



Twenty-Two - No More Games

The air was heavy and somber as the men stood in a semi-circle around the crematorium box. They watched as their colleague, their friend, was reduced to ashes. Orange light flickered across their faces through the viewing window that gave a partial view of Carlos's corpse. Meanwhile, Landon, recovering from a concussion and broken arm, sat in a chair while the others stood around him.

Kade, Dennis, Richard, Charles, and Landon had said their goodbyes upon retrieving his body. One of their own had been taken out so easily...the mission had to continue and none of them knew who could be next.

As soon as the vital signs in Carlos's beacon flatlined, Richard and Dennis flew to the surface of New Vegas. They collected the body and a barely conscious Landon almost mutely. It took a few hours in med-bay before Landon was able to string a few sentences together to explain Carlos's death. His words were:

"That bastard predator deboned him like a fresh caught halibut."

To put it lightly, everyone was in shock. When Landon was more put together, he told the story in greater detail. She'd been alone. He and Carlos thought it would be easy pickings, but then, when she was all but caught, the Predator appeared, like Ashaki was acting as bait. That was his only explanation, and they fell for it, hook, line, and sinker.

Humans and Predators rarely survived each other, and the database was frustratingly small on their interactions at all. The only instance Charles found of a human woman and a predator surviving together was a case of a Predator escaping a facility with a human woman as his captive. The Company had mostly redacted the important part of the documents they found even remotely useful. They could request access, but would likely be denied, and Dr. Traeger wouldn't help either. She would shout their heads o and hang up.

"All bets are o. We hit the fucking alien with everything we got. We bring Ashaki Sawyer in. No sympathy!" Kade said in an angry growl. He turned to eye everyone in the room, his gaze full of wrath.

"You knew what we were getting into, Kade!" Exclaimed Dennis. "I warned you!"

He was in Kade's face within two steps, anger twisting his own face. His dark eyes narrowed as he glared down at the Kade. Dennis was much bigger than Kade in size and width, a fact he abused to intimidate his superior. Animosity towards Kade had grown over the last few weeks until their trust had fractured. Carlos's death was the final straw.

He was the comedic relief of the crew, always cracking jokes and lightening the atmosphere. The bastard would never get to take his girlfriend on a vacation a er all. Dennis hadn't been close with Carlos but Jesus Christ, they were mercenaries, not blood sacrifices. The man had been a good man and good co-worker. Already the crew could feel his absence.

It was Richard who took Dennis's side.

"Kade, he's right. We can't lose another man..." He stepped forward, his voice so and his hands up in a placating manner. "We should bail."

"If we fail to bring her in because of this Predator, it's on all of us and you know how The Company takes failure!" hissed Kade.

"It's not my failure. It's yours!" Dennis jabbed Kade in the chest with a finger.

"Fuck you, Dennis! Stop being a whiny, scared little bitch and do your fucking job! We knew there was a chance this was going to happen! This isn't a picnic. It never was!"

"I do not need to be belittled!" Dennis raised his voice, prompting Richard to attempt to pull him away as he further encroached on Kade's personal space. The man fought against his pull, "There's a reason people like me aren't in horror movies! We're not fucking idiots and run right at the Big Bad!"

"People like you? More like cowards! You're a coward!" Kade shot back, pushing Dennis's chest. "I'm in charge around here, so you're going to do as I say!"

Charles stepped in, shoving both men away from each other. His face was one of exasperation. "Alright, gentlemen! That is quite enough!" The Synthetic chided them like children, "We do not need to argue amongst ourselves. If we do not remain united then we will fail to the Yautja as we—"

"Shut up, robot! I didn't ask for your opinion!" Dennis interjected, venom lacing his voice. His eyes prickled with wetness as he balled his hands into fists. "I will never trust your kind, especially since it was your kind that stood by and allowed an entire colony, my colony to be hunted and killed by Xenomorphs! Don't you dare get in my way!"

A look of realization sparked on Charles's face. He had put it in his eyes for the man who was so burdened by his past.

"My protocols are to protect biological humans. Dennis, I would never —"

"I don't want to hear it!" hissed Dennis, flinging his wrath at Charles. Landon spoke up for the first time, "Dennis, leave Charles alone. He wasn't there." He sat upright with dignity. One of his arms was in a sling and white bandages were wrapped around his head.

Dennis turned his glare to Landon and scooed.

"You let her get away and allowed Carlos to die! Sit your ass down before I break you even more." His lip curled as he sent a death glare to Landon.

"Hey, Dennis. Fuck o. That Yautja was huge! It was massive! Let's see you go up against it!" Landon snapped back, a challenge in his eyes.

It was Richard who ended all of the fighting. He had been hanging back in silent prayer since the fighting began. He hadn't moved since Carlos turned to ashes, but when he did, he simply stood up, cleared his throat, and spoke loudly enough to disrupt the arguing men.

"Dennis, Landon, Kade," he addressed each of them with a scathing disappointment, "stop arguing like children or I will treat you like them. All of this fighting is throwing more gasoline onto the fire and isn't helping us capture Ashaki one bit. The only thing it's doing is lowering our morale and driving a wedge into our team." The man paused as he came to stand before the three. Charles stepped aside.

"What we are dealing with is unprecedented and we must adapt accordingly." He added, making a point to cast a side-long glance at Dennis in particular.

Dennis didn't appreciate being singled out and gave Richard the bird.

"Stop this insanity! It's not conducive to our goals." Richard said with solemn finality. They were soldiers, not toddlers throwing tantrums.

"You're right, Richard." Kade acknowledged, "We must adapt to the situation. There is a solution here. I just need to find it." He gave Dennis one more glare before storming out of the room, his boots thudding heavily against the floor.

The ship was dimly lit which made it feel smaller than it actually was. The dark corners made everything tighter, more cramped. A er Carlos's corpse was brought on board, it got worse too. The atmosphere thickened. It became almost claustrophobic. Kade felt it in his raised neck hairs. He knew his men were feeling it just the same.

Kade swallowed a rising lump and secluded himself within his office. There he swiped his trusty 'medicine' from the liquor shelf, taking a long drink straight from the bottle. He sank into his chair with a grunt. It had been a long day, a day he didn't want to repeat. Not now and not ever.

A man's life was lost today. Kade, the team leader, felt it worse than any of them.

A hardened determination settled in his gut, twisting with a burning desire to get revenge on the Yautja bastard. He would do what was needed to force Ashaki Sawyer into his custody. Whatever it took, he would bring her to Donna and the rest of the blood-hungry nerds.

For now, though, he would grieve as they put together a plan.

Ashaki woke to being smothered by her big green Yautja. He slept soundly on top of her with his cheek resting on her chest. Was it warm, hot air washed over her skin. His long, accessorized flocs spread out, tangled and wild, fanning her smaller body.

Dhare was heavy on her chest, but this was a rare opportunity to watch him sleep. This mountain of an alien man allowed himself to be fully comfortable around her, with no walls in between them.

She so wanted to tell him she loved him, but it hadn't been the right moment. He said he liked her and that was good enough...for now. Eventually she would tell him. The poor guy had struggled to articulate his feelings and she loved him even more for it. For being so old, he sure was like a teenager at times, fumbling through his first date. It was his prowess in bed that she was able to discover his knowledge of other areas. A pleasant ache hummed in her loins reminding her of their night together.

Her fingers traced his dark green crest, following the waxy edge. His skin was so er on his forehead where she gently stroked him like a cat.

So purrs vibrated from the sleeping Yautja. She liked how he stirred a little, slowly waking up. He clicked different things in his native tongue as he stirred more atop her. A growly groan left his mouth as his golden eyes slowly blinked awake.

As a smile graced Ashaki's face while she watched him stretch his long limbs.

"Good morning, sleeping beauty," she whispered, admiring how beams of sunlight flooding through the window made Dhare's skin sparkle.

He was a stunning work of nature. His dark green color speckled to a lighter green before blending into a creamy, buttery yellow. Little black spots dotted here and there over his bulging muscles. This alien Adonis was beautiful.

Dhare grumbled something unintelligible as he nuzzled her. She brought her hand down to caress his face, tracing her fingers over his top mandible before gingerly touching his jawline. Her actions elicited louder purrs from him. He had yet to speak, likely enjoying the shared intimacy of lying naked against one another.

"It's time to wake up, hun," Ashaki cooed. "You're crushing me and I have to pee."

The Yautja sighed heavily and rolled onto his back next to her.

"It is too early," he complained.

She giggled, "For you but not for me."

Still, she sat up dragging a sheet with her as she slid o the bed. She yelped when her legs gave out on her. Ashaki grunted when she hit the plush rug face first.

"Ow..." she sighed, shakily sitting upright and rubbing her cheek.

"Ashaki, let me help you."

She turned to see Dhare kneeling at her side, quickly helping her to her feet. A gentle throb between her legs annoyed her, but it was a good reminder. In Dhare's eyes she could see a smug glimmer.

Bastard

"Wipe that look away, mister." She huffed, trudging her way to the bathroom with Dhare's assistance.

He chittered, "I am pleased that you need my help."

Ashaki scooed playfully, "Only because you plowed me like a jackhammer." Humor shined in her voice.

"But you enjoyed it."

"Of course I did!"

"Good," he remarked.

A while later, a er a shower and getting dressed, Ashaki prepared breakfast. She scrambled a carton of eggs to make a few omelets and made some pancakes on the side, making sure to prepare enough for Dhare's bigger appetite. He leaned against the island bench, tapping away at his computer device on his gauntlet.

Comfortable quiet was shared between the two. They were perfectly at peace with being near each other and not speaking with the only sound of the sizzle of cooking food in the skillet and an occasional click or chitter from Dhare. Only when she was chopping veggies to put in the omelets did Ashaki break the silence.

"Dhare, do you want an omelet?" she asked softly, turning to see her cutting board on the island.

The Yautja stopped what he was doing to meet her eyes, his head cocking to the side. "Omelete? What is that?"

Ashaki smiled gently, "It's a breakfast food made of eggs and whatever fillings you put in it." She demonstrated putting shredded cheese on one of the cooking egg mixtures and folding it over on itself to form an omelet. "See? Now, do ya want one? I can load it with veggies and other things to make it filling."

His mandibles fluttered as he came to stand beside her, gazing down into the pan. He hummed to himself before agreeing.

She gave him a few options of vegetables and started to skillfully dice the ones he chose, tossing them into the pan a er removing the finished pancakes. Dhare hovered as he watched her cook, watching her move between cooking omelettes and pancakes. A few times he tried to sneak a pancake but she swatted his hand away. Eventually, everything was ready and table set.

Dhare looked comically large with the small chair at the equally small table. He chose to eat with his hands over using the miniature cutlery. None of it was meant for an alien, especially one of his size.

"Instead of filling these...omelets...I could fill you instead." He said as he devoured his enormous portion.

Ashaki almost choked on a forkful of pancake and quickly chugged some of her orange juice to wash it all down.

She cocked an eyebrow, "Are you always so naughty?" A small smile ghosted her lips.

Dhare nodded, licking his chops as he finished his food.

"Only when it comes to you..." He purred as his eyes moved down to her cleavage. "There are...many positions I will be more than happy to pound your yoni with my zepha." The big male leaned back in the cushioned chair, the wood creaking.

His eyes burned gold as he pointed out various places in the living room.

"I could take you on that counter, the table, the cleansing room, the pool, the deck, the seating, the tub, the wall, and many, many more." He made a show of patting up his chest like a preening bird, emphasizing his bulging muscles.

Ashaki pushed her plate forward to rest her elbows on the table. She met Dhare's eyes as he stared her down. A steady, pleasurable warmth chired in her loins.

"Wow...someone is imaginative," she managed to say. Her heart pounded in her chest at a rabbit's pace.

"Mmm, you have no idea."

"Well there's plenty of time to try out new things..." Ashaki swallowed, trying to calm her libido. Unfortunately, something else was on her mind, "a er we figure out who's a er me."

Dhare audibly groaned, his mandibles tightening over his inner mouth in an alien pout. With a clicking growl he tore through the rest of his meal.

While he finished, Ashaki put her dirty dishes into the insta-washer and organized the clean dishes into their proper places. She retrieved her new tablet device and sat on the couch. Pouring through the internet, she dug around for possible leads. It was when she came across a recruiting ad for Weyland-Yutani that she felt a chill down her spine.

Two years had passed since she had been aggressively interviewed and interrogated by Weyland-Yutani. She was reminded of her time on LV-318. The horrors that she could remember hadn't haunted her in weeks. Her time with the large Yautja had allowed adequate enough distraction to completely pack it away into the dark recesses of her memory.

Just seeing the yellow and black logo brought those memories back.

"Ashaki, are you alright?"

Dhare's concerned question drew her attention from the ad to see him kneeling before her. He reached out to pluck the tablet from her hands.

She nodded, "Yeah, I just—" she cleared her throat, "I have a bad feeling it may be Weyland-Yutani. They le a bad taste in my mouth once they paid for my silence."

The Yautja sat beside her, his heavy weight sinking into the couch.

"Paid for your silence?"

She didn't want to sound like a conspiracy theorist, but that mega corporation was always fishy and secretive. The men who had accosted her were also wearing black flight suits, something that was common among the types of uniform worn by their employees and she would know. She had worn one over her casual clothing back on LV-318.

"I was paid a shit ton of money with the agreement that I would say nothing of what happened on LV-318. That money is how I was able to afford this fancy ass penthouse suite in this hotel."

He answered with a non-committal grunt and perused the ad as Ashaki went on.

"I can't think of any reason why they would be a er me other than they want to tie up a loose end." She sighed, dragging her eyes from her beefy alien to the glittering sunlit city outside.

"My sire, the leader of my clan, allowed himself to be captured almost a cycle ago in order to gather intelligence on these humans. They had successfully spliced Yautja DNA into a human female named Leoni. A few cycles later, we heard talk that they wanted to breed hybrids instead."

That was when my sire went undercover himself. He uncovered that they would stop at nothing to take what makes my species strong and use it to their advantage at the expense of everyone. Artemis, my step mother, had been successfully impregnated with my youngest sibling Orion. Our two species have compatibility for breeding, so it was easy for them to do so," he said with a hard edge to his voice.

He returned the tablet to a projection gauntlet from the core table, pushing buttons until a link appeared, a hologram photograph in full color. By pressing buttons, he cycled through a number of photos taken from various Weyland-Yutani facilities. She couldn't read the symbols at the bottom corner of each but she assumed they were the dates they had been taken. Each had different equipment, people, and birds eye view shots.

"They kept pestering me about some unknown substance in my system." Ashaki so ly told him. The memories were strong a er two years. "Whatever it was, this unknown substance, it was the reason I even alive. It healed me."

Dhare tensed next to her, his body becoming rigid.

His voice was rough as he spoke, "There is something I must confess to you before we go further."

Questions filled her head as she wondered what he had to say. Surely there wasn't something he knew that could help, right? Silently she braced herself for whatever it would be.

He picked up his mask from the table and pushed a few buttons on his gauntlet with his free hand. As he set the mask back down, a video projected from the eye lenses. Dhare pressed a button and the video began to play.

It was an old recording of Dhare following a glowing trail in a leonid spectrum, his vision in ultraviolet. The fluid glowed like blood under UV light and led outside towards a Weyland-Yutani dropship. A body of a child lay dead on the ramp. Seeing it sent a chill of familiarity down Ashaki's body.

The kid was someone Ashaki had managed to keep safe and had been so close to escaping with him...but a bug attacked. She was injured in her fight to save the boy. A er that she couldn't remember. She watched in shock as the video continued to play.

Dhare knelt by the boy, closing his eyes with gentle fingers. He continued through the dark ship, able to see everything with the night vision mode he used. Eventually he came upon a figure.

Ashaki's mouth fell open, seeing herself barely alive and slumped in a corner. He scanned her body as he came to kneel before her. The angle of the video tilted side to side as if he was trying to piece together a puzzle. When he reached out to touch the woman, Ashaki started shaking as the pieces finally came together.

She was turning numb.

He removed the mask in the video but it still recorded as he began to save her life.

Beside her Dhare watched in silence, his mandibles drawn taut over his inner mouth. She could feel his eyes flick to her every few seconds.

Instead of anger or hurt, she only felt...relief. Relief was all she could feel as she watched Dhare triage her...relief. Relief was all she could feel and smothered her wound with his blood. She watched in awe as her wound visibly began to heal before her eyes. Through his eyes, she watched herself watch him.

It was no wonder she could only remember his eyes. The fact that they were Dhare's had nagged at her for so long but she had ignored it as too obvious and coincidental. But, here was the proof, right in front of her.

The Yautja had been her anchor all along and she didn't know it. Even when he kidnapped her and she was feeling helpless, it was him that she had looked to for comfort. The golden eyes in the darkness was Dhare! It was so out of left field but it was true. He was the reason why she had ended up in the cryo pod, floating in space for decades until she was found.

Relief released the heavy burden of the past from her shoulders that she had carried for so long.

It felt good to let go. Warm feeling trickled back into her body. Her heart beat with delirious a ectation.

She was quiet as she watched him place her into the pod and leave. The video ended, freezing on him watching the ship take o into the sky. Together they sat in silence as Ashaki struggled to formulate a response. Eventually she landed on the one question she had.

"Why?"

She settled back into the couch, suddenly exhausted like she had run a marathon, and turned to face Dhare.

She took in the alien profile of his face and his long decorated black loots that hung to his chest in thick tendrils. He wore a simple loincloth that le his muscled body on display. His dark green skin shined in the sunlight seeping through the window.

Dhare's shoulders sagged visibly.

"I do not know," he said.

"What do you mean you don't know?"

"I do not know why I saved your life. I was tasked to clean house a er humans allowed an infestation of kianedamedhaYou were barely alive when I found you. It was your scent that caught my attention." She narrowed her eyes, "My scent?"

Dhare nodded, "Sei? Your scent. Scent attraction is one of the reasons Yautja sometimes take life mates. It's a sign of Kayana's will."

"Who's Kayana?"

"She is the goddess of fire, creativity, and passion. Kayana is o en present when mated pairs come together." His eyes bored into her very soul.

He said it so matter of factly that she knew he believed it. A goddess of his people's religion seemingly had a hand in bringing them together, at least according to him.

Religion was one of those things humanity had long moved past. Reason and progress le no need for religion anymore, especially a er it had been used to oppress humans throughout history. The twenty-first century was especially rife with it back then. They had crept their way into government and harmed everyone. It wasn't o en something that people accepted with kindness. Ashaki didn't want to end him, but it was far-fetched that a goddess wanted them to be together.

But she could believe in destiny.

Even with this new information, she was still madly in love with the big asshole, an asshole that she'd kill to keep.

"There was a time that I had thought Kayana sent you to tempt me," he chuckled, his mandibles drawing back in a smile. "But now, I think that maybe you were her all along. You tempt me. Fill me with a fiery passion that burns hotter than a supernova."

Dhare turned his body to face her head on. His large hands enveloped hers.

"Ashaki, you have survived again and again. You have the heart of a saint! A warrior. I admire your strength to keep going despite all of the odds."

Ashaki's face burned as he spoke so candidly. He hadn't said he loved her but with his words she could sure pretend he did. Her heart swelled, almost bursting with emotions.

Her voice cracked as she said, "I hate how everything bad happens to me. It's like the universe hates me. If there really is some god out there, then they're out to get me."

That rumbling purr she had grown to adore reverberated from his chest. He released one of her hands to brush stray hair out of her face.

"Ashaki, if there is some 'god' out for you' as you say, then I will find him and skin him for you. I will bring you his skull and leave it at your feet." He wrapped an arm around her waist and pulled her into his lap where he held her close.

She settled against his front, letting his purrs chase the negative emotions away. His large body enveloped her in warmth. Ashaki couldn't remember when his rough skin had become so pleasant to touch.

A small smile graced her face as she rested her face against him.

"You're so romantic, Dhare."

In true Yautja fashion, killing something and giving it to her would be practically a formal announcement of a ection like a Victorian gentleman stating his intent for her hand.

"Romance is weakness...but when it comes to you? I do not mind being 'romantic' as you say." He chuckled. "Let me find out if this mind is behind your attempted kidnapping. I need something to occupy me so I do not rot you into the floor."

"I'm still sore from last night so how about we just research."

"I have something for that if you are truly uncomfortable?" He offered, his voice so ening.

Ashaki squirmed in his lap, "I'll be okay. Really. I just want to cuddle right now. You're nice and warm. Like an overgrown cat."

Dhare clicked thoughtfully, "Believe what you want about me, but I will provide a erecare if you really are in pain." He gently squeezed her hips as she settled in a good spot.

"I'm fine."

He was quiet for a moment and remained so as he dug through the files in his computer. Ashaki listened to the tapping of his claws over the buttons.

If it really was Weyland-Yutani...what would they want from her and why? Hopefully they would find out shortly. Who knew if those men would try to kidnap her again. Dhare would never allow it, but the fear remained. For now, she just relaxed in the safety of Dhare's embrace.