

Four - Super Nova

Ashaki awoke in a cocoon of warmth, like a giant cat, so and fuzzy, was surrounding her. Blinking her eyes open she found herself in an envelope of exactly that — a fur pelt, complete with the head of a large cat. It was large and brown, both warm and so while lightweight. Her fingers ran through the dense follicles.

A er rubbing her eyes alert, she slowly sat up and looked at her surroundings. She was in a large rectangular room with black walls and a sleek window spanning the far side where stars were flying by at a rapid rate, so she immediately determined she was on a ship. Right under that window in the center was what resembled a primitive bed, but massive. Dozens of varying colored and patterned fur pelts covered it thickly. They looked ru led as if someone had recently been there.

The walls were decorated with various objects. One wall was entirely decorated with exotic swords, some bent and rusted, others broken with parts missing. Another was covered with tapestries of increasingly complex colorful designs. They stood out in the dimly lit room considerably, bright and invoking. The floor was covered by a massive fur of ochre and yellow stripes across a brown background. It was quite beautiful and she wanted to run her hands over the exquisite pattern, but she wasn't able to reach.

Because she apparently was attached to the wall like a literal dog. When she tried to crawl forward, drawn towards the tantalizing floor rug, she was yanked back. She spotted the metal object still wrapped around her forearm and followed the glowing tether up to a hook high above her. It was far too high for her to reach.

She groaned in frustration as she tried to yank it free. The damn thing wouldn't budge, even when she planted her feet against the wall to get some leverage.

"Dammit!" She cursed, while giving a final pathetic tug.

When she sat back that was when she saw her backpack on the adjacent wall. It was just out of reach, beyond the boundary of her tether and her plush nest. Her stomach growled thinking of the food that was still in it. She blew out an exasperated hu .

Abruptly, a hidden door slid open, making her jump. Her heart began to race as she watched the familiar big green alien stride in, his massive frame casting a shadow from the hallway lights as sat frozen in fear as he approached. His metal mask still obscured his face. The evil slanted eye-lenses sneered at her from above. She cowered as the big alien knelt before her, cocking his head curiously to the side. His locs tumbled to the wayside with the motion. The long black dreadlocks were decorated with many metal bands and beads that tinkled with every move, an intriguing contrast to the killer before her. He liked to decorate his hair, or at least the inky black tendrils growing from his skull.

One of his massive hands, now free of the leathery gloves he previously wore, reached out to ghost over the exposed flesh of her shoulder. She hadn't even noticed the sleeve had been ripped away and the wounds magically healed. A raised scar was in place of formally shredded flesh.

A so clicking came from him as he traced a finger over each scar. His skin was rough, but his touch was gentle, completely unlike what she had anticipated. She shivered involuntarily, her skin prickled beneath his touch. Shudders ran through her body at the reminder of what those claws were capable of — ripping her flesh to pieces.

"L-let me go...please." Pleaded Ashaki. Her voice was a mere whisper as she bowed her head in submission to the deadly being.

He rattled so ly as he sat back on his haunches, the dark green flesh

giving way to a light green on his inner thighs. She spied the color, and patterning of his skin, reptilian-like but not exactly.

"I can't. Do that!" Varying voices told her, "You. Are my. Captive."

She hadn't done anything! Why was she even here? She had to find out!

Clearing her throat, pushing back her fear, and sitting up a bit straighter she looked him head on, "I-I've done nothing to be your captive. I won't tell anyone what I saw! Honest!"

Again the alien rattled, his mighty chest rising and falling as the cogs in his head churned at lightning speed.

"Saved you! from. Criminal." The voices told her, disjointed men and women speaking. "Witness. I will not. Harm you." His fist beat his chest.

"I saw you take the other one's head o ! How do I know you won't do the same to me?"

"On my. Honor. Protect. Human!" He hooked a claw around the top strap of her backpack and set it before her with a series of clicks coming from him. A gi ? A peace-o ering?

Everything about this was not as she expected. She thought that he would kill her but here he was being...nice? It made no logical sense that this killer alien was friendly. Didn't it want to kill her and maim her like the other?

"Wait...you said the other guy was a criminal?"

The alien nodded, his long chest-length locs swaying forward with the movement.

So maybe he was some...space cop? Bounty hunter? She asked, pushing for more information.

"Yes. Hunt. Criminals. Saved your life."

She had never exactly been friendly with authority, especially a er waking up from cryogenic sleep. Human police were shady in space and usually had an agenda that was backed by some equally shady corporation. Maybe alien cops were di erent.

He obviously was very di erent from anything she'd ever encountered. He was a god damn alien! A real alien! He was the embodiment of science fiction stories. Space had, so far, been empty, except those damn bugs from LV-318. This one was humanoid and was clearly smart enough to communicate and have a spaceship, to wear armor and decorate.

Speaking of spaceship...

"Hey, did you happen to see my ship? My entire life is on Star Chaser If you could just...drop me o ? I can get my stu and we can talk about the specifics of my captivity here? I can also properly lock it." Her ship was her baby and it had taken just two short years to get her. Ships didn't come cheap but she had scored a great deal on hers. All of her hard work selling exotic minerals and specimens to science labs had made it possible to make Star Chaser hers. She had to know if her ship was still there in case she was able to finally escape.

The alien was quiet for a long moment, the silence dragging on. The longer he was silent the more her hope to see it again withered away..

Finally, he brought up his metal gauntlet. He pressed a few buttons until a hologram projected upwards. A video started and an ice-cold wave splashed through her veins as she watched a blazing ball of light turn her beloved ship into a smoldering pile of twisted metal and black smoke. It was as if someone had sapped all of her goodwill towards the alien and filled her instead with petrol. Fanning a flame that began to burn with an intensity that would turn into a raging inferno.

Hot tears rolled down her cheeks as she let loose a pained howl. Her very soul ached with every fiber of her being as she bellowed her melancholy and rage, directing it all at the alien who wisely dodged when she tried to swing a tiny fist at him.

"You fucking asshole! She was my everything! My entire life was in her and you blew her up! You sonofabitch. I'm gonna fucking kill you and make you pay for this! You mother fucking E.T lizard-looking big shit-green prick!" Seethed Ashaki, trying her hardest to get free of the tether so she could take out her anger on the big asshole before her.

A guttural snarl le the chest of the alien as he expertly dodged her attacks, that rapid clicking accompanying his moves.

"I don't speak 'asshole', you click clicking bitch! Come here and fight me like a man, you fucking oversized lizard!" Spat the woman as she pushed her feet against the wall so she could swing forward to try to kick the shins of the alien. "When I'm done with you, you raggedy bitch, you won't even be able to click click at me!" She continued to fight the tether that held her in place.

The alien let loose a terrifying roar that would've scared lesser beings, but Ashaki was one pissed o and hurt woman, she returned the favor and screamed back at him. Her return yell at the alien caused him to visibly be taken aback in surprise.

"You're so god damn lucky I'm stuck or I'd kick your ass!" Ashaki put all of her strength, more than she thought possible, into pulling on the tether. But still it wouldn't budge, not even a little, much to her frustration. She screamed and glared daggers at the alien who stood there with his arms crossed. The action made his big biceps bulge dangerously, tension tight in his shoulders and standing ready for another attack.

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She gave up fighting and slumped to the floor. The tears rolled faster, a torrent of emotion filling her chest with pain and spilling over.

Her life had once again been ruined and destroyed. She would never get ahead. She would never find peace. The universe seemed destined against her. Even if she wanted a peaceful, humble existence, fate always saw otherwise. She would never get even a foothold ahead. Finding people that truly cared about her and gave her life meaning was even further in the distance.

She still didn't understand why she had lived and everyone else had died on LV-318. Her entire family gone in one fell swoop.

Like an asteroid, she floated through life with no stable surface to anchor her. She wondered if maybe it truly was her destiny to be alone and never truly satisfied. There was a hole in her heart that ached to be filled. Star Chase had been the start of that; owning the ship was a way to fill the void. It grounded her in time and place.

It was a new start.

But now, for the first time in a long time she felt like she wanted to end the pain. She'd never find the answers of her painful missing memories but at least she could see everyone she loved again, in the a erlife. Be with them again. Feel wanted and needed.

This alien, whatever he was, had destroyed it so callously. He had no idea how important that ship had been and still was to her.

At that moment all she could do was curl in a ball and wail.

She had no hope for the future. What was the point of escape? There would be no way out of this.

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Dhare watched the human curl in on herself and cry. His nesting room echoed with her sobs. He hadn't expected such a strong reaction from the ship's destruction.

It was a piece of equipment that was easily replaceable; a hunk of metal with no real value outside of material costs. Even the design was standard. His ship scans showed nothing of interest in the ship's modifications or workings. He couldn't understand why she reacted so violently.

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He hadn't expected her to try to attack him, either. It was plain that he had severely miscalculated. This human was vastly dierent from the one he had come to know so well.

This one burned with the force of a supernova.

Instinctually, he wanted to comfort her. A purr had worked itself up low in his diaphragm but he stopped himself short. He didn't know her and she didn't know him. She had proven herself to be aggressive. Granted, her bad reaction came from viewing the video...but he still wanted to take precautions.

Realistically, she couldn't hurt him. She was too small, weak, and so . She was blinded with rage and wouldn't be an e ective fighter, but even the smallest wild animals can cause damage if furious enough, including damage to themselves.

Also, he had heard human words he hadn't heard before, and wanted to find the meaning of them. He gathered that they were expletives based on her body language, the sight of her trying to free herself like a crazed lunatic, but he also had questions. Questions only his stepbearer could answer.

Calling Artemis was imperative.

He made his escape while she was in fetal position and quickly made his way to the cockpit. Dropping heavily into the cushioned pilot's seat, he set about sending a message out to Artemis.

A erward, he leaned back in his seat pensively. A plan was formulating about what he should do with his captive, but first the female needed to move beyond her anger towards him. He would let her simmer for a while and give herspace, time. It was ingrained in him to appease an angry female since in his species, they were bigger than males. While she was human and tiny compared to a yautja female, that instinct was still active. Beyond that, there was his own so er side he didn't like to acknowledge.

I didn't even ask for her nameHe growled to himself.

While he waited for a response from Artemis, he holed himself up in his trophy room. But even here there was no respite from his foul mood. Where ordinarily he felt content and prideful, the gleaming white skulls on the walls seemed claustrophobic and su ocating as he worked away at cleaning the ic'jit's th'syra.

Normally he would put it in a machine and have it clean the flesh for him but today he prefered to do it by hand. His hands working away with the traditional tools allowed him to focus on something other than his straying thoughts.

His sire had raised him better. He was more in tune with empathy

than others of his kind. Rhage, his sire, was the most empathetic Yautja he had ever had the pleasure of knowing. It was partly why he had raised his young, Dhare had been an exception, and also partly why Rhage had fallen for a human, Artemis, his step-bearer. He was still getting used to calling her that.

A er Valam had done the unthinkable and kidnapped her, he was more worried than he had ever been. Seeing her so broken had changed something in Dhare. For the first time in his six-hundred and forty-seven years he understood his sire completely.

Humans weren't Yautja nor would they ever be, but there was something within them he admired. It was why he swore o hunting them. It was cruel of him to tie her down like a hunting dog, that he knew. He should free her to wander about the ship. He would deal with the repercussions of her freedom easier than the torture of thinking of her chained. In the future, if he could establish a better rapport with the human female, perhaps they could find friendship in one another.

Currently it was out of the question. He had to take the first few steps and try to explain why she needed to remain with him...among other things he wouldn't reveal until when it was right.

That footage of their first actual meeting was his contingency plan. His wild card. A last resort.

The skull was now a dull yellow before him, gleaming beneath the bright lights of the room. He had picked away all traces of viscera and blood. As he stared into the empty eye sockets he wondered where his thoughts had wandered. His mind was a jumbled mess with no clear direction.

He placed the clean yautja skull in a storage box for the moment. It would stay there until he arrived at the allying clan that demanded the Bad Blood's head. He would get his payout and acquire that new technology he wanted to install on his ship. The details about these new upgrades were vague but they seemed promising.

He contemplated the possible improvements as he placed his biomask over his face. She obviously wasn't ready to see his real face. A few minutes later he strode into his nest chamber to find the human eating fruits and nuts from one of her ration packs. She ate another handful, her golden brown eyes locked on him as he removed the tether from the hook and allowed it to retract back into the brace on her arm.

Giving a nod, he le the room.

Perhaps setting her loose would be the first step in making sense of his jumbled thoughts.

A/N: I hope you're enjoying this book so far! I'm aiming to write a better book than "The Elder's Mate". I really want it to outshine the first eventually. Thanks for reading! Let me know what you think!

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