except for burning golden eyes. She remembered those eyes so vividly but no matter how hard she tried she couldn't recall how she had seen them. The golden orbs pierced the darkness like nothing she had ever seen before.

They were beautiful.

Haunting.

Liquid molten gold, and when she gazed into them, her world shifted. Her existence was diminished to that single moment. It was all she had to hold onto, the only memory worth keeping.

Now, with only the memory of those hypnotic eyes, she tried to move forward. Building a new life helped to piece herself back together, but eventually she knew she would be okay. At least, she hoped. She had to.

For her family and for herself.

The changing of the music player, old rock music starting, in the dim and dirty diner drew her from her thoughts and back to the real world around her. Smoke hung in the air, a slight clove aroma accompanying it. Voices of the fellow patrons were soft and muted, no doubt everyone there but her taking part in something shady or illegal even. The oasis, one of many similar refueling stations in space, usually attracted mercenaries and scavengers, sometimes even pirates if they were bold enough to face the Colonial Marines that patrolled them.

She occupied a stool at the bar nursing a glowing glass of nutri-pack. The drink could satisfy a person while also delivering a very pleasant buzz. It was a well deserved treat after a long day of filing paperwork to renew her ship's access codes for the coming year.

Anything that dealt with the bureaucrats of space was time consuming. They took their time and seemed to enjoy keeping space travelers holed up in their tiny little office for as long as possible. Violent thoughts filled her mind just thinking about that little douchebag with a sly smile and beady eyes. As soon as he had handed her the data card she was out the door.

A drink was all she needed before crashing in her bed back on the Star Chaser. She hardly ever drank, not since she awoke in a cryo tube two years ago.

Alcohol could only fix so much and she didn't want to end up an alcoholic like her Uncle Eddie. It was all anyone ever talked about after his death. They never talked about why he drank himself to death but they weren't kind to his memory. Not going down that road was a small way for her to pay respects. Besides, she had a lot to prove being a woman on her own in space, and being a drunk with the proverbial keys to a spaceship wouldn't fare her well.

Even though space was huge...word still got around. It always did.

"Heyyyy."

Ashaki turned to see where the slurred baritone voice had come from to find a very drunk off-duty Colonial Marine. He was handsome in the face with a square jaw and a brunette buzz cut. His clothing was the usual green shirt with the UACM logo, black cargos, and boots. His breath reeked of intoxication. The offending drug sloshed around in a frosted mug that he held in a hand.

She couldn't help but roll her eyes, "Hey buddy, I think it's time you return to the barracks, eh?"

His drunken eyes squinted as he struggled to see her clearly; a light sheen of sweat glistened on his forehead. "No, baby. The party is just getting started! I noticed your sexy self from across the bar and came running. I always did like a thick chocolate woman." He tried to smile but he had trouble making the expression. It came off super creepy, he was creepy.

Ashaki narrowed her eyes. She hated being compared to food. She wasn't food. This man's words told everything she needed to know about him.

It was time to return to her ship. This drunken idiot had ruined what little buzz she had acquired.

"Look, Marine," She smiled coldly as she paid her tab and rose to her feet, "I'm not interested. I have other places to be."

"Ungrateful bitch. You should be lucky someone like me is giving you such attention!" He sneered, his jovial attitude evaporating like water on the desert sand. His body straightened to his much taller height over her and he flexed his muscles in his biceps.

The guy was well built but after what she had seen so many decades ago on LV-318...this man had nothing on those black hellspawn. Nothing could ever compare. They were the things of true nightmares. It was thanks to the memory of those golden orbs in the darkness that helped her to tread through the past, remembering the ghosts that lingered just out of view...and reach. The only thing that guided her safely through the horrors of her past was the memory of the glowing eyes in the dark. The lingered like a beacon out of her view...and her reach.

Ashaki had enough and turned to leave, quickly pushing her way through the crowd until she was in the corridor outside of the bar. The raucous sounds and the smells vanished in the stale air of the hall. The lingering ghosts faded into nothing, leaving only a prickly feeling shooting through her nerves. The Marine wisely didn't pursue her, but she had felt his glare on her back as she left.

With a little effort and determination of getting past crates that partially blocked the corridor, she soon made it back to the safe haven of her ship. The small D-class cruiser was black in color with Star Chaser stenciled on the side — the transport wasn't the fanciest cruiser, A classes being the top of the line, but it got her where she needed to be. Wanted to be. Through thick and thin this had been her home. Within the metal walls was her whole life.

Her whole life, the clutter she gathered filling that empty hole that couldn't be filled.

She shook her head, dispersing the negative thoughts. It never boded well to wallow in that head space. Looking forward was what she needed to do.

The ramp disengaged and the metal bay door groaned closed, securing the ship for takeoff. Dropping into the plush pilot seat she switched on the appropriate controls and felt the hum of the twin engines coming to life. The gentle rumble was soothing to her frayed nerves as she plotted her next destination.

The oasis would soon be long gone, just like the shadows of her past.

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Kepler-331B is a planet that's comparative to Earth in mass and size. It has three hundred and forty-three days in each year of its rotation. The atmosphere is similar and the weather slightly cooler on average. This particular planet was situated in a system where three habitable planets had a sun like the one in Earth's system but far older. This star's life cycle was estimated to have a few more million years before it died.

Ashaki called it Earth 2.0. At this point, it was her favorite planet to visit and sightsee. The great forests and the large oceans that covered its surface were her go to spots. She had hiked the many mountain ranges and explored most of its diverse biomes. On each visit she would catalog the different flora and fauna of Kepler-331B, even though she wasn't a scientist. It was a hobby she had picked up to fill the hole in her heart.

Much like everything else these days.

Her ship dipped into the atmosphere and was soon cruising through the clouds. As she sank below them, the forest appeared with its tall evergreen-like trees fighting to see who could grow the tallest. She was already hungry to get outside. The sensors on her ship indicated that the weather was a comfortable twenty-two degrees Celsius.

Perfect weather for a few hours rest in which she could clear her head of the past. Too much time had gone by since she had time to really relax.

A familiar clearing presented itself several meters away as her chosen landing spot where she set down Star Chaser the ship landing with a muffled thump. It powered off as she flipped switches and pulled levers.

Ashaki packed a backpack full of rations, a pocket knife, a water container, a camera, a tent, a sample container, and a notebook so she could take notes of her findings. One last thing she grabbed was a homing beacon watch.

She never left the ship without it. It was a near-permanent fixture on her wrist. In the case of an emergency, where if she lost her way she could follow the GPS back to the ship.

Double checking everything, she made her way outside. The ship locked automatically as she scaled down the gangway. No one ever came here, but one could never be too careful. Even on a planet without a sentient species, an animal could make its way inside and she'd have to get it out.

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During the two years being out on her own to do as she pleased with the generous hush money from Weyland-Yutani, she had worked on building up her endurance and strength. Hiking the mountainous parts of the planet had done much good to add some definition to her body. Despite all her training and exercise, she still found herself to be a thick "curvy" woman. Everytime she went to an oasis she was reminded of how much harder she needed to push herself.

A few hours had passed and she was a couple of kilometers away from the ship. Her legs burned from the exertion but she kept going. The burn was a good indicator that she was properly exercising her body, pushing it to its limit. A few times she had paused to quench her thirst, but she resisted stopping when she could. She preferred her fast, focused pace to be underterred.

Her intense drive was meditative. She zoned out feeling the struggle and rhythms of her body working. She needed to prove to herself that she could escape her past.

Ashaki was able to let the past fade into nothing while charging through the wilderness of the planet. Sunlight cast through the upper canopies of the trees and highlighted the carpet of plants that covered the forest floor. Wind whispered through the leaves. The earthy smell of damp soil filled the air. Various alien animal sounds added to the chorus of the planet's song.

Feeling the dappled warmth against her skin was a treasure itself.

Being in space so much, she couldn't feel the comfort of sunlight. All there was, outside her ship, was the cold emptiness of space. A heated blanket had nothing on the feeling of the sun on her skin. To feel the heat in person...it was special. If magic was real, then this would be it.

More time passed as she continued on. She eventually slowed down her brutal pace to really enjoy the nature around her. She found a roaring river where she cataloged moss-like plants that grew along the shores. A few quick sketches later, she followed the river North, more of that alien moss accumulating as it went. It was spongy beneath her shoes and reminded her of stepping on wet grass in a rainstorm back on Earth.

Using a small scalpel, she collected some from the rocks and placed it in an airtight container to study later. Perhaps this would provide healing properties like some of the other plants she had collected on this world.

Once it started to grow dark she set up her tent in a small clearing on high ground. The tent was bothersome to put together, a pain in the ass, but she managed. She found this tent when she bought her ship in a dusty forgotten storage bay. It was ancient and required assembly instead of automatically popping up. Despite the annoyance, she preferred the older tent.

Using less technology when camping was something she liked. It helped separate herself from the world where technology and progress pushed aside the natural world, more so than ever. Even though camping the way she did could be a bit difficult, it helped her get closer to nature and enjoy it. To feel the joy of putting together everything yourself and relying on your knowledge rather than technology was freeing, despite the hassle. It was wild and she preferred it that way.

Yeah, she knew she pretty much lived in space because of high tech society products, but it was good to escape that every now and then.

Ashaki sat by the small campfire she had built and watched the stars come to life with the setting sun. The encroaching darkness gave the night sky its time to shine. The moon was out and glowing but not so bright that it hindered the starlight. In this clearing there were less trees to hide the sky and less canopies to hinder the amazing view.

Much of the daytime forest noises had died only to be replaced by the low hum of the night.

This planet had many nocturnal animals, and their sounds, while alien, reminded her of the more familiar trills of Earth. For example, she heard a sound that reminded her of an owl. It began with the classic soft hoo but at the end of its call they lilted upwards musically; a miniature crescendo into the next call where it began low and increased in volume.

Tiny flying insects floated around emitting bright colors, buzzing like bees as they passed. Some other animals, ones she had yet to see, made harsh cries akin to coyotes but shriller.

It was heaven.

This was it.

Nothing could compare.

Hearing the natural alien world around was grounding. It helped more than any kind of therapy ever would. Here, on this world, in the wilderness, she felt...whole... alive

A noise in the distance drew her from her thoughts. It sounded like...a roar of a predator. Two of them, in fact...at the most. The sound reminded her of a ferocious tiger. Whatever they were, the sounds, though distant, tripped an animal flight or fight response in her brain.

For a few moments she sat listening as the sounds sent the rest of the fauna into silence.

Curiosity was getting the better of her as she packed the tent and doused the fire. After LV-318, she investigated every strange sound. She needed to prove to herself she had nothing to be afraid of. Those beetle black insectoid Xenomorphs wouldn't be on such a remote planet; one that was just barely in the Human Sphere. She had to convince herself this was true.

As she followed the source of the harsh roars, she wondered if this was some new species she had yet to encounter on the planet. They must've been pretty elusive for them to escape her ship's scans.

It took a bit of a trek but she found the sound's source at the bottom of a slight hill. She carefully treaded closer until she hid behind a pile of rocks. A small gap in the collected stones granted her a perfect viewing window of two humanoid creatures fighting each other.

She had never seen creatures such as these. They both wore armor that glinted in the moonlight above. These...aliens...growled and grunted as weapons clashed and claws tore through flesh. Such savagery was frightening but it was thrilling.

The absolute strength of these creatures was astounding!

They were of different sizes, one bigger than the other, but they were definitely the same species. They both had dreadlock-like tendrils that fell in different lengths down the sides of their heads and masked faces. The bigger one's hung to its armored chest, the black locs swinging as it ducked and weaved in a deadly dance around the smaller one. Its skin was a rich green, yellow, and what looked to be a creamy white; not too different from an alligator. Jewelry adorned the dreadlocks — golden bands here and there and tiny teeth hung from various strands. Even the silver armor it wore was savagely beautiful, made in clean lines and layered into sharp plates.

The other was slightly smaller with its dreadlocks falling to its shoulders but with less adornments. Its armor was duller and more scratched up. This one's body was tan and brown-spotted,with less bulk and looked shiny, like it was oiled. It wore less armor than its bigger opponent — the design less...personalized?

Less impressive.

Both of the aliens seemed to be in a fight to the death with the bigger one winning. A huge fist collided with the side of the smaller alien's mask and it let out a deafening roar that sent fear racing through Ashaki's body.

Fuck, these things are out for each other's blood She thought.

Ashaki whipped out her digital camera and snapped photo after photo of the two, the glow of the moonlight making it easier to see them in each picture. Nothing would ever replicate seeing it in person but she would be able to look back to remember it at least. Once she was satisfied she tucked the camera into her pack as quietly as she could. It was going to be very difficult getting the hell out of there before either of them noticed her presence.

Unfortunately, not two steps back up the hill, her foot snapped a twig loudly beneath a pile of leaves.

The silence was deafening. The fighting behind her ceased immediately and snarls erupted from the aliens.

Slowly, centimeter by centimeter, she turned her head to find both of them looking in her direction. She could feel their eyes right through the sinister metal masks that covered their faces. Her breath caught in her throat as they watched her with interest. Fear burned in her veins and finally forced her into action.

Ashaki's feet flew over the forest floor as she bolted, trying to get away as fast as possible. A scream escaped her mouth as one of the aliens bellowed powerfully.

The sound sent shivers down her spine but even scarier...was the lack of heavy footsteps falling in her wake.

Continue reading next part