



A
Cyborg
In
Control

CYNTHIA SAX

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

INTREPID
ENCOUNTER

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Intrepid Encounter

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For more information contact Cynthia Sax at

www.CynthiaSax.com

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INTREPID ENCOUNTER

Cyborg vs. Valkyrie

Blood will be spilled and hearts will be captured.

Intrepid and his crew on the Dauntless guard the border to the cyborg sector. The D Model cyborg captain has dedicated his lifespan to protecting their homeland. He'll do anything to secure the space and keep his brethren safe.

That includes confronting a Valkyrie intent on vengeance.

The female warrior is beautiful, brave, strong...and Intrepid's genetic match. She's the one being he is fated to claim. Her voice causes his circuits to hum. Her touch produces a passion he struggles to control.

But if he has to stop her...permanently...to protect his kind, he will make that sacrifice.

Olrun has been tracking the whereabouts of a one-of-a-kind object. The stolen item is critical to the safety of her Valkyrie sisters, and she'll do anything to retrieve it.

That includes waging war on a tall, broad-shouldered cyborg warrior sporting brilliant-blue eyes and grimly set lips.

The male might...just might...have battle skills matching her own. And that excites the immortal fighter. She craves his rough handling, his punishing embrace, his stern words.

But Olrun's desire for the cyborg won't distract her from achieving her goal. She will shield her fellow Valkyries from danger, even if that means ending Intrepid's lifespan in the process.

Intrepid Encounter is an enemies-to-lovers Cyborg SciFi Romance set in a dark, gritty, sometimes-violent universe.

It features a protective cyborg, a vengeful Valkyrie, and a destiny neither of them can predict.

CHAPTER ONE

Danger was near.

Intrepid couldn't yet process the source of the threat.

As he patrolled the Dauntless's hallways, he scanned his surroundings. Every being, every object, and every system appeared to be operating within spec on his battle station.

But the voice deep inside his soul, the early-warning signal that bypassed his machine side, continued to scream that his lifespan, and a high probability of the lifespans of his crew also, could soon end.

The feeling of dread had started 3.2545 planet rotations ago, and it had gradually intensified until it consumed the processes of his organic brain.

He had to find the origin. His pace quickened.

His trepidation had no basis in logic. But it was always right.

Always.

It had warned him, during his first solar cycle of existence, that a humanoid opponent had secreted a gun into the training ring.

He turned as the male was drawing the weapon. A projectile whizzed across his right cheek. His nanocybotics repaired that damage.

And he dispatched his foe with a dagger to the center eye socket.

The doom deep in his core had also once told him to step to the right on the battlefield.

A missile then landed where he had previously stood. The detonation blasted his arms and legs off, but he survived the impact.

Rage, his friend, stopped and reattached his limbs, sparing him a possible decommissioning by the Humanoid Alliance, their cruel manufacturers.

Solar cycles later, his gut had pushed him to support Rage's plan to

escape those humans.

If he hadn't fought for his liberation, there was a 100.0000 percent probability he would've been decommissioned. The Humanoid Alliance would have sliced and diced his form, his mind, all of him into tiny pieces until he begged for the death that would've eventually followed.

He trusted the feeling now ravaging his soul.

Danger was approaching. That was a certainty.

He exchanged not-so-casual chatter with crew members as he passed them in the hallways.

They had nothing out of the ordinary to report.

There were minor variances.

A panel had been replaced in a training chamber after a warrior tested a new type of projectile on it. The top speed of a shuttle craft had been increased. The cleaning bots in the docking bay had their tracks replaced.

All those issues were resolved without incident.

Intrepid turned a corner.

That hallway was also occupied.

"Yum." He addressed the male walking in his direction.

Yum snapped to attention. "Captain."

"Are there sufficient supplies of nourishment bars on board?" Intrepid tracked that information through the systems, but he preferred to hear Yum's report.

"Yes, sir." The male's chin lifted to a proud angle. "There are sufficient rations on board for 1.2363 solar cycles, based on our current crew count."

"Good." They shouldn't run out of nourishment before the next opportunity to restock the vessel. "And we're continuing to test a sample of them before distribution?"

It was unlikely anyone would tamper with the nourishment, but Intrepid wasn't ruling out any source of peril.

Yum's lips flattened. "We randomly test one in every 100 nourishment bars distributed, Captain." His tone was curt. "As per set procedures."

Intrepid had damaged the male's self-esteem with his question. "I projected you were following procedures." He met Yum's gaze. "But a good captain shouldn't assume anything. Especially when it involves an important task like nourishment-bar distribution. The full functionality of the entire crew...and myself...relies upon your role."

Yum stood straighter. "We won't let you or the rest of the crew down,

sir.” His eyes shone with pride.

“I’m counting on that, Yum.” Intrepid headed toward the bridge.

The reports coming from his officers had greatly reduced over the past shift. That could be the source of his unease. There could be a bad reason for that variance.

The doors to the bridge opened as he approached them. Laughter blasted his auditory system.

As he stepped into the space, the mirth dissipated. The image on the main viewscreen reverted to that of open space.

But he had seen the footage his crew had displayed there. “Why is our new engineer crawling along a ventilation shaft?” Intrepid claimed the captain’s chair.

That new engineer, Choice, was the freeborn offspring of Rage and Rage’s human female. He was a C Model like his father and barely fit in the shaft.

It was his first post-training assignment. Intrepid’s trepidation increased. The kid was inexperienced. He would be less capable of dealing with any dangerous situation.

His officers wouldn’t laugh at a crew member in peril. But they also might not recognize if the kid faced danger. Unlike Choice, they had all endured the Humanoid Alliance’s harsh training. They might project he could handle the situation he currently faced.

No one on the bridge answered Intrepid’s question. But they all looked at Grid, their navigator and the primary chaos-creating being in the group.

The male grinned like his processors were malfunctioning.

“Grid.” Intrepid deleted his frustration from his voice.

None of his officers projected they were in danger. He hadn’t shared that hard-to-explain intel with anyone else. They had no reason to be on high alert as he was.

He displayed the live footage of Choice’s ventilation shaft adventures on the main viewscreen. The kid appeared to be fully functional. He moved slowly but without signs of damage.

“Why is our new engineer crawling along a ventilation shaft?” He leveled a hard gaze on Grid.

“I can’t project Choice’s processing with 100.0000 percent accuracy, Captain.” The male’s eyes glittered with humor.

“Project it with less accuracy.” Intrepid didn’t allow him to evade giving

an answer.

Grid tilted his head to the side. “If I had to project wildly, I would say he’s ensuring the battle station’s ventilation systems are operating at maximum efficiency, Captain.”

There were many systems on the Dauntless. All were constantly monitored, and all were operating at max efficiency.

“Why is Choice focusing on the ventilation system?” Intrepid paused. “Relay your best projection. And supply all the details behind it.”

He would uncover the truth eventually.

Grid’s grin wavered for a heartbeat.

The male was responsible for Choice’s misadventures. Intrepid processed that.

His navigator had a sense of mischief that bordered on malfunction.

And he lacked stealth. Intrepid read the guilt all over his countenance.

But Grid was also protective of his fellow crew members. He wouldn’t intentionally place the less-experienced male in peril. The current situation was a diversion for him.

The male didn’t process they were facing an unidentified danger.

Intrepid tracked Choice’s activities in the ventilation shaft. The kid had extracted a handheld from a holster on his body armor and was looking at its tiny screen. He remained in full functionality.

Seeking an explanation, Intrepid redirected his focus to Grin.

His navigator swallowed. Hard. He must have sensed he was in trouble. “Choice was boasting about how *he* ensured all the systems on the Dauntless were operating at maximum efficiency, Captain.”

Intrepid recognized the kid was trying to prove his worth to the rest of the crew. But that comment irked him as much as it must have irked Grid.

The Dauntless’s systems always ran at maximum efficiency.

“And?” He lifted one of his eyebrows.

“And I asked him how he processed that with 100.0000 percent certainty.” Grid turned his palms upward. “The readings for the ventilation system could be incorrect.” He shrugged. “The ventilation system was given merely as an example.”

Choice was new to the crew. Intrepid’s lips twisted. There was a low probability the newbie processed it was *an example*.

And there was only an 0.0235 probability the ventilation system had been a random choice. Grid had wanted to prompt the very large C Model to enter

the very narrow shafts.

“I told him if he hadn’t verified the readings were correct, he couldn’t determine the ventilation system was operating at maximum efficiency with 100.0000 percent certainty.” Grid’s argument was logical. “I project he’s undertaking that verification.”

That response was logical also. And the entire interaction could inadvertently assist Intrepid with identifying the nature of the danger they might be facing. Not that either officer processed that.

“The readings *could* be incorrect.” He nodded.

Grid’s eyes widened. The male hadn’t projected that response.

“All our key readings, including navigation, will be verified.” Intrepid issued that command.

The officers on the bridge groaned.

It would be a huge undertaking. But they were cyborgs. Their kind didn’t require sleep.

And the process might save their lifespans. They might uncover the threat.

“Grid, you’ll lead the efforts.” That was both a reprimand and a reward. The male would gain experience at commanding beings, but he wouldn’t find the role enjoyable. “I expect progress reports every planet rotation. The first one will occur by the end of the next shift.” Intrepid inclined his head toward the footage on the main viewscreen. “Choice will have completed his verification of the ventilation-system readings by that time.”

The kid was backing out of the ventilation shaft. There was a high probability he had already completed the verification.

The Dauntless’s newest engineer was eager to prove himself. His mom, Joan, also a skilled engineer, would be proud of him.

As Intrepid was.

He looked back at Grid. “I expect the reports to be thorough.” Indication of the threat might be revealed in those details.

“Yes, Captain.” The navigator’s shoulders slumped.

The other beings on the bridge appeared as unhappy with the additional tasks.

There was a high probability they were grumbling about the orders through the crew-only transmission lines.

But Intrepid said nothing more. Their safety was a higher priority for him than being liked.

And confiding in them now would accomplish nothing except alarm his crew. That had a high probability of making a bad situation worse.

He kept his feelings to himself as a good captain should. And he focused on locating the source of the danger.

“Has there been any activity at the border?” He’d been monitoring the space, but others might have noticed something he’d missed.

“Nine pieces of debris have crossed the border over the past shift.” Strike, his second-in-command, displayed images of the wreckage beside the footage of the now-vacant ventilation shaft. All the pieces were smaller than a missile launcher. “A ship also appeared briefly at the edge of our monitoring range. It altered course and didn’t enter our visuals. Other than that, it has been quiet.”

Intrepid replaced the images on the main viewscreen with footage from the battle station’s forward recording devices. There was no movement amongst the stars.

His feelings of foreboding didn’t lessen.

Something was terribly wrong. He would uncover what that was.

Three planet rotations passed, and Intrepid hadn’t located the threat. He stared, via the main viewscreen, in the direction of the cyborg-sector border. There was no activity there.

“We could place two sensors in front of the ship and fly between them.” Grid shared his strategy to test their navigation systems. “They’ll relay our position, and I’ll compare that to the readings. That will—”

Lights flashed on the console.

“We’re receiving incoming communications from the Cyborg Council, Captain.” Argot, the Dauntless’s communications officer, relayed that information.

Intrepid swallowed a groan. He didn’t want any distractions at the moment. And an interaction with the Cyborg Council was always a big distraction.

But he couldn’t ignore the request. “Open communication lines.”

“Opening communication lines, Captain.” Argot confirmed that order.

An image of Power, the self-appointed leader of the Cyborg Council, and Eirene Ours, his genetic match and the leader of the now-incorporated Rebel

Cyborgs, appeared in a corner of the main viewscreen.

“This information can be relayed with your officers.” Power bit off each word.

“It’s being relayed.” Intrepid hadn’t waited for permission to broadcast the communication to the bridge. Power would’ve informed him if the information was meant for his consideration alone.

“There’s a possible threat to the safety of all cyborgs, genetic matches—” Power’s gaze flicked toward Eirene Ours. “—and offspring located within the sector.”

Intrepid straightened in his captain’s chair.

Power’s threat could be the one he was sensing.

None of the beings on board the Dauntless had the good fortune to locate their genetic matches yet. And that included Intrepid.

They might never find those beings, and they might never manufacture offspring.

But they’d dedicated their lifespans to protecting the other warriors’ genetic matches and offspring. Intrepid took their safety very seriously.

“We have intel that a Valkyrie might seek to enter our space.” Power delivered that information with a blank countenance.

“A Valkyrie.” Drift, the Dauntless’s pilot, expressed their shared astonishment. “The chatter was correct.”

The rumors on the transmission lines were that a cyborg and his genetic match had returned to their sector with artifacts taken from a Humanoid Alliance facility. One of those artifacts was a dagger stolen from a Valkyrie by their much-reviled enemy.

The chatter speculated that the warrior was now searching for her weapon.

And that weapon was currently located on Praecipua Minor, a planet within the sector that was heavily guarded by cyborg warships.

Intrepid questioned that those defenses would be sufficient to ward off a Valkyrie attack.

The female warriors matched cyborgs for skill in battle. They lived to fight and believed they’d been created by their deities solely for that purpose.

They were also ancient. Valkyries had a natural lifespan of forever, as Intrepid’s kind did. They were fraggin’ hard to kill and were as difficult to stop.

Intrepid had spotted one across a war zone once. The humanoid female

had been dressed in gold armor, and she had glowed as she jabbed a spear through her opponent's tough skull. The victory cry she'd given after that kill had pierced the noise of the fighting all around them.

Fraggin' hole. He blew out his breath.

His organics had been warning him of an imminent danger.

A Valkyrie was danger encapsulated.

"Why would she seek to enter our space?" Intrepid wanted to hear the truth from Power's own lips.

Speculations were often fraught with errors and miscommunications, deficiencies that could kill a captain and his crew. The Cyborg Council leader would've verified any intel he relayed.

"She's searching for an... object in our possession." Power was frustratingly vague. "You are to down her ship and ensure there is nothing left to recover."

Valkyries were reportedly only interested in war. The object must be a weapon.

The rumors about the dagger were true.

"Another being would give that object to her." The cyborgs didn't need another dagger. They could defend their sector with the weapons they currently had. "The odds of intercepting the Valkyrie are low. And the odds of blowing up her ship are lower."

"The Dauntless has defied low odds in the past." Power wasn't moving on his stance.

He was correct. They *had* defied low odds in the past.

When they'd saved Power's lifespan six hundred and thirty-seven planet rotations ago.

Intrepid's lips twisted. The Cyborg Council leader was an ungrateful ass.

"You're asking me to risk my crew to stop the Valkyrie." He wanted to ensure the male processed the risks he was ordering them to take. "Is this... object worth their lifespans?"

"Yes." Power held his gaze.

The E model didn't relay why he was willing to place Intrepid and his crew in peril. But his tone communicated he was 100.0000 percent certain that danger was warranted.

Intrepid swallowed his misgivings. Power might be an ass, but he wouldn't sacrifice warriors unnecessarily. "Then we will stop the Valkyrie." He deleted all emotion from his voice and countenance. "If we detect her

ship's approach."

"You'll detect her ship's approach." Power lifted his chin. "The border sensors are fully functional." His dark eyes flashed. "Ending transmission."

The image on the main viewscreen reverted to footage of the border Intrepid and the crew of the Dauntless were charged to protect.

The area was too vast for Intrepid's comfort. And he didn't share Power's confidence in the border sensors' ability to detect the Valkyrie.

The warrior females were ancient. They had existed long before the first cyborg was manufactured. They hadn't lived that long because they lacked the ability to evade capture.

Detecting and then stopping their target would require all the resources on board the Dauntless.

"Grid, the testing of all onboard systems will be paused as of this moment." Intrepid informed the male. They had a higher-priority task to complete.

"Pausing all onboard systems testing, Captain." Humor lilted his navigator's voice.

Only that chaos-embracing male would find their current situation amusing.

"Activate the emergency monitoring systems." Duplicating systems would expend energy and leave them with no backups. But the threat warranted it.

"Activating emergency monitoring systems, Captain." Strike's expression was grave. He processed the danger they were facing.

There was a 97.5665 percent chance they'd only have one opportunity to blow up the Valkyrie's ship. The female warrior would be skilled. Once she detected them, she would be fraggin' impossible to kill.

A tinge of misgiving shimmered through Intrepid. To end the lifespan of such a legendary being seemed...wrong. The Valkyrie he'd viewed had been magnificent. They were gifted fighters.

They were also rare. There were millions of cyborgs and, according to their databases, only thirty-seven of them had ever spotted a Valkyrie.

He and his crew would have to kill one.

And for what crime? If the rumors were true, she was attempting to retrieve her dagger, a weapon that belonged to her.

Sympathy for the Valkyrie mixed with Intrepid's misgiving. He had weapons he valued also.

But his private feelings about the warrior female wouldn't prevent him from following Power's orders.

If the Cyborg Council leader projected the Valkyrie had to be killed, Intrepid would ensure the Valkyrie was killed. Without hesitation.

His jaw jutted.

"Increase our speed." They would patrol their allocated stretch of border faster, covering more space in a short duration of time.

"Increasing our speed, Captain." Drift, the Dauntless's pilot, acted on his order.

Intrepid's resolve firmed.

His duty to his kind came first.

He would sacrifice everything and everyone else in the universe, including his own crew, to keep his cyborg brethren free and safe.

The Valkyrie would die.

CHAPTER TWO

Olrun would, without hesitation, risk her lifespan to keep other Valkyries safe.

Fuck. She'd dance with death merely for the thrill of it.

But placing Jane, her adopted daughter, in danger...again...chilled her to her ancient bones.

She'd already fucked that up once. And it had cost her daughter her legs.

Jane was human, and humans were mortal. Unlike Valkyries who were fuckin' hard to kill and had unlimited natural lifespans. Her daughter had almost died.

Humans also didn't heal very quickly. Jane had endured a solar cycle of painful recovery.

Olrun wouldn't put her through all that again.

She grabbed her daughter's arm, stopping her from entering the beverage outlet, and she pulled the youngster into the shadows.

"What is it?" Jane whispered.

"I bid you not to fuckin' go in there." Olrun kept her voice low also.

"No one uses bid in that way anymore." Jane rolled her eyes. "The word you want is order."

"I put a fuckin' in there." That should've made the command sound more modern.

"Mom, we talked about this." Her daughter sighed. "Adding fucks to a sentence doesn't make much of a difference."

But it did make *a bit* of a difference. Which is why she used them liberally.

For Jane. Only for Jane.

Olrun didn't give a shit which words she used as long as they were understood.

But fitting in had always been important to her daughter. Jane had spent much of her childhood listening to communications originating outside the Valkyrie Sanctuary. She knew how non-Valkyries chattered.

Olrun tried to make her daughter happy and talk like them. "I *order* you not to fuckin' go in there. It's too dangerous."

"We're warriors, Mom." Jane touched the pocket in the flight suit where she hid her knife. They were always armed. Both of them. "Everything we do is dangerous. And we have to go in there. You know that."

Olrun pursed her lips. "We don't have to do anything."

"No." Her daughter shook her head. "We talked about this. Your hooded cape won't fool the humans at close proximity. I have to be the one to speak to them." She lifted her chin. "And I can do this. It's a simple conversation. I'm good at those."

"You're better at talking than I am." Olrun admitted that truth. She would prefer to cleave beings in half than chatter with them.

And her daughter was right.

Her disguise was good at a distance, but it wouldn't hold up under scrutiny. They would realize she was a Valkyrie. Her kind glowed. And the humans would leave without sharing the information the two of them needed.

Jane had to be the one to speak with the males.

"You'll gather the intel, make an excuse, and then leave." Olrun settled on that compromise. The faster they left, the safer her daughter should be.

"I know what I have to do, Mom." Jane's head dipped. "I won't fuck this up."

"I know you won't fuck this up." Olrun squeezed her arm.

Jane wasn't a child anymore.

It seemed like only last planet rotation that she found her daughter on a battlefield among the dead. Jane had four solar cycles at that time. She'd been covered in blood and gore and was so small, so delicate.

The female before her was strong. Jane had trained hard and was skilled...for a human...in fighting. She also had twenty-seven solar cycles.

Which meant she was physically older than Olrun. Valkyries stopped aging at twenty-five.

Olrun pushed away the sadness her daughter's mortality brought her. "I'll be watching for danger."

“You always are.” Her daughter grinned at her.

Olrun swallowed her misgivings and smiled back at Jane. They had to do this. She adjusted the hood of her cape, ensuring none of her showed.

Jane, in contrast, unfastened her flight suit until a generous amount of breast was visible. Human males were often rendered brainless by her bountiful curves.

She looked at Olrun.

Olrun nodded her approval.

Jane turned and strolled into the beverage outlet. Her hips swayed. Her clever daughter had quickly mastered the art of walking with her mechanical legs.

Olrun’s chest expanded with pride.

She waited for a few moments. Then she slipped through the doors.

None of the beings inside the space looked at her. They were all gawking at Jane.

Olrun claimed a chair at an empty table in the shadowy corner of the main chamber and watched as her daughter weaved through the seated occupants.

Their targets huddled around a table near the far wall.

Jane sat at an adjacent table. She flicked a lock of her dark hair over her shoulder.

There wasn’t a strand of gray in those long tresses.

Yet.

“What does a female have to do to get a drink around here?” Jane pouted.

As predicted, many males held out their containers of beverage.

Jane swung around in her chair and clasped the offering extended by one of their targets. “Awww...thank you.” She dazzled him with a smile.

The Humanoid Alliance male blinked. He appeared stunned to be chosen.

“I love your green uniform—” Jane’s gaze shifted to the male’s chest. “—Dave.” She read his nametag. “Green is my favorite color.” She touched the lapel of her green flight suit, drawing his attention to her barely contained breasts. “And, oh my.” Jane perused the other males. “You’re all in green. Lucky me.”

“We’re in Communications.” Those words burst from one of those males’ lips.

“Communications. Ooh.” Jane batted her eyelashes. “You must hear *everything*.”

Her clever daughter also heard fuckin' everything. She was the being who had intercepted the communications between the bored males on the frontier Humanoid Alliance planet.

The male on the receiving end of her flirting didn't know that. "Nothing happens without our knowledge, beautiful." He sat straighter in his chair.

"Nothing?" Jane's eyes widened.

"Nothing." All the males nodded.

Jane's gaze didn't stray from the second male. "But most of it must be boring." She sighed. "I doubt you hear anything interesting. And isn't that sad?"

There was a pause.

"A planet blew up." The first male yelled that reply.

Heads turned.

Jane's attention returned to him.

"A planet blew up." The first male's voice lowered as he repeated that statement.

Only the humans seated close to him would have the ability to hear his words.

But Orlun wasn't human. She had a Valkyrie's keen hearing and could follow the conversation.

"Even I heard about that." Jane waved her right hand dismissively. "Fred was telling me." She paused and looked at them. "Do you know Fred? He's in Engineering."

The males glanced at each other.

"There are many Freds." The second male spaced his words out as though he was talking to a child. "We *might* know him."

"Well, *I* know him. *Very* well, if you know what I mean." She winked. "I met him in a place like this." Jane gestured around her. "He chattered to me like I was a friend, and then we did very unfriendly things in my private chambers." She frowned. "Then he flew away." She shrugged. "Anyway, he told me the Humanoid Alliance blew up a planet with their world-destroying thingie. And then the world-destroying thingie blew up, and no one knows who did it." She paused. "I told him that maybe it just broke, but he said they don't just break." She imitated a male. "But what else could it be? He said there wasn't anyone else near the world-destroying thingie."

"There was a cyborg." The first male blurted that revelation.

One of the quieter males sucked in his breath.

“What?” The first male scowled at him. “She isn’t going to tell anyone, and even if she did, no one would believe her. Look at her.” He waved his hands at Jane’s breasts.

Jane arched her back. That action accentuated her bountiful chest even more.

“She *is* female.” Another male said that as though it was agreement.

Human males were fuckin’ fools. Olrun’s lips twisted.

“Awww...thank you for noticing.” Jane played the role they expected of her. “And you all are so very male.” She twirled a tendril of her hair around her right index finger. “And you are much more clever than I am.” She fixed her wide-eyed gaze on the first male. “I didn’t know cyborgs could fly.”

“He wasn’t spotted *that* close to the World-End.” The male chuckled. “When the situation on the planet went to shit and the evacuation was authorized, someone saw a cyborg running toward a ship.”

“That someone was a nobody, a container loader.” A male rolled his eyes. “And he claims he saw a B Model cyborg. Those machines were decommissioned hundreds of solar cycles ago.”

“No one is supporting his claim.” Another male shook his head. “There were hundreds, thousands of beings in the area, and not one of them saw this supposed cyborg. The male is delusional.”

The males nattered amongst themselves. But none of them had any alternate theories about who had blown up the World-End.

And there was no reason for the container loader to lie. He must’ve realized he’d be mocked, yet he had spoken up.

Olrun suspected the male had been telling the fuckin’ truth.

The cyborgs were half organic, half mechanical beings. They’d been manufactured by the Humanoid Alliance to be their killing machines, and they’d been treated as cruelly as the Humanoid Alliance treated other non-human, non-male beings.

Once they were given the opportunity, the cyborgs had escaped Humanoid Alliance control. They now occupied and defended an entire sector.

Those warriors must hate their creators. The theft could’ve been an act of vengeance, a concept she knew very well.

Like Valkyries, they would love weapons.

The dagger the Humanoid Alliance had stolen from Olrun was a weapon. It was also a key, of sorts. A being carrying it could enter the Sanctuary, a

safe location for all Valkyries.

And eventually for her daughter.

A cyborg now held her blade, and that terrified the shit out of her. The Humanoid Alliance was largely incompetent. Cyborgs were not.

Her daughter could be in danger in the future.

She was also in danger now.

Olrun watched and listened as the males chattered with Jane. Her daughter added light irrelevant comments to the more-serious conversation. They didn't appear to view her as a threat.

Which was fuckin' foolish, because Jane could likely kill all five of them before any of them reacted. There was a knife in her right front pocket.

"I have to return to my role." Jane stood. "It isn't as exciting as your roles. During the last working shift, I sorted flight suits." That was the truth. They had chosen their garments with care before arriving at the beverage outlet. "But I have to return to it."

"When will I see you again?" The second male rose to his booted feet also.

"She spoke to me first." The first male bumped against his rival.

"Boys. Boys. Boys." Jane laughed. "You have to learn to share." She walked around them, drifting her fingertips over their forms. "There's more than enough of me to go around, don't you think?" She glanced down at her chest.

The males nodded vigorously. Their expressions were ravenous. And they gave the impression they didn't mind sharing.

"I understand you're important males and have responsibilities." Jane flattered them. "But do you think you can return here at the end of next shift?"

"I'll be here." The second male vibrated with excitement. "Dave has to work."

"I'll switch shifts with someone." Dave frowned. "I'll be here also."

Two of the other males also agreed to return to the beverage outlet.

"That's super." Jane beamed at them. "I have to go." She moved toward the exit. "Wear the green uniforms. I love those garments on you." She feigned a shiver. "And off you."

The Humanoid Alliance males agreed to arrive in those uniforms.

Jane gave them a cheery wave, and then she was gone.

Her daughter was safe. The tension stretching across Olrun's shoulders

dissipated.

She waited for a few moments. The Humanoid Alliance males argued about who would have the first turn with Jane. They didn't know they'd never see her daughter again.

Jane had extracted the information they needed.

They knew where to look next for the dagger.

Their search, after her daughter had healed from her wounds, had started at the former site of a Humanoid Alliance compound. The compound had been blown up, along with the rest of the planet. Only rubble had remained in that area of the sector.

There'd been no dagger floating amidst the debris. Her weapon was indestructible, and Olrún hadn't sensed its presence. It was gone.

The B Model cyborg must have taken it. Or he knew the being who possessed it.

They would travel to the cyborg-controlled sector and find the warrior. Olrún would retrieve the dagger from him. He wouldn't give the weapon up easily. She would likely have to kill the cyborg to obtain it.

That prospect of fighting one of those warriors filled her with great satisfaction. Her daughter had been hurt and almost killed during the dagger theft. The need for vengeance on Jane's behalf filled Olrún's Valkyrie soul.

It would also be her last battle for a while. Once it was over and the cyborg was dead and her dagger retrieved, she'd return, with her human daughter, to the Sanctuary.

They would spend the rest of Jane's unsettlingly short lifespan there, where she would be safe and protected.

Fuck. Olrún's lips flattened. That future pained her.

It was the cost of caring for a mortal. She wouldn't trade the last twenty-three solar cycles with her daughter to escape any of that hurt.

But she would transfer some of the agony, the sorrow, and the anger to the cyborg who dared to hold her dagger. He would pay for that arrogance. In blood and suffering.

That was the Valkyrie way.

Olrún ensured her cape completely concealed her face, pushed herself to her booted feet, and stalked out of the beverage outlet.

The cyborg wouldn't know what the fuck was coming for him.

Olrun met with her daughter, as they had previously agreed, back at their ship. Jane had the engines running and was sitting in the captain's chair.

"I assume we're heading to the cyborg sector." Her daughter guided the ship upward.

"You assume correctly." Olrun plopped her ass into the seat beside Jane and flung off her cape. Her glow illuminated the bridge. "The B Model has the dagger. Or he knows who stole it."

"Who re-stole it." Jane grinned. "They stole the dagger from the Humanoid Alliance who stole it from us." Her smile dimmed. "That was my fault. You didn't retrieve it immediately because you were saving me."

"I didn't save you well enough." Olrun frowned. Guilt wrapped around her heart, squeezing, squeezing, squeezing.

"You didn't know I was in danger." Her daughter waved one of her hands dismissively. "Fuck. They sacrificed one of their own officers to get your dagger. Who could've predicted that?"

Olrun hadn't known the Humanoid Alliance was targeting her.

But that was what they did. They placed one of their highest-ranking officers on the battlefield. They must've realized she couldn't resist downing him.

Thinking she was being cautious, she had sent Jane back to the warship on a fake errand. She didn't want her in any danger during the battle.

Then she had engaged the officer.

Olrun had thrown her blade. It had zinged straight and true through the air. And it had pierced the male's eyeball, killing him instantly.

Before she could retrieve her dagger, the Humanoid Alliance had targeted the warship with a missile strike.

All Olrun could think about then was her daughter, getting to her, pulling her from the wreckage.

Her legs. Fuck. Her legs had been blown to bits.

And the missing dagger faded from importance until Jane was healed.

"I should've been more fuckin' careful with you." She was a shitty mom. All she knew was war, and she hadn't been able to use those cursed skills to protect her daughter.

"A cautious life isn't worth living." Jane recited her modern twist on a common Valkyrie line. Her daughter ignored the light flashing on the console as she steered the ship toward open space.

The planet didn't host sufficient Humanoid Alliance forces to chase the

ships leaving the surface.

“A cautious life is better than no life at all.” Olrún’s stance on caution had shifted once she became a mom. “We’re returning to the Sanctuary after we deal with the cyborg.” She warned her daughter of the plan. “You gave me your vow we’d do that once you had twenty-five solar cycles.”

“Mom, that vow was made a long time ago.” Jane jutted her jaw. “And I have twenty-seven solar cycles, and we haven’t returned.”

The delay was due to her injuries, and her daughter fuckin’ knew that. “Jane—”

“I don’t belong there. You know that.” The unhappiness in Jane’s voice pulled at Olrún’s heart. “Valkyries don’t form relationships with non-Valkyries.”

Olrún had broken that rule when she adopted Jane. And she had forced the others to break it also by bringing her daughter back to the Sanctuary.

“I be cursed. I be cursed.” Jane mimicked Herfjotur’s voice. “The gods will smite me.”

That Valkyrie was extremely dramatic.

Olrún’s lips flattened. The female also hadn’t been kind to Jane. “I’m surprised the gods didn’t smite her thousands of solar cycles ago.”

“Beings don’t say smite anymore.” Her daughter shook her head. “The word you want is decapitate.”

Olrún was almost certain the word she wanted wasn’t decapitate. Though that *was* one of only a few ways Valkyries could be killed. “We’re returning to the Sanctuary once I retrieve my dagger.” Her daughter might have moments of unhappiness in that hidden place, but she would be safe there.

Jane’s eyes flashed with protest. “Mom—”

“No.” Fuck. Being a mom was hard. “You gave me your vow. And a vow is a vow.”

“Then we’ll return to the Sanctuary.” Jane sighed. “But I’m not speaking to Herfjotur. Ever.”

“I’m going to beat her ass in every training session I participate in.” Olrún made her own vow. No one fucked with her daughter. “Then she won’t speak to either of us. Ever.”

“That would be a gift.” Some of Jane’s good humor returned.

Olrún wanted her to be happy. “You did well back there, at the beverage outlet.” She was proud of her daughter’s courage and quick thinking.

“I had to lie.” Jane made a face. “That wasn’t very Valkyrie of me.”

Valkyries did lie but not often. “Lying was necessary.” Chopping the males’ arms and legs off, which would have been her preferred solution, hadn’t been an option. “We have to protect the Sanctuary.” She paused. “Even if there isn’t enough smiting happening there.” Olrun teased her daughter.

That earned her a laugh. “A little more smiting would be good.”

Silence stretched. Jane flew their ship toward the cyborg-controlled sector.

“We’ll have one last adventure.” Her daughter stared at the images on the main viewscreen.

“We’ll have one more adventure.” The thought of it being their last was too painful to contemplate. “I can defeat the cyborg.”

“That’s not what I meant.” Jane didn’t look at her.

“I know.” Olrun was her mom. She knew what she meant. “But I *can* fuckin’ defeat him.”

“*We’ll* defeat *them*.” Her daughter was stubborn. “There will be more than one of them. Cyborgs don’t fight alone.”

Then Olrun would defeat all of those skilled warriors. Because her human daughter wasn’t getting close to any cyborgs. They were harder to kill than Valkyries. And Jane was distressingly mortal.

Fuck. She would do anything to stop the march of time.

That wasn’t possible. “The cyborgs will be monitoring their borders.”

“I have some ideas to deal with that issue.” Jane’s eyes lit up.

Her daughter was much more technologically savvy than she was. She would miss Jane’s input on future adventures. Her heart ached.

“Tell me your ideas.” Olrun fixed a smile on her face.

She listened as her daughter outlined three different strategies to breach the borders to the cyborg-controlled sector.

And she tried to ignore the faint laughter lines that had recently appeared on her beloved child’s beautiful face.

Olrun wasn’t ready to see that. She doubted she would ever be ready.

CHAPTER THREE

Intrepid gazed at the main viewscreen on the bridge and frowned.

Eighty-seven planet rotations had passed, and there were no signs of the Valkyrie's ship. Or any other hostile vessel.

The stretch of border he and the crew of the Dauntless had been assigned to monitor was the closest entry point to the sector from Keid 9.

According to Intrepid's intel, a cyborg and his female had recently returned from that now-decimated, formerly Humanoid Alliance-controlled planet.

He projected the pair's activities were associated with the dagger the Valkyrie was searching for.

Especially as the cyborg and his female chose to settle on Praecipua Minor. The crews of the ships protecting that planet had been warned they faced grave danger by agreeing to that task. Intrepid had confirmed that with other captains.

The Valkyrie could be arriving from a different origin point, however.

But no other cyborg-crewed ship had intercepted their adversary. None of their numerous systems had detected her ship.

Which meant either she hadn't yet crossed the border.

Or she had somehow evaded them. That prospect chilled Intrepid's nourishment-processing system. The enemy, a skilled warrior, could be in their sector and be headed toward the cyborg Homeland right now.

His brethren, their genetic matches, and their offspring could be in peril.

"Scan the border." He barked that order.

His officers immediately stopped their chatter. They straightened in their chairs.

“Scanning the border, Captain.” Grid, the Dauntless’s navigator, answered on behalf of the crew on the bridge.

The images on the main viewscreen shifted.

Intrepid peered at the space, utilizing his own visual system to supplement the scans. Those scans had been verified but, as Grid had earlier correctly pointed out, nothing was perfect.

Intrepid couldn’t risk missing their foe.

“The border’s sensors have detected no movement, Captain.” Strike reported on the devices recently installed along their sector.

“The Dauntless’s scans also detect no movement, Captain.” Grid nodded. “It’s fraggin’ dead space out there.” He muttered that additional comment.

“It isn’t dead space.” Intrepid was as impatient as the rest of them, but they couldn’t lower their guard. “The Valkyrie is out there. Our opponent is one of the most skilled warriors in the universe.” He stressed information they all already had. “She was fighting and launching military campaigns long before the first cyborgs, the A Models, were manufactured.”

Choice, their newest engineer, swallowed hard.

He was scared. They all should be apprehensive.

“*She* will not underestimate her foe.” Intrepid met each of his officers’ gazes one by one. “We would be fools if we underestimated her. Are we fools?”

“No, Captain,” his officers replied in unison.

“I didn’t process we were.” Intrepid didn’t tolerate sloppiness. “What is the status of our warships?” They had to be fully functional and ready to fly at a moment’s notice.

Choice relayed the condition of each ship.

Strike, Intrepid’s second-in-command, updated him on the crews assigned to each vessel.

Cure, their medic, imparted the repairing of beings on board the battle station. Cyborgs liked to train hard and often incurred damage when they pushed their organics or mechanicals past their limits.

As Intrepid listened to the reports, he continued to monitor the border.

He detected movement a heartbeat before the alarms sounded.

Lights flashed on the bridge. The siren wailed.

“Deploy all warships.” Intrepid wanted them ready to react. “They are to be positioned behind the Dauntless.”

“All warships are deployed, Captain.” A tremor of excitement edged

Strike's voice.

"The Dauntless is to remain outside of the standard monitoring range at all times." If the captain of the approaching vessel hadn't enhanced their systems, Intrepid and his crew would have the advantage. They could track the other ship's location, and their possible adversary couldn't track them.

"The Dauntless is positioned outside of standard monitoring range, Captain." Drift, their pilot, confirmed that fact.

"Do we have a match for the shape of the detected object?" It was situated too far away for visuals.

"There's a 98.2563 percent match to a Humanoid Alliance class A warship, Captain." Choice confirmed Intrepid's projections.

That warship wasn't one of theirs. A cyborg would've communicated with them via their internal transmission lines if they were approaching the border. That was protocol.

Fraggin' hole. It could be the Valkyrie.

"The ship is slowing, Captain," Grid informed him.

Intrepid leaned forward.

"The ship has stopped, Captain." His navigator issued that update.

What was the captain of the warship doing?

Intrepid tapped his right index finger against his chin.

"An object has split from the ship, Captain." Grid zoomed in on that reading on the monitoring system.

"Choice?" Intrepid prompted the new addition to his crew for information.

"Oh." The inexperienced male shook himself. "It's an 86.4785 percent match to the shuttle craft issued to a Humanoid Alliance class A warship, Captain."

"That shuttle craft is on trajectory to reach the border, Captain," Grid notified him.

Intrepid's gut relayed it was a decoy. But he had to treat it as a legitimate threat. "Instruct Fleet 1 to intercept the shuttle craft at the border."

"Fleet 1 has been instructed to intercept the shuttle craft at the border, Captain." Strike relayed that command.

"Another object has split from the ship, Captain." Grid's eyes gleamed.

"It is a 99.9999 percent match to the escape pod issued to a Humanoid Alliance class A warship, Captain." Choice supplied that intel without being queried. The new addition to Intrepid's crew was learning.

“That escape pod is on a different trajectory to reach the border, Captain.” Grid relayed a status Intrepid had projected.

It was another decoy. No one utilized escape pods for casual travel.

“That’s a clever strategy.” Intrepid was impressed.

Most captains would’ve split their fleets into two factions after the first decoy was launched. They would’ve sent 50.0000 percent or more of warships to investigate the shuttle craft and left a small number of warships to guard their battle station.

A second decoy requiring investigation would deplete that force to nothing.

Intrepid wasn’t most captains. He hadn’t sent 50.0000 percent or more of his warships to investigate the shuttle craft. His forces wouldn’t be depleted to nothing. “Instruct Fleet 2 to intercept the escape pod at the border.”

“Fleet 2 has been instructed to intercept the escape pod at the border, Captain.” Strike nodded.

“The warship is now flying at its unmodified top speed, Captain.” Grid’s forehead furrowed. “It is moving parallel to the border.”

“And is it moving in the opposite direction of the shuttle craft and the escape pod?” Intrepid already processed the answer to his query.

“Yes, Captain.” His navigator glanced at him. “What are they...” He paused. “They’re putting as much distance between the entry points as possible.”

“That ensures the fleets we’ve already deployed can’t intercept their main ship.” Strike had reached the same conclusion. “They don’t process we have more warships.”

“They project we only have a battle station left. If they detect that.” Drift’s lips twisted. “And a warship can outfly a battle station.”

“Fly the Dauntless parallel to the border also.” The battle station couldn’t match the enemy’s speed, but Intrepid wanted it positioned as close to the warship as possible.

“Fleet 1 is within hailing distance of the shuttle craft, Captain.” Argot tapped his fingertips against the control panel embedded in the console in front of him.

“Hail the shuttle craft.” There was a mere 11.7815 percent probability that would be effective.

“Hailing the shuttle craft, Captain.” His communications officer’s head dipped. “Fleet 2 is now also within hailing distance of the escape pod.”

It was futile to hail an escape pod. The emergency vessels hosted basic communication systems. “Instruct fleet 2 to perform a lifeform scan of the escape pod.”

“Fleet 2 is performing a lifeform scan of the escape pod, Captain.” Argot frowned. “There is no response to Fleet 1’s hail of the shuttle craft.”

Intrepid projected there wouldn’t be a response. “Instruct Fleet 1 to perform a lifeform scan of the shuttle craft.”

“Fleet 1 is performing a lifeform scan of the shuttle craft, Captain.” Argot relayed that order. “The lifeform scan of the escape pod came back negative. There were no lifeforms detected.”

“Fraggin’ hole.” Grid shook his head. “They programmed the escape pod to fly to the border.”

Intrepid hadn’t been surprised by that tactic. It was what he would have done.

Especially if he was the sole occupant of the warship. As he projected the captain was.

“The lifeform scan of the shuttle craft was also negative.” Argot confirmed both vessels were decoys.

“Fleet 1 is to down the shuttle craft as it enters the sector.” Intrepid didn’t want it flying pilotless through their space. “Fleet 2 is to down the escape pod as it enters the sector.”

Strike verified that order was relayed.

“The warship is approaching the border, Captain.” Grid communicated that information.

“Position the Dauntless as close to the warship’s projected entry point as possible.” Intrepid wanted to ensure the enemy processed they were detected. “Fleets 3 and 4 are to be situated along the border but are to remain outside the warship’s standard monitoring range.”

If the captain of the warship detected Fleets 3 and 4 too early, she would merely move the entry point. Intrepid didn’t want to chase his opponent all along the cyborg-controlled sector border.

“The warship is adjusting its trajectory, Captain.” Grid grinned. “They’re outside standard monitoring range.”

Its captain had assumed their range hadn’t been modified.

They were cyborgs. Extending it was one of the first tasks they’d undertaken.

“Maintain our position.” Intrepid’s goal, to make his foe aware of the

Dauntless's presence, had been achieved.

"They're within hailing distance, Captain." Argot glanced at him.

The warship captain was a hostile. Her actions conveyed that truth.

She wouldn't respond to a hail. But it was cyborg protocol to attempt to communicate with any ships approaching the sector. And Intrepid had to follow that protocol. "Hail the warship."

"Hailing the warship, Captain." His communications officer pursed his lips. He expected no response also.

"It must be the Valkyrie." Drift murmured that statement.

"It isn't the Humanoid Alliance. That's 100.0000 percent certain." Grid, like most cyborgs, had no respect for their manufacturers. "The warship's captain is skilled at battle strategy."

The other officers nodded in agreement. That was high praise from their kind.

And it was warranted. Intrepid's circuits sang with the thrill of confronting a warrior matching his prowess. He processed if he made one error, she would evade him.

"The warship isn't responding to the hail, Captain." Argot delivered that predictable news.

"Perform a lifeform scan on the warship." Protocol also stated that, if possible, the captain of any ship entering the sector be informed of any lifeform scans being performed on their vessel.

The warship captain had foregone that courtesy when she hadn't answered their hail.

"There are two lifeforms detected, Captain." Strike surprised Intrepid with that revelation. "One human. One humanoid. Both females."

Intrepid leaned back in his chair.

Valkyries were all females. They were humanoid. And they often fought alongside other beings.

She could have paired with a human.

"A human *would* be involved." Argot muttered that comment under his breath.

"My mother is human." Choice defended his parent's kind. "They aren't all bad."

"This isn't about good or bad." Intrepid lacked sufficient information to apply either of those labels to the Valkyrie. "The warship is approaching our border. Its occupants aren't responding to our hails. And they're actively

trying to avoid us. We have to assume they're hostile. Hostile vessels entering our space are downed. By us. That is our directive. Do you have a problem with that, cyborg?"

"No, Captain." Choice straightened in his seat.

"I didn't project you would have one." Intrepid expected total commitment from his crew.

He watched the progress of the enemy's ship.

Intrepid was 100.0000 percent certain the humanoid and human females were enemies of himself and of his brethren. There was an 89.2875 percent probability he would never process why they had targeted his kind.

But they were hostile. And his orders were to stop them.

He would follow those orders.

"The warship has crossed the border, Captain." Grid gave him that update.

Intrepid waited for a few more moments. He wanted the warship to be deep enough into the sector that it couldn't reverse out of it.

Because he would wager his left arm the captain would try to enter cyborg space again if that was possible. And they might not detect her during the next attempt.

"Instruct Fleet 3 to intercept the warship." He gave that order. "Instruct Fleet 4 to block the warship's retreat from the rear."

Strike conveyed his commands to the Fleet captains.

The captain of the warship spotted Fleet 3 first. The vessel slowed and started to turn.

She then must have detected Fleet 4. The warship stopped.

His prey was caught. Intrepid allowed himself a small smile of triumph.

"We're being hailed, Captain." Argot met his gaze.

If Intrepid was 100.0000 certain the humanoid on the warship was the Valkyrie, he would ignore the attempt at communications. He would complete the mission assigned to him by Power, the leader of the Cyborg Council, and blow the vessel out of space, ensuring there was nothing recoverable.

But he wasn't 100.0000 certain they were facing the Valkyrie. "Open communications with the warship."

"Opening communications with the warship, Captain." Argot swiped his fingers over the controls.

"Tell your warships to back off and let me pass, cyborg." The sexiest

voice Intrepid had ever heard filled his bridge.

Energy coursed through his circuits. His breath caught as his respiratory system temporarily malfunctioned. His body hardened. His cock pressed against the confines of his body armor.

He wanted the speaker. With every nanocybotic in his battle-blasted soul.

And he processed what his reaction to her voice meant, but he wasn't ready to articulate it yet. Not even to himself.

"Because if your warships don't retreat, I'll fuckin' fire on them." She acted as though she was the being in control of the situation. "I'll down their asses."

Intrepid found her bravado extremely alluring.

"I'll die." The female's tone relayed she'd accepted that fate. "Every being, even our kinds, eventually die. But I'll go out fighting, as warriors should, and I'll take as many of your cyborgs with me as possible."

"Even *our* kinds?" Intrepid's voice deepened with wanting. "Do you equate yourself with cyborgs, Valkyrie?" He sought confirmation of her identity, hoping his projection wasn't accurate.

"You're *not* my fuckin' equal." Her indignation was palpable.

And her lack of denial verified her identity.

Intrepid gazed with enthralled horror at the image of the warship on the main viewscreen.

She was the enemy he'd been waiting to stop.

"I was fighting foes while you were still a fuckin' sheet of unformed metal." She hurled that insult at him.

Frag. She was magnificent.

"You might have more solar cycles than I do." He recognized that truth. "But based on this confrontation, it appears I'm the superior warrior."

"You're *not* the superior warrior." Her fury expanded.

As he had projected it would do. Her passion fed his need.

"You're currently surrounded by *my* warships." His tone held a hint of taunting. "I *am* the superior warrior, Valkyrie."

"That's the Valkyrie," Choice whispered. His voice was edged with awe.

Every cyborg on the bridge gazed at Intrepid. Power had told them to down the Valkyrie's ship and ensure there was nothing left to recover.

They had all heard those instructions, and they now waited for Intrepid to issue that order.

His officers expected him to kill the skilled female warrior on the other

end of the communications line.

He *should* do that. Immediately. Before she took some wild action that might harm his crew.

Intrepid's lips flattened.

The safety of everyone in the cyborg-controlled sector relied on him giving that command.

But he couldn't form the words. His databases were empty of the vocabulary needed for that directive.

All he could process was her.

Her voice. Her words. Her bravery in the face of certain death.

"That doesn't make you the superior warrior." She was so fraggin' confident, and that appealed to him. "It makes you lucky."

Intrepid *had* luck. That was certain.

He projected it was the bad kind.

The glorious being on the other end of the communication lines was his genetic match, the one being he was destined to care for, bond with, protect.

That should've been cause for celebration.

He had found his female. Many of his brethren would never accomplish that feat. They'd live their long lifespans without that companionship, that fulfillment, that hope.

Any other warrior in any other circumstance would view himself as being fortunate.

Except he wasn't one of those warriors, and he was enduring the worst type of circumstances.

Because his genetic match was the Valkyrie, his assigned target, his enemy.

She was the danger he'd been sensing. The warrior female was a threat to everyone he cared about and to everything he had sworn to uphold.

Intrepid had to stop her. Permanently.

And that would tear his heart straight out of his chest. Any possibility of happiness in his future would be brutally quashed. He would be an empty shell of a warrior, barely functional.

But he'd take that dire action. He'd blow up her warship.

Because that was his duty.

CHAPTER FOUR

The cyborg was *not* the superior warrior.

Olrun glared at the image of the battle station on the main viewscreen. She was a Valkyrie. Her kind had been fighting wars long before some planets existed. She had defeated foes and wielded weapons the battle station captain had never fuckin' seen in historical databases.

But the cyborg *was*, admittedly, a skilled strategist.

She and Jane had been maneuvered into an unwinnable position. At the moment, Olrun could conceive of no possible way to escape his trap.

They were dead beings in space.

All he had to do was issue the command, and they would be blasted into bits.

That truth escalated her fury. At the cyborgs. At the Humanoid Alliance who started all her current mess.

And at herself.

She'd fucked up. Again. Their situation was all her fault.

When Jane had proposed they distract the cyborg defenses by sending crewless vessels toward their border, Olrun had decided two decoys were adequate.

That was solely on her. And she didn't think it could possibly be the wrong call.

Shit. She'd thought she was being cautious.

One decoy would've been adequate for most foes.

But the cyborgs weren't most foes. And she suspected the battle station captain wasn't most cyborgs. He'd been manufactured to wage war, and he was clearly damn good at that task.

The cyborg had anticipated the two decoys. He had held back part of his forces.

Fuck. Who did that?

The battle station captain did that. That was who.

Olrun begrudgingly respected him for that decision. It was fuckin' brilliant. And he now had her and her daughter surrounded.

"Being lucky and being skilled aren't mutually exclusive." The cyborg's deep voice curled her boot-covered toes.

Valkyries were beings of passion. They fought hard and they fucked hard. But she had never desired a being—foe or ally—like she desired the battle station captain.

And she wanted him based on his deep tones and his warrior skills alone.

She hadn't yet seen the male.

Her fucked-up need for him increased her anger. She clenched her jaw.

"Luck is part of battle." He didn't discount his good fortune. Any experienced warrior recognized its impact on their success.

Luck was part of battle.

And every warrior realized there would come a planet rotation when luck wouldn't be on their side. They'd die at that time, preferably with a sword in their hands.

She reached over her right shoulder and drifted her fingertips across the hilt of the immaculately maintained weapon strapped to her back. That connection with the weapon soothed her.

Olrun had accepted death in battle would be her fate. She'd lived longer than many of her sisters and most other beings in the universe. It was a good end for a warrior.

And the Valkyries in the Sanctuary would be safe. She didn't have to worry about them. The power of her lost dagger and the rest of her weapons would vanish with her death. Their energy was linked to her, and when she perished, that energy perished also.

But Jane, fuck, Jane would die with her. Olrun glanced at her daughter's beautiful face. Her fuckin' error would shorten Jane's already too-short lifespan, and that made her fuckin' furious.

She hated the battle station captain for taking advantage of her mistake.

"Luck is fickle. It can turn on a warrior at any moment." Olrun delivered that as the threat it was. While there was air in her lungs, she would try to figure out a way to fuckin' defeat him. "Tell your forces to back off and let

my ship pass, cyborg.”

“You’re not advancing farther into cyborg space.” He denied that request. As she figured he would. “And my name is Intrepid.”

Intrepid. She silently repeated his name. It suited him. The male was fearless.

“I’m not retreating.” She and her daughter had come too far and risked too much to do that. “Not without my dagger, the dagger your kind stole from me.”

“A cyborg stole a dagger from you?” The battle station captain’s, Intrepid’s tone held doubt.

“The Humanoid Alliance stole my fuckin’ dagger.” After she had made yet another costly mistake.

Jane rubbed her knees. That was the place on her daughter’s body where her organic and mechanical legs joined.

Olrun hated that her daughter had paid that price for her error. “Your kind stole that dagger from the Humanoid Alliance.” She told the cyborg. That chain of events was a guess on her part. She wasn’t certain they’d taken her weapon. She didn’t know who the fuck had it. “It was stored in a structure on Keid 9.”

There was silence.

The lack of denial confirmed her speculation. The cyborgs had her blade.

“Return the dagger to me, its rightful owner, and I’ll exit your sector.” It irked her, but she would forgo her vengeance to keep her daughter safe.

“There are two beings on board your warship.” The battle station captain must’ve run a lifeform scan.

Fuck. She hadn’t wanted the cyborgs to know about Jane.

The less an enemy uncovered the better.

“Return the blade, and we will exit your sector.” Olrun amended her demand.

There was another pause.

She doubted Intrepid was contemplating returning the weapon. He was more likely preparing to issue the kill order to his warriors.

Olrun put communications on mute. “Jane...”

“I always knew we’d die in battle, Mom.” Her daughter gave her a heart-wrenchingly brave smile. She was such a badass. “I say we blow up some warships and enter Valhalla in a blaze of glory.”

“You have the heart of a Valkyrie.” Admiration expanded Olrun’s chest.

“I’m proud to be your mom.”

“I’m proud to be your daughter.” Jane’s eyes glowed.

Her daughter deserved more moments of living.

The full weight of the failure rested on Olrún’s shoulders. She had to make one more attempt to save Jane’s lifespan.

Olrún unmuted communications. “The weapon rightfully belongs to me, Intrepid.” She tamped down her anger and softened her voice. “The honorable response would be to return the dagger.”

She appealed to his sense of fairness. If he had any.

“Returning your dagger isn’t an option.” The cyborg was determined to be an ass.

“But sacrificing your lifespan is an option?” Her fury flared. “Oh. But that’s right.” She lifted her eyebrows. “It isn’t your lifespan you’re risking, is it? You’ve sent other beings to fight your battles for you.”

She deliberately pricked at his pride, seeking to goad him into leaving his battle station and facing them directly. If she and Jane were to die, they would take the battle station captain with them.

That would be a good death.

“You push too hard, Valkyrie.” The cyborg growled.

The sound wet her pussy and tightened her nipples.

“You haven’t yet seen how hard I can push.” She leaned over the console. “Tell the families of those beings you sacrificed that Olrún dispatched them to Valhalla.” She paused. “Or wherever your kind believes warriors go when they’re dead.”

Her fingers hovered over the console. With one tap of her fingertips, she could shoot a missile at the nearest cyborg warship.

They would return fire.

And she and her daughter would die.

Fuck. She hated that she had to do that but—

“Stop.” Intrepid barked that order.

And fuck her but she did stop.

“None of the other beings have to be sacrificed, Olrún.” He said her name like a caress. That did fuckin’ funky things to her core. “This doesn’t have to involve my warriors. Or the human on your warship.”

She frowned. “What are you proposing?”

“A battle.” He captured her with those two words. “Between you and me. On the surface of a life-supporting planet. Blades and bodies only.”

The cyborg had made a mistake.

Her lips curled upward. She was unbeatable at being-to-being combat. The male would die, and her daughter would have an opportunity to escape. Possibly. “What happens when I win?”

“*If* you win, you’ll receive the full protection of my crew.” Intrepid shocked her with those terms.

There must be thousands of cyborgs on board the battle station in front of them and in the warships positioned all around them.

That would be a formidable force. All safeguarding Jane.

Her daughter would survive her most recent mistake.

“And my dagger?” That was the reason they had entered the sector. “Will it be returned to me?”

“You’ll control a battle station.” The cyborg’s tone was dry. “You’ll have negotiating power.”

She would have to be content with that.

Jane waved her hands vigorously. She must’ve had some issue with the discussions.

Olrun had no issue with it. It sounded like a win to her.

She ignored her daughter’s increasingly frantic movements and concentrated on the opportunity they’d been presented. “I’ll fight you.” Fuck. She’d fight Intrepid for no reward.

“We’re still negotiating.” He sounded amused. “If I win—”

“You won’t win.” Olrun shook her head. She was certain about that.

“*If* I win, I’ll ensure your human exits the sector safely.” He added that generous term to their negotiations.

She opened her mouth, prepared to accept that offer.

Jane muted the conversation. “No. You’re not agreeing to this, Mom. It’s a trap.”

“We’re surrounded by warships.” Olrun gestured at the main viewscreen. “We can’t be more trapped than we are at this moment. And he *could* be honorable. We *could* gain a battle station crewed by cyborgs. They’re... adequate warriors.” They weren’t Valkyries, but they had *some* battle skills. “And they’ll know where my dagger is located.”

“You’re assuming it will be a fair fight.” Her daughter didn’t doubt she’d win in an equable situation.

“It *might* be a fair fight.” She wouldn’t know that until it started. “What do we have to lose?”

“They could capture you, torture you, do worse.” Jane had a legitimate point.

That could happen. “That’ll distract them and you can escape.”

Her daughter’s face darkened. “You’re taking this risk for me.”

The prospect of Jane being safe whether she won or lost *did* appeal to her. “I agreed to the fight before he offered to see you safely to the border on the slim—” Olrun held up her right index finger. “—the very slim chance that I lost.” That wouldn’t happen. “It’s a battle, Jane. With blades and body attacks. Against an...adequate warrior. No Valkyrie can resist that.”

“That’s true. No Valkyrie could resist that.” Her daughter blew out her breath. “If he defeats you—”

“He won’t defeat me.” Olrun assured her.

“*If* he defeats you, know that I *will* avenge you.” Jane’s eyes gleamed. “I will blast him into nuts and bolts, and I will bellow your name as my war cry when he dies.”

Olrun smiled her approval. “Spoken like a Valkyrie, daughter.” She returned her attention to her foe. “Now, unmute communications and let me agree to this battle.”

“You’ll agree to it *again*,” her daughter mumbled as she complied with that command.

“It *will* be a fair fight.” Intrepid sounded insulted.

How? Olrun mouthed that word to Jane.

He shouldn’t have heard their discussion.

Her daughter glanced down at the control panel and then lifted her hands into the air. She didn’t know how that was possible either.

They should’ve been on mute. Either the mute wasn’t working...

Or someone had unmuted them. “Did you hack into our warship’s systems?”

“Your communication lines aren’t secure.” Intrepid sighed.

His disappointment in her, his enemy, irritated the shit out of her. “Fuck you, cyborg.”

“Your visuals are also malfunctioning.” He volunteered that information. “We couldn’t see you or your daughter.”

Olrun’s Valkyrie glow had fried that system over solar cycles of use. “Don’t worry. You’ll know who *I* am.” And he’d never get close enough to her daughter to see her. “I’ll be the warrior with her sword tip buried deep in your metal frame.”

His chuckle fluttered her stomach. “You won’t touch my metal frame, but I *will* recognize you. Valkyries are...distinctive.”

How did he know that? Olrún narrowed her eyes at the image of the battle station on the main viewscreen. “You’ve fought one of my kind?”

“No.” He eased her concerns with that admission. “I saw the female across a battlefield.”

The Valkyrie glow would’ve made her more visible. It intensified during battle.

“Ah. I wondered why you were still alive.” She would be the Valkyrie to kill him. “Where and when do we fuckin’ fight?”

It was his sector. He had the knowledge to set the details.

That would give him a slight advantage.

“We fight in two shifts. At sunrise.” Her foe gave her time to prepare and to rest. “I’ll send you the coordinates of both the landing site and the battlefield within one shift. You’ll be escorted to the planet’s surface by my warriors. The human will remain with your warship. No one will damage her.”

“If any of your kind approaches her, they’ll die.” Olrún glanced at Jane.

Her daughter nodded. She would protect herself.

“No one will approach her.” Intrepid confirmed that. “I give you my vow.”

Olrún wasn’t a fool. “Vows aren’t always kept.”

“My vows are.” Sincerity wrapped around her opponent’s words. “Cyborgs can’t lie. That’s built into our programming.”

She tilted her head slightly to the side.

That was an interesting development. If it was true.

She might be able to use that weakness.

“You’ll travel on foot to the fight location.” Intrepid continued to convey the details of their upcoming confrontation. “Take only the blades you can carry on your form. Body gear is allowed.”

“Including helmets?” The winged headpiece was a part of a Valkyrie’s battle garment.

“Helmets are allowed.” He didn’t deny her that protection. “You can utilize anything you find on the battlefield.”

The sourcing of makeshift weapons happened in war. It was a thrillingly messy event. Beings used everything they could find to defeat their enemies.

“If you have additional queries, hail the battle station and I’ll answer

them.” The cyborg’s calmness communicated his experience. An upcoming fight to the death didn’t faze him.

It would be a good battle, a test of her skills. “Until then, cyborg.”

“Until then, Olrun.” He closed communications.

“I’ll figure out how to better secure our systems.” Jane, judging by her tone, had taken umbrage at that exposure. “I’ve already started compiling being-to-being battle footage featuring cyborgs. And other information on them.”

Her daughter did that for every battle they entered. “Is there any way to determine what model he is?”

An early C Model cyborg would fight differently than a more recently manufactured K Model. They had different body types and different skill sets.

“I doubt it. Not without a visual.” Jane sighed. “We’ll have to prepare for any model.”

“That will suck time.” Olrun stood. “But we’ve prepared to fight multiple species in the past. This will be like that.”

“We’ve never before had merely two shifts to prepare for a battle.” Jane scanned the control panel embedded in the console before her. “And you have to rest. You need to be at full strength.”

Olrun had to do a lot of things. She drew her sword from its sheath and studied the blade. It was permanently sharp. The gold metal reflected her glow.

In two shifts, that weapon would be covered with cyborg blood.

Her thirst for vengeance would be appeased. And the ridiculous wanting deep in her core would go away. Her enemy, the battle station captain with the sexy voice, would be dead.

She wouldn’t examine why that prospect saddened her. “I’ll kill him quickly.” Prolonging the battle increased enjoyment of it, but it also created more space for mistakes.

Her gaze settled on her daughter. Too many errors had already been made.

“Also research livable planets within the cyborg sector.” Knowledge of terrain would be crucial. “The cyborg was concerned about additional fatalities. Assume the planet is sparsely populated.”

She sheathed her sword and drew a dagger. It was created from the same material. Its blade was as sharp.

Olrun had never encountered a material it couldn't cut through.

It should pierce a cyborg's frame.

If it couldn't accomplish that feat...she'd die. "I love you, Jane. Never doubt that."

"I've never questioned that. Ever." Her daughter gazed at her for a moment. "You can do this, Mom."

"I can do this." Olrun shifted the dagger from her right hand to her left and back again.

She had to win the upcoming battle. To protect her daughter, the being she loved more than life, more than war.

"The battle station captain—" Intrepid. "—will die."

She firmed her resolve, and she shrouded herself in energizing anger.

The cyborgs had her dagger. They were fucking with her daughter's safety by keeping it.

She would punish them for that by killing one of their best warriors.

CHAPTER FIVE

Intrepid had been ordered to blast the Valkyrie out of space.

He hadn't been told to end her human daughter's lifespan.

And he had no wish to risk any of his crew. His gaze shifted to Choice, the newest addition to the Dauntless. The engineer was offspring, their kind's hope for the future.

He didn't want to put the kid or any of his warriors in danger unnecessarily.

The proposed battle on a planet's surface was a compromise. It would be enjoyable. He loved to fight, and his Valkyrie would be a worthy opponent.

Arranging the confrontation would also give him time to investigate the situation.

Because, if his female was telling the truth, the object Power had claimed for the cyborgs rightfully belonged to her. The honorable response would be to return the dagger to her.

His Valkyrie was a humanoid, however. She could lie.

Power didn't have that ability.

"Open a communication line with Power." That conversation had to be public. If the object did belong to the Valkyrie, and the leader of the Cyborg Council insisted on keeping it from her, his crew had to process why they would be refusing a direct order.

Intrepid wouldn't kill the Valkyrie. Not for asking that her own weapon was returned to her.

Especially as she was his female. Energy coursed through his circuits. She was the one being he was manufactured to protect, to cherish, to spend his long lifespan with.

“Opening a communication line with Power, Captain.” Argot repeated that command.

An image of the Cyborg Council leader’s countenance was displayed on the main viewscreen.

“I contact you. You don’t contact me.” The male was in full arrogant-ass mode.

“The Valkyrie is seeking an object. Does that object belong to her?” Intrepid had no emotional bandwidth for futile chatter.

Power’s dark eyes flashed. “You are to follow orders, not question them.”

He hadn’t answered the query.

Because he couldn’t lie.

Intrepid gritted his teeth.

The Valkyrie had relayed the truth. The dagger *did* belong to her.

“The object should be returned to her.” He would undertake that task. “It’s hers.”

“The *object* is a dagger.” Power bit off each word. “And it’s an extremely dangerous weapon. The Valkyrie allowed it to fall into the Humanoid Alliance’s possession, where it could’ve been used against us. She isn’t worthy of controlling it.”

“The dagger is *hers*.” Intrepid didn’t process the full situation.

He had no intel regarding how his Valkyrie had lost possession of the weapon or how the dagger was a threat to his kind.

But he did process it belonged to her.

“Weapons were amongst the few possessions we took with us when we escaped the Humanoid Alliance.” He locked his gaze with Power’s. “They were important to our survival and to us. To deprive another warrior of her weapon would be...dishonorable.”

“We’re retaining control of the dagger.” The Cyborg Council leader jutted his chin. He wasn’t moving on his position.

But he had revealed more of his stance on it.

Power cared about control, not possession.

Those were two very different things.

“The dagger will never be outside the range of my monitoring systems.” Intrepid didn’t plan to be farther away from his Valkyrie than that. She was his genetic match. He would follow her to the ends of the universe.

If she didn’t kill him first.

“But I do need access to the weapon.” He would show his warrior female

he was operating honorably.

“Access denied.” Power denied that request also.

“I’m meeting with the Valkyrie.” Intrepid had to relay that development to Power. The meeting, or battle, would be held within the cyborg-controlled sector.

“I didn’t authorize you to meet with the Valkyrie.” Power’s lips flattened. “Your orders were to blow her and her ship up.”

“I sought to limit our casualties.” That wasn’t a lie but it also wasn’t the full truth. “A face-to-face confrontation places only my lifespan at risk.”

The Cyborg Council leader narrowed his eyes at him. “The only acceptable outcome of your face-to-face *meeting* is the Valkyrie’s death.”

“An alliance with the Valkyries could benefit our kind.” An alliance with his Valkyrie would *greatly* benefit him. Intrepid’s circuits coursed with need at the mere prospect of it.

“Valkyries don’t form lasting alliances.” Power frowned. “They’ll fight with a group this planet rotation and, then, a solar cycle later, they’ll fight against them. No.” He shook his head. “The only acceptable resolution is the Valkyrie dies.”

Frag. The Cyborg Council leader was stubborn.

“I’ll deal with the Valkyrie.” Intrepid wouldn’t commit to more than that.

“Deal with her. *Permanently.*” Power’s tone was firm.

Intrepid nodded. There was an 89.7744 percent probability any solution he derived with his Valkyrie would be permanent.

“The face-to-face meeting will be held within our sector, on Praecipua Minor.” Power set the site of the battle. “Chatter with Grin and his female about those details. And inform them you’ll take temporary possession of the dagger.

He verified Intrepid’s projections. The dagger was one of the weapons stored on that planet.

“After you’ve dealt with the Valkyrie. *Permanently.*” The Cyborg Council leader reinforced that order. “And you’ve relayed possession of the dagger back to Grin and his female, you are to return to the Homeland.”

Fraggin’ hole. Intrepid lifted his chin. That didn’t bode well for him. “The border requires protecting.”

“The border will be protected.” Power’s countenance hardened. “You are to return to the Homeland.”

He hadn’t blown up the Valkyrie’s warship and had therefore earned a

reprimand for ignoring that direct order. Intrepid swallowed his irritation and focused on mitigation. “My crew wasn’t involved in any of my decisions regarding the Valkyrie. They warrant no censure.”

“I decide what they warrant.” Power’s lips twisted. “I expect *you* to obey orders and deal with the Valkyrie.”

The male closed communications.

The image displayed on the Dauntless’s main viewscreen reverted to footage of the Valkyrie’s ship. It hadn’t moved. It *couldn’t* move. The vessel was surrounded by his warships.

Every warrior on his battle station could be reprimanded because Intrepid refused to blow up his female. Guilt pricked his heart.

But that regret was offset by excitement, joy, and lust.

Because he would soon meet his female, his one genetic match. He would fight her.

And he would touch her. His fingers twitched. That was a 100.0000 percent certainty. They were battling at close quarters with blades and hands.

And possibly mouths. His lips curved. He would—

“Permission to speak freely, Captain.” Strike, his second-in-command, interrupted his projections.

Intrepid wiped all emotions from his face, hiding his passions under a blank mask. “Permission granted.”

“We—” Strike indicated the warriors positioned around him. “—the crew and I, support your decision to disobey the Cyborg Council orders. The Valkyrie would’ve followed through on her threat to fire on our warships. Her kind are fierce.” His tone held reverence. “And they’re skilled. Some of our brethren would’ve died during that confrontation.”

“That is noted.” Intrepid didn’t need their support. He was their captain. But he appreciated having it.

“But we have reservations about the being-to-being battle.” Strike wasn’t done. “There has to be a way to avoid the fight, and—”

“I have no wish to avoid the fight.” Intrepid’s cock hardened at the mere projection of battling his warrior female.

“She’s a *Valkyrie*, Captain.” Strike gawked at him.

As did the others on the bridge.

“Valkyries are some of the most skilled warriors in the universe.” His second-in-command relayed intel Intrepid already had. “They’re strong and fast and have been fighting for thousands of solar cycles. Or longer than that.

No one processes when they were manufactured. They're legendary."

"We'll be evenly matched." Intrepid liked that.

Battle was an important part of his lifespan. His genetic match, his Valkyrie, would fight by his side during future mock battles and real confrontations.

"You'll have command of the Dauntless during the battle." He met Strike's gaze.

The enemy could attack while he was distracted. The battle station required a captain on board who could respond quickly to any threat.

He projected his second-in-command would be honored by the temporary role.

Instead, the male appeared horrified. "You are too important to our kind, Captain, to risk in battle. I volunteer to fight in your stead."

"Frag, no." Grid, their navigator, rolled his eyes. "You're too important also. I volunteer."

Every male on the bridge offered to take Intrepid's place. They argued that they were the most expendable. And they all projected they would lose their proposed battles with his Valkyrie.

His males were offering to die to save his lifespan.

That threatened to down Intrepid's emotional system. "No one is fighting in my stead." His voice was gruff. "This is my battle to win."

Silence sliced like a sword through the bridge.

They gazed at him. Protests were written across their countenances.

That was how passionate they felt about him not fighting. They were willing to be insubordinate to stop him from facing his husky-voiced foe.

He had to tell them. "The Valkyrie is my female."

Jaws dropped.

"The...the Valkyrie..." Strike's speech system malfunctioned.

The males were cyborgs. They had heard him.

"The Valkyrie is my female." Intrepid repeated that statement because he liked saying it. She was his female. He had found his genetic match.

She might kill him. The anger in her voice had been palpable, and she was a warrior through and through. There was a 91.2589 percent probability she planned to hack him into small pieces.

He'd willingly risk that fate to meet with her, smell her, touch her.

"Does she process she's your female?" Strike's eyebrows lifted.

"My mom says she knew my dad was her warrior the moment they met."

Choice, the sole offspring on the battle station, volunteered that information.

“Your mom isn’t a Valkyrie.” Grid shook his head. “Valkyries process war and little else.”

“She has a human daughter.” Argot pointed that fact out.

“She brought that fragile human daughter into a conflict with her.” Cure’s tone was dry.

“She accepted a being-to-being battle to save her fragile human daughter’s lifespan.” Argot met Intrepid’s gaze. “I’ll ensure the daughter’s safety while you’re occupied with the battle.”

It was Intrepid’s turn to be surprised. There was no reason for the Dauntless’s communications officer to volunteer as the daughter’s protector.

Unless... “She’s *your* genetic match.”

It was Argot’s turn to be gaped at.

The male’s expression was blank. He said nothing.

Which said everything. The Valkyrie’s daughter was the warrior’s female.

Frag. Intrepid raked his fingers through his closely cropped hair. That complicated the situation. He would not only be battling for his future happiness but also for that of his communications officer.

“All my vows to the Valkyrie are to be honored.” He looked at the trusted beings on the Dauntless’s bridge. “Argot will protect the daughter.” That was the male’s right as the human female’s warrior. “If I fall in battle—” He had to plan for that possibility. “—you will also protect the Valkyrie.” She was his female. That was *his* right. But he would be dead. They would have to complete that task for him. “Ensure she recovers her dagger and is escorted safely out of the sector.”

“We will protect your female, Captain.” Strike’s expression was grim.

The other officers, including the rarely serious Grid, were equally solemn. They didn’t like their orders, but they had accepted them.

Intrepid relaxed.

His female’s future was secured. She and her daughter would be protected.

He could focus on their upcoming battle and on winning his Valkyrie—body, mind, and heart.

Intrepid next reached out to Grin and Grin's female through the communication lines.

Their reaction to the intel about the Valkyrie was calm. They had expected her to try to retrieve her dagger, had anticipated her arrival, and they expressed gratitude that Intrepid was meeting with her and they didn't have to tackle that task.

There were no alarms raised over the weapon possibly returning to her possession. Their reactions consisted mostly of relief.

That dissipated Intrepid's lingering trepidations that he was doing the wrong thing, that he was putting the rest of the sector at risk. If Grin and Grin's female—two beings acutely familiar with the dagger and the dagger's powers—weren't concerned, he shouldn't be concerned either.

A cleared field near the couple's settlement was proposed as the location of the battle. The humanoids living in the area would be temporarily relocated. Grin's female would give Intrepid the dagger when he landed on the planet's surface. He would carry it on his form during the confrontation.

His Valkyrie should then process he was operating in good faith. Her questioning of his honor had stung. Intrepid prided himself on his integrity.

He sent the coordinates for the landing site and for the battle to his Valkyrie.

"Open communication lines with the warship." He'd chatter with her also. The need to hear her voice again, to reassure himself she was real, was too great for him to resist.

"Opening communication lines with the warship, Captain." Argot appeared more animated than Intrepid had seen him to be in solar cycles.

"She's sleeping." The human daughter answered the hail. "Do you need to speak with her?"

Argot glanced at him. His eyes glowed.

The male wanted to chatter with his female.

Intrepid swallowed his impatience and nodded. He could wait to speak with his Valkyrie.

"The captain asked that communication lines be opened." The battle station's communications officer's voice trembled slightly.

Intrepid had never heard it malfunction like that.

"Oh. Who's this?" Argot's female wanted to chatter also. "I'm Jane. I'm the human daughter." Her laugh was edged with nervous energy. "But you want to talk to my mom. I know. You don't want to talk to me."

“I want to talk to you, my Jane,” Argot assured her. “We could chatter in the future. Just the two of us.” He paused. “If you would like that.”

“I’d like that.” Jane’s voice softened. “And you are?”

“My name is Argot.” The male beamed. “Your Argot. I’m the Dauntless’s—the cyborg battle station’s—communications officer.”

“You’re skilled at chattering then.” The female laughed again. “My Argot.” She claimed the warrior verbally. “I’ll go get my mom.”

Silence stretched.

The interchange between Argot and his Jane had been so easy. It was almost sweet.

Intrepid smiled. His interchange with his Valkyrie might be—

“What the fuck do you want now?” She blasted his projection apart with that response. “I was sleeping.” His Valkyrie sounded thrillingly aggravated.

And that aroused him. Greatly. Intrepid’s cock hardened. His simulated spine straightened.

“Valkyries sleep?” He leaned toward the main viewscreen. “You replenish your energy levels in that primitive way? You’re vulnerable in that state.”

“I’m one of the best damn warriors in the universe.” She snapped at him. “I’m not vulnerable in any fuckin’ state. What do you want, cyborg?”

He was *her* cyborg. And he wanted her.

“The ships guarding Praecipua Minor have been instructed to allow your warship to pass them.” He had arranged that with Grin and Grin’s female. “Both the landing site and the battle site will be devoid of other beings. Your daughter won’t be disturbed, and we can focus our processing power fully on the fight.”

“If anyone approaches our warship—”

“They won’t approach it.” No one wanted a confrontation with a Valkyrie. And he had given orders that everyone was to stay far away from the warship. “Your daughter will be safe.”

“She’ll be safe?” She snorted. “How can you assure that? Because I can’t fuckin’ assure it.” Her tone was edged with bitterness. “Is there a point to this communication? You could’ve sent all that information with the coordinates.”

Frag. He grinned. His female was magnificent.

“The battle will be over when one of us admits defeat.” He no longer planned to kill her.

“The battle will be over when your head is in my hands.” Her goal hadn’t modified. “I could kill you solely for interrupting my rest cycle.”

Her passion was extremely arousing.

“Do Valkyries dream?” Dreaming was a fascinating concept to Intrepid. He’d never experienced it, as cyborgs didn’t sleep.

“Do cyborgs ever shut up?” She made an aggravated noise. “We’re not friends, cyborg. I don’t want to chatter with you. I don’t want to get to know you. In a shift and a half, you’ll be dead.”

His female was attempting to put emotional distance between them. He processed that. It made the task of ending a lifespan easier.

“In a shift and a half, you’ll be conceding defeat.” And he would be restraining her.

Touching her, kissing her, breeding with her.

“Your brain or machine or whatever you have is broken.” She must have sensed his malfunction around her.

“I have processors and an organic brain.” He volunteered that information.

“I’ll never concede defeat.” Her confidence appealed to him. “I won’t have to fuckin’ do that. I’m killing your ass.”

“That’s an unusual body part to target,” he teased her.

“Fuck you.” A bark of laughter escaped her lips. That unexpected sound lit up his circuits. “I’m ending this conversation.”

The line went dead.

Intrepid swallowed a laugh. His Valkyrie was entertaining.

“She doesn’t process you’re her warrior.” Strike shook his head. “You might be fighting until there’s a concession. She’ll be fighting to the death.”

The other males on the bridge nodded.

“No genetic match has ever killed their cyborg.” The connection between them prohibited that from happening.

“No genetic match has ever been a Valkyrie.” His second-in-command muttered that truth under his breath.

Genetic matches were rare. And there were few Valkyries in the universe.

Intrepid would be the most fortunate of warriors.

If he survived his first meeting with his female.

“Prepare a shuttle craft.” He would utilize that smaller vessel to reach the planet’s surface.

“A shuttle craft is being prepared, Captain.” Choice gave him that update.

“Blades and other weapons are being placed in its cargo hold.”

“I’ll wield my own weapons.” Intrepid wouldn’t utilize untested blades in the upcoming battle.

He projected he’d require all his skill to defend himself against his extremely angry Valkyrie.

CHAPTER SIX

Olrun was ready for the upcoming battle. She vibrated with fuckin' excitement.

Or those tiny tremors could've been due to their descending warship.

Jane guided the vessel downward toward the designated landing site on Praecipua Minor. As the cyborg had vowed, the ships guarding the planet had parted when they approached, allowing them to pass.

They'd completed lifeform scans of the area. No beings were situated close to their destination. That greatly decreased the likelihood of an ambush.

Which was good, because Jane wasn't focused. At fuckin' all.

"Argot, the other cyborg, seemed nice." Her daughter had been chattering about the male since their one extremely brief conversation. "At least, I think he's a cyborg. We're in the cyborg sector. Yes." She nodded as she agreed with herself. "He must be a cyborg."

Their warship shuddered as they landed.

Olrun ran her fingers over the blades strapped to her armor. She had fought thousands of battles with those weapons. Touching them comforted her. They were like old friends.

"Cyborgs are half mechanical." Jane quieted the engines. "They might not freak out when they see a female with mechanical legs." She rubbed her knees. "Or say awful things to her." Her daughter glanced at her. "Not that I plan to be naked with Argot." She paused. "Though he *did* have a sexy voice."

Intrepid, Olrun's opponent, had a sexy voice also.

"Did that humanoid nourishment deliverer at the medic bay say awful things to you?" She frowned at Jane.

After forty-two planet rotations of raving about the male, her daughter had spent one rest cycle alone with him. And then she had never spoken to him or of him again.

Olrun had thought nothing of that. One-rest-cycle relationships were the Valkyrie way.

But now she realized she should've asked more fuckin' questions.

"I would rather talk about Argot." Jane studied the console in front of her.

The humanoid nourishment deliverer must have fucked with her daughter's gentle heart.

"After I kill this cyborg—" Olrun stood. "—we're returning to the medic bay, and I'm slicing that fuckin' male into tiny pieces. I'm starting with his toes and working my way upward. He'll plead for mercy before I reach his knees."

"Focus on this planet rotation's battle first." Her daughter sighed as she rose to her booted feet. "You have your weapons?"

"Check." Olrun tapped two of her dagger hilts.

"Your helmet?" Jane moved on to the next item.

Olrun grabbed the helmet and jammed it onto her head. It fit as though it was crafted for her...which it had been. "Check."

"Shield?" Her daughter handed that defense to her.

It was in immaculate condition. "Shields weren't mentioned, but I assume they're allowed."

"You can discard it if it's not." Jane shrugged. "We've reviewed the location. It's an easy run...for you...from here."

Valkyries could move much faster than humans. "I'll find the site." Her kind also had a great sense of direction. They'd been created long before handhelds and other devices were invented.

"The more humanlike a cyborg's eyes, the younger they are, and the less experience they'll have at fighting." Jane tugged on Olrun's left forearm armor, adjusting it. "The ones with gray skin and energy-infused blue eyes are the oldest warriors. They'll know what they're doing."

They were also, in Olrun's opinion, the best-looking cyborgs. She kept that observation to herself. "None of them have seen as many battles as I have, daughter." She sought to reassure Jane. "I'll dispatch him and return here before you've plotted our route out of the sector."

They would leave immediately. Long before the cyborgs could plot their revenge.

Her foe had promised they wouldn't be harmed. But, based on her past experiences, vows were discarded soon after the being died.

"Be careful." Concern reflected in Jane's eyes. "This won't be a typical battle. I feel that in my bones."

Olrun had the same trepidation. "If you witness anything unsettling, leave immediately." Her daughter's safety was most important to her. She was a Valkyrie. Her kind was always prepared to die. "I'll meet you in the next sector."

"Communicate if you can." Jane hugged her hard.

Olrun embraced her as fiercely. "I'll communicate at least once a shift." She pulled back. "If that is necessary." She met her daughter's gaze. "My foe should be defeated within moments."

"Your foe *should* be defeated?" Jane lifted her eyebrows.

Fuck. Her daughter caught that slip.

"He *will* be defeated within moments." She inserted the expected cockiness into the statement. "I have swords with more experience than the cyborg has." Olrun drew the weapon.

It felt good in her hands.

Jane didn't appear reassured. "Mom—"

"I'm leaving." Olrun strode off the bridge and through the hallways. She didn't want to hear any arguments why she shouldn't fight the cyborg. "Secure the ship once I've cleared the space."

She blasted through the doors, sprinted down the ramp, and headed toward the designated site. A solitary sun shone in an otherwise blue sky. Its rays heated her armor-clad shoulders. Unseen creatures trilled in the distance. The grass was high. It brushed against her thighs. The ground yielded slightly under her boots' heels.

A ship's engine rumbled. That must be her opponent arriving.

She tossed her sword from her right hand to her left and then back again, juggling the weapon, relishing its weight, its shape. Cyborgs were fast. They were strong. And they had skill.

It would be similar to battling another Valkyrie. And she had that experience. Whenever she returned to the Sanctuary, she trained with her warrior sisters.

During those skirmishes, blood was spilled. But death blows weren't delivered.

This planet rotation, she'd kill the cyborg.

That made her uneasy.

And that was dangerous. Doubt lost battles. A warrior had to strike without any hesitation.

Plus, it was a little too late in her lifespan for qualms. She'd killed countless opponents. The cyborg would merely be one more.

Olrun accelerated as she entered a forest. The trees limited visibility. That made her vulnerable to attack. She zigzagged between the thick trunks.

The battle station captain could take advantage of her fleeting weakness.

Most opponents would do that.

He wasn't special. Sure, his voice aroused her to a ridiculous extent. That, however, had to do with her lack of fucking over the past few solar cycles. It wasn't due to Intrepid.

It couldn't be him. He was the enemy, and she would kill him in mere moments.

The tree coverage cleared. More sunlight pierced the canopy.

She sensed the cyborg before she saw him. A shimmer of awareness swept over her form. Her pussy grew wet. Her nipples tightened against her metal armor.

Her arousal was...distracting.

Olrun fought to ignore it.

She sprinted around a huge pile of brush, and then she skidded soundlessly to a stop.

Her foe stood at the edge of the clearing.

The cyborg was taller than her. And that was rare. She was a large female. Many beings were shorter than she was. But she'd have to tilt her head upward to meet his gaze.

That excited her a bit.

As did his dominant stance. The cyborg's booted feet were braced apart. His shoulders were squared. His muscular form was clad in skintight black body armor.

He was highly visible, and he was waiting for her.

She was one of the best warriors in the universe. Their confrontation would result in his death. Yet he hadn't run from it or from her. He wasn't hiding.

Olrun shook her head. The male wasn't lacking in intelligence. He had outmaneuvered her in the air.

That meant he was foolishly brave.

He was also as physically hot as a newly forged sword. His black hair absorbed the sunlight. His gray skin was flawless. He didn't sport one visible scar. And his grimly set lips were extremely kissable.

The cyborg wasn't traditionally handsome. His nose was too pronounced, and his countenance was too stark to be considered pretty.

But his appearance conveyed raw masculine power, and that appealed to her.

Too much.

Her body hummed with need.

Fuck. Olrun wiggled her ass. She couldn't afford any distractions at the moment. And he was one big sexy diversion.

Focus. She had to focus. Her goal was to kill the cyborg and win their upcoming battle.

Her gaze shifted to the golden dagger strapped to the male's garment-covered left pec.

She also had to retrieve her blade. Once that weapon was back in her grasp, the danger to her daughter and to all Valkyries in the Sanctuary would decrease.

The universe would be a little bit safer.

The cyborg lifted his head. His nostrils flared.

She quickly sheathed her sword.

That was a close-range weapon. He was situated too far away to effectively utilize it.

Olrun drew two blades from the sheaths fixed to her armor-clad hips, and she lowered her form, preparing to strike, to attack, to kill.

"You won't be successful." Her foe met her gaze. His brilliant-blue eyes blazed with emotion. His words rang with certainty.

She quivered. Her wanting for the male spiraled upward. "I'll be successful." Her jaw jutted. "And you'll be dead."

As she said that, her daughter's warning flowed through her brain.

The ones with gray skin and energy-infused blue eyes are the oldest warriors. They'll know what they're doing.

Fuck. The cyborg had both gray skin and energy-infused blue eyes.

He might pose more of a challenge than he currently appeared to be.

The male's lips curled upward ever-so-slightly. "Many beings have tried to kill me." He looked to his left and then to his right. "They're gone and I'm still here."

“I’m not many beings.” Olrun spun the daggers in her hands.

He was a cyborg, and had been manufactured for war, but he couldn’t match her fighting skills. She had fought millions of battles over thousands of solar cycles.

“You *aren’t* many beings.” He leisurely scanned her physique.

She felt that visual caress as acutely as if he had touched her. Her nipples ached with wanting.

“You’re mine, and you’re magnificent, my female.” His possessiveness thrilled her, and that was wrong, so very wrong.

He was the enemy, her current target, the male she had to kill.

“I don’t belong to anyone.” She hid her reaction under a scowl. “Prepare to die, cyborg.”

She sprang forward. As she moved, she blasted him with her glow, seeking to blind him.

He spun to the left, smoothly rotating out of her range. His movements were graceful and precise and effective.

She couldn’t make contact.

“Fuck.” She landed and rolled.

“Your shine is beautiful, but it’s ineffective on me.” Amusement edged his voice. “A cyborg’s visual system can adjust to extreme levels of illumination.”

“Does it adjust to this?” She turned and threw one of her daggers.

The cyborg caught the blade between his two palms. The weapon’s tip was a tongue’s length away from his face. “I can adjust to anything you lob at me, my Valkyrie.”

Nothing had been *lobbed*. Olrun scowled. She’d thrown the dagger with all the force she could gather.

“I’m not your Valkyrie.” She grasped one dagger and drew five more, holding three blades in each hand.

The cyborg slid the caught dagger into a hip holster.

Then he finally reached for a weapon.

He unsheathed a gorgeously designed sword in silver metal. The blade reflected her glow. It appeared wonderfully sharp.

The male had great taste in weapons.

“You’re my universe, my Olrun.” He said her name as though it were a prayer to the gods.

“I’m your executioner.” She ran toward him.

He braced his big form, widening his stance.

She released the daggers, directing half at his left side and half at his right side. No one could dodge...or catch all six.

The blasted male dropped to the ground and then tumbled abruptly to the left. He avoided three of the daggers and blocked two additional daggers with his sword.

One of the blades sliced through his right temple. Light blasted him. The energy release from the dagger would hit him like a punch. Blood spurted from his wound.

The cyborg didn't flinch.

Fuck. He was a beast.

She grabbed her sword and slid on her knees toward him.

The male stopped her blade with his own. He was fast.

And he was strong. She rotated with the momentum, carving grooves into the soil and vegetation. Her arms ached. Her chest heaved.

She rolled out of his reach and jumped to her booted feet.

The cyborg showed no signs of strain. He didn't breathe heavily. And his face wasn't flushed.

But he was injured. A rivulet of crimson flowed down his right cheek.

That gave her a burst of satisfaction. She'd won a round, had proven herself.

"First blood is yours." The cyborg grinned at her as though they were playing a game and not fighting to the death. His eyes sparkled with energy.

He was so damn appealing.

She had to end him. Now. Before the attraction between them grew.

"Last blood will be mine also." She rushed forward and swung her sword.

He blocked her. She swung again. He stopped that blow.

They battled at Valkyrie speed, sparring faster than her human daughter would be able to track. Sweat coursed down Olrun's spine, under her armor. Her muscles heated. Sparks flew with every connection. The clang of their blades rang in the clearing.

She danced around him, attacking and retreating, attacking and retreating. He turned to meet her strikes, catching each one.

Moments passed. The sun moved across the sky. The light dimmed.

She didn't land a hit. He didn't counterattack.

They were evenly matched.

And she was tiring.

Exhaustion caused mistakes. Mistakes led to death.

It was time to rest.

She bounced backward. “Your skills are...adequate, cyborg.”

He impressed the fuck out of her. She hadn’t faced someone at his fighting level in...fuck...in forever. Her sisters in the Sanctuary didn’t fight like he did.

The cyborg seemed to anticipate danger. It was the strangest thing.

“Your skills are *adequate* also, my Valkyrie.” His eyes glittered with mirth.

Olrun opened her mouth to tell him she wasn’t hers. But if he hadn’t listened to her protests the last few times, he wouldn’t listen to it now.

She saved herself the aggravation and pressed her lips together.

“You need to replenish your liquids.” He extracted a beverage container from a holster, placed it on the ground between them and backed away.

Olrun eyed his offering. She *was* thirsty. But he also could have tampered with the contents. “Drink from it first.”

“Cyborgs don’t require additional liquids.” He retrieved the container, opened it, and took a swallow. “And we’re immune to every poison humans have encountered. That was part of our design.”

Poisons couldn’t kill Valkyries. But they could slow her kind down.

And a decrease of speed would give him the advantage he’d need to defeat her.

“I wouldn’t damage you in that way.” His tone held sincerity. “I can defeat you with my battle skills.” He placed the container back on the ground. “I don’t require trickery.”

The cyborg was the enemy. She shouldn’t believe him yet she did.

Even foes had pride.

And honor.

She suspected he had both.

“You won’t defeat me.” She scooped up the container and took a long drink from it, keeping her gaze on him at all times.

The cyborg didn’t move. He didn’t attempt to take advantage of her beverage break.

The cool liquid and the few moments of rest revived Olrun’s energy. She bounced on the balls of her booted feet. Valkyries recovered quickly.

Cyborgs appeared to heal as speedily. The wound on her opponent’s temple had closed. The bleeding had stopped.

He watched her closely.

“Are you trying to uncover my secrets, cyborg?” She lifted her chin.

“I’m admiring you, my female.” His voice lowered to a deep rumble.

She quivered.

Her body’s reaction to him should have angered, not thrilled her.

“You’re unlike any being I’ve ever encountered.” Admiration wrapped around his words.

“I’m a Valkyrie.” The glowing, the height, the lack of scars impressed beings.

“I saw that other Valkyrie on the battlefield.” He reminded her. “And she wasn’t as...alluring as you are.”

Her curiosity was too great to ignore. “What did she look like?”

“Her sword was decorated with a lightning bolt.” The cyborg was a true warrior. He had noticed the details of her weapon. “And her hair, what was visible of it, was curly.”

“That was Kara.” A sudden sadness gripped Olrún. She missed her friend. “She is now in Valhalla.” As were many of her sisters. There were very few Valkyries remaining. “The Humanoid Alliance blew up her warship. They hit it with multiple missiles.”

There hadn’t been enough of her left to heal.

“The Humanoid Alliance killed many of my brethren also.” The cyborg’s face softened with sympathy.

They were both warriors. They had lost many loved ones.

And some of those beings, it appeared, had been killed by a shared enemy.

She didn’t want to have that in common with him. Fuck. She didn’t want any emotional link to the male she had to kill.

Yet it was there. A connection, an understanding at a deeper level, flowed between them. It had existed from their very first verbal exchange.

She hated that. It wasn’t the Valkyrie way.

And she knew only one way to sever their bond.

She had to end the cyborg’s lifespan.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Intrepid's female was the most beautiful creature he'd ever seen.

All of her was golden—her hair, her skin, her eyes. She shone. Her brightness pushed his visual system to its limits. She was tall. The top of her head reached his eyes. And she was strong. Blocking her blows strained his muscles.

She was perfect for him. He wanted to strip off her helmet and her armor and see more of her. And he wanted to touch that golden skin. Every bit of it.

His Valkyrie wanted to chop his head off. Her entire form vibrated with energy, with purpose. She viewed him as the enemy and planned to kill him.

"We are *not* the same, cyborg." She hurled the beverage container at him.

He wasn't manufactured last planet rotation, and he didn't require the warning in his soul to decide his next steps. Intrepid projected the container toss was a trick designed to distract him. He ducked the makeshift projectile and drew two daggers.

His female chose her sword as her weapon. She unsheathed it as she ran toward him. The ends of her long hair flowed behind her. Her eyes were narrowed.

Her focus on him was stimulating. His cock was as hard as her armor.

She swung her sword. An adorable grunt escaped her lush lips.

He caught the blade between his two daggers. Utilizing those weapons brought her closer to him

The scent of warm female and sunshine teased his nostrils. "We *aren't* the same." He breathed deeply. "You're dazzling."

"I'm a Valkyrie." She pushed against his hold. "We glow." Sweat beaded on her skin.

“And you’re glistening.” It took effort to block her advance.

“Fuck you.” She huffed.

They remained locked. Her body was enticingly near his.

“You can fuck me after I disarm you.” He chuckled as he shifted his stance, bumping the toe of his left boot against the toe of her right boot.

It wasn’t skin-on-skin contact, but they *were* touching.

“You will never disarm me.” Her confidence appealed to him. Greatly.

“I *will* disarm you.” He moved his blades to the right, directing her sword away from his chest.

Her eyes widened.

He ignored his inner alarms. They had been ringing since he first saw her. He turned.

Her sword sliced through his body armor and along his left arm.

Pain flooded his form. A burst of energy hit him. That impact would’ve knocked a human male off his booted feet.

Intrepid was a cyborg, however, and he was set on his prize. He flicked the edge of his Valkyrie’s helmet with the tip of the dagger in his right hand.

That headpiece toppled to the ground and rolled. Her hair burst free.

The glory of it struck him like a missile. He staggered backward.

She lunged forward and stabbed him in his right shoulder. Her sword pierced his protective garments once more. His female was powerful.

More agony bombarded him. Another wave of pummeling energy added to the hurt.

He retreated, putting a safe distance between them. “I relieved you of your helmet.”

“Yeah, but at what fuckin’ cost?” She held up her bloody blade. It glowed brightly. “Both sides of you are now injured.”

“It was worth it.” He grinned at her.

She was even more beautiful without her helmet. Her hair was thick and full, and it was matted to her skull. That accentuated the size of her eyes.

“You’re a fool.” She shook her head. Her rapidly drying tendrils caught the sunlight. “How you haven’t died before this planet rotation I don’t fuckin’ know.”

“I’m skilled.” He spun his daggers in his hands. His damage was rapidly repairing. “And I don’t seek to undress other opponents.”

“You shouldn’t seek to undress me.” She rushed toward him again.

He braced himself for the impact.

She slid, targeting his ankles.

His female was clever. She had the power to slice through that part of him. And having detached feet would severely hamper his ability to fight.

Intrepid sheathed his daggers and jumped over her blade, flipping in the air. He landed on his booted feet, facing her.

She continued to skid forward.

He chased her, grabbed her back armor and yanked. The closures snapped. The piece came free in his hands.

His Valkyrie drew a dagger and stabbed the tip into the ground. She rotated around that point. Her momentum dislodged her chest armor. The pieces scattered around her. A thin cloth garment covered her breasts. She leaped to her booted feet and propelled herself forward.

Intrepid grinned and extracted one of his daggers. His female was tenacious. He liked that. Too much. He wanted to decrease the distance between them.

That required forcing her to change weapons.

She swung at him.

He blocked her sword with his weapon, grabbed her blade and twisted his dagger.

“Fuck.” She pulled on her sword.

The blade sliced into his palm. Agony rushed up his arm. Energy blasted him. Metal screamed as she reached his frame.

Frag. She could cut his hand into two.

That would give her a killing advantage.

Intrepid swept outward with his left booted feet and connected with her left leg.

She was knocked off-balance.

He wrenched her weapon out of her hands and then hastily withdrew. “I relieved you of your sword.”

“I almost relieved you of your fuckin’ fingers.” She backed away from him also. “Was that worth it?”

“It was worth it.” He slid her sword into the sheath on his back, placing her weapon next to his.

“You’re insane, but you do have...adequate fighting skills, cyborg.” His Valkyrie awarded him with that hard-won compliment, and warmth spread across Intrepid’s chest. “It’s been over a thousand solar cycles since someone took my sword from me.”

She breathed heavily. Her chest heaved. Her beautiful face was flushed.

“A human or humanoid would’ve lost hold of the weapon.” His metal frame had allowed him to maintain his grip on it.

“A human or humanoid also wouldn’t have been able to hold onto the blade, twist their dagger, and kick me at the same time.”

His female gazed at him with respect, and that was a heady experience.

“You’ll be a challenge to kill.” Her voice held excitement.

Intrepid nodded. His female liked a challenge.

As he did.

“The energy bursts are a unique weapon modification.” He had never encountered that in a blade. “They’re activated by blood?”

“Blood is the metal’s conduit.” His Valkyrie’s breathing leveled. She reverted to spec quickly. “The source of its energy is me. I was the original blood donor. The process doesn’t work if I’m not alive. It sources energy also from any living being whose blood I’ve spilled. Our weapons have a symbiotic relationship with us.”

“We’re now bonded by blood.” He liked that.

“Your energy feeds my fuckin’ weapons.” She rolled her eyes. “And that connection ends when I kill you.”

“And if you don’t kill me, what happens then?” Intrepid didn’t plan to die.

“The energy compounds with each donor.” She frowned. “If there are too many donors, the levels become...dangerous.”

That must be the threat Power had referred to.

“That’s why, if I spill blood, I kill that opponent.” Her golden eyes gleamed. “You’re going to die, cyborg. Make your peace with that fate.”

She chose the daggers strapped to her arm-protective garments as her next set of weapons. The sunlight reflected off the blades. She circled him slowly.

“I’ll be a permanent donor.” He turned as she moved, keeping her in his sightlines. “Make your peace with that bond.”

Every part of him was aware of her. As an opponent. And also as her male. He noted the gleam in her golden eyes, the placement of her booted feet, the tempo of her breathing.

His Valkyrie was a humanoid. She was limited by the constrictions of her kind, and she was tiring. She had also inflicted damage on him, and that appeared to have sated some of her need for vengeance.

Her fury had dimmed. She was almost at the point where she might be

receptive to chatter from him.

Almost.

She attacked with both daggers.

Metal sparked as he blocked the blow.

She bounced backward, moved forward, and struck again.

He defended again.

They danced around each other, engaging and withdrawing, engaging and withdrawing. His Valkyrie gave every clash her all. She was quick and strong, and he had to react at cyborg speeds to stop her blows.

The sun neared the horizon, and they continued to fight. His humanoid female moved slower and slower. Her jabs weren't as fierce.

She would damage herself if they battled for much longer.

He had to end their physical fight.

It took three attempts, but Intrepid caught her blades with his, locking their weapons. She tugged and grunted and was unable to free herself.

“Let me go, cyborg.” She glared at him.

“I'll never let you go.” He forced her to step closer to him.

She tilted her head back to meet his gaze. Only their weapons separated them.

She breathed in. He breathed out. She breathed out. He breathed in. They shared the same air and the same space.

The moment hung between them, heavy with connection.

A breeze pushed strands of her hair toward him. One tendril brushed against his right hand. It was decadently soft against his skin.

Intrepid's need for his Valkyrie escalated. And, judging by her scent, she experienced the same wanting for him.

“We're fighting to the death.” Her voice was a husky whisper.

It swept over him, lighting up all his circuits. “Are we fighting to the death?” His goal had modified since their first verbal exchange.

“Yes.” Her gaze flicked to his lips.

Intrepid couldn't resist that unspoken request. His hold on his restraint snapped.

He dipped his head and captured her lips.

Her Valkyrie parted for him immediately, granting him entry into her sweet mouth.

Her response both reassured and thrilled him. She wanted him.

She wanted their kiss.

And she wasn't a passive participant in it. She met him stroke for stroke, passion for passion.

They dueled with their tongues, twining, sucking, pursuing, retreating. His processors were flooded with inputs. His systems threatened to shut down.

His universe narrowed to his female. She smelled divine. He inhaled deeply. And she tasted right, so fraggin' right. A rumble of appreciation rose in his throat.

His Valkyrie moaned her response. That sound caused his cock to bob. She leaned into him more and more until the flat of her blades pressed against his body armor-clad chest.

Kissing his female surpassed the joy of battle. He—

“No.” She pushed him away.

He stared at her. “No?”

“No.” His female backed up. “No.” She paced to the right. “No.” She turned and paced to the left.

He stood still and replayed their kiss in his processors, trying to decipher what had gone wrong.

His Valkyrie stopped moving and gazed at him.

He gazed back at her.

“No.” That rejection lacked the ferocity of her previous ones. “You're the enemy. I owe it to Jane, to all of my kind, to eliminate you as a threat. No. I can't do this.”

Intrepid frowned. “I'm not your ene—”

“Fuck it.” She sheathed her daggers and rushed toward him. “We're doing this.”

He hastily put away his weapons also. What they were doing, he couldn't project, but—

His female reached upward with her right hand, grabbed him by his nape, pulled his head lower, and kissed him. Hard. The intensity of her sensual attack flickered his systems.

Intrepid wrapped his arms around her waist, and drew her snug against his form. And then he opened to her, granting her any terrain she wished to conquer.

She claimed all of it. His Valkyrie explored every part of his mouth before twisting her tongue around his. Their lips ground together. Her cloth-clad curves meshed with his body armor-encased muscles.

She pulled away from him slightly and growled. “No.”

His heart squeezed. She planned to end their embrace. Again.

But then his Valkyrie grabbed the collar of his garment and yanked. That large piece of his body armor came free. She tossed it over her right shoulder.

Intrepid’s disappointment morphed to elation.

She wasn’t rejecting him. She wanted more of him to touch.

“Yes.” He helped her strip his form bare.

Cool air swept over his heated skin.

“Fuck yes.” Approval shone from his Valkyrie’s golden eyes.

They crashed together once more, kissing, touching, owning. There was no need to be gentle with his female. She was a warrior, and she gave as wildly as she received.

His lips hummed. His cock pushed against her. He sank his fingers into her hair, savoring the softness of those long tendrils.

She coiled one of her legs around his and shoved him backward, deliberately tripping him.

He allowed himself to fall, taking her with him, and he landed with a thud on the vegetation-covered ground. His Valkyrie’s form slapped against his.

“We’re fucking, cyborg.” She wiggled out of her remaining garments. Her skin shone. Her body was toned. Her breasts were firm. And her mons was devoid of hair.

He had never hungered for anything or anyone as much as he desired to breed with her. But that act would have consequences. And he wasn’t 100.0000 certain she was ready for that yet.

Honor dictated he tell her about those impending modifications. “Fucking —” He utilized her words. “—will change—”

“No.” She smacked her right palm against his lips, covering his mouth. “This fuck changes nothing, cyborg. We’re taking a break from the battle. That’s all.”

That wasn’t all. He frowned.

“What’s the problem?” She scowled back at him. “I want to fuck. Do *you* want to fuck?”

Intrepid nodded. He wanted that more than his next breath.

“Then we’re fucking.” She straddled his upper thighs. Her wet pussy lips parted around his unrelenting shaft, and they both moaned. “I’ll kill you later.”

His Valkyrie *might* kill him. After she uncovered the cost of breeding

with him.

But he would take that risk. He nipped at her palm.

She pulled her hand away from his mouth. “Your wounds have healed.” She perused his form. “That’s good. I plan to use you hard, cyborg.” His warrior female said that as a challenge.

It was one he’d accept. “My body is yours to use.” Forever. “Call me your cyborg, your warrior, or preferably, your Intrepid when you take your pleasure.”

She rocked against him slowly, and the pressure, the feel of her, almost severed his control. “I don’t use my enemies’ names. It makes it more fuckin’ challenging to kill them.”

“While we’re breeding, we’re not enemies.” He clasped her hips, securing her to him.

They weren’t enemies when they weren’t breeding either. But she didn’t process that yet.

“Oh, we’re enemies.” She increased their tempo. “This is definitely a hate fuck.” His Valkyrie’s legs flexed around him. “My foe.”

Foe wasn’t an optimal term of endearment. Intrepid splayed his fingers over her skin. But she had verbally claimed him. That warmed his chest. “There’ll be nothing to hate in this breeding.”

“Yeah, this fuck will be damn good.” She agreed with his projection. “You have a big cock, big hands, unlimited stamina, and I can tell by the way you fight, you know how to move.” Her lips curled upward. “Put those huge palms on my breasts, my enemy, and don’t be gentle. I like some pain with my pleasure.”

There was no projecting during breeding with his Valkyrie. She told him what she needed.

Intrepid liked that. Very much.

He cupped her curves, capturing her nipples between his fingers. She was an intriguing combination of supple skin and taut tips.

His female was a being of contrasts, and that enthralled him. He closed his fingers around her flesh.

A keening noise rose from her throat. She arched her back, pushing her breasts into his hands.

He pulled on her nipples, extending them.

Her golden hues lightened. “Yes.” She vibrated on top of him. Her entire form quivered. Warmth and wetness bathed his cock. “Twist them.”

He followed that command without hesitation, rotating his wrists.

She released an auditory-system-straining battle cry, and she gyrated violently against him. Her pussy juices streamed between his balls. Her face flushed. Her eyes glowed.

His female was magnificent. He had never seen anything or anyone as beautiful as she was in her moment of fulfillment.

He gritted his teeth, fighting the urge to come with her.

Her shaking eased. His control returned.

“Fuck.” His Valkyrie sagged over him. “I needed that.” Her stomach grazed his cock.

He shuddered. “You need more than that one release.” He breathed deeply. “I smell your wanting.”

Her decadent musk had thickened on the breeze. His warrior female recovered at cyborg speeds.

She grinned. “Battle makes me horny.” She wiggled her ass, tormenting him with those sexy movements. “The harder I fight, the more aroused I become. And we fought fuckin’ hard, cyborg. My cyborg.”

Her modification pleased him. He had shifted from being her enemy to her cyborg. That was progress. “You’re a skilled fighter.”

“I’m also a fantastic fuck.” She glowed. “You’ll walk funny when I’m done with you.”

There was an 84.7812 percent probability he wouldn’t be walking at all for a short duration after their breeding. Merely touching her threatened to down his systems.

He was willing...no...he was eager to affirm her projection. “Is that a promise or a threat, my Valkyrie?”

She gazed at him for a moment. “That’s both a promise *and* a threat.” She laughed. “I plan to shift your fuckin’ universe.”

She had already shifted his universe.

His Valkyrie wasn’t ready to hear that truth either. “Do your best...if you’re able.” He issued that challenge to her, processing she could accomplish it with very little effort.

His body was hers to damage.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Olrun had fucked enemies in the past. She hadn't lied about battle turning her on.

But something told her fucking her cyborg would be different. It would be...more. A sense of connection, of belonging swirled around them.

If she was thinking straight, she'd grab her dagger and stab the male in the heart. Because Valkyries didn't form bonds with non-Valkyries. They fucked and left.

And they killed their foes.

That had to happen. She had spilled his blood. Her sword was pulling from his energy.

And she had to retrieve her weapons.

Intrepid had to die. Then she had to leave the sector before there was retaliation. Her daughter's safety and the safety of every Valkyrie in the Sanctuary depended on her killing him.

The timing of his death, however, wasn't important. She could delay the kill by one shift to sate her physical needs. That shouldn't impact anything.

Her gut screamed that was a lie. She ignored that warning and moved against Intrepid.

"I'm coming one more time before I fuck your brains out." She informed him.

"I'm a cyborg." He kneaded her breasts. "I have processors and an organic brain. Nothing and no one has ever caused both to malfunction at the same time."

"I'll do it." She loved a challenge. "I've turned beings into blathering idiots with my fucking skills." Some of them admittedly hadn't been the most

intelligent beings before she had fucked them.

“No talk of breeding with other beings.” Her cyborg’s lips flattened.

“I’m older than some planets.” She rocked against him. “There have been other beings.” She was a passionate female. “Are you jealous?”

He tilted his head as though he was seriously considering her flippant question. “Yes.”

His possessiveness shouldn’t thrill her. Yet it did. “Hmmm...” She wiggled against him. “You have a great cock.” She tried to placate him with that truth. His shaft was as straight and as rigid as he was.

The rest of his body was perfect also. There were patches of lighter gray skin where she had wounded him. But those gashes had closed. His palms were delightfully rough against her curves. She quivered. His blue eyes blazed with a stimulating heat. Sitting on his thighs resembled perching on a thin veneer of muscle over unrelenting metal.

The combination revived her need to unexperienced highs. She pressed her pussy against her cyborg’s cock and then retreated, advanced and drew back. Her body pulsed to that same tempo.

Intrepid, her foe, tugged and released her nipples, twisting them as he pulled. That agony made the pleasure sweeter. And it centered her. Her focus narrowed to the male underneath her, to the pain, to the pressure building within her.

She was close. Her climax was within reach. She could sense it, almost see it. It loomed in front of her, a beaming light of soon-to-be-experienced bliss. But she couldn’t quite get there.

Olrun met her cyborg’s gaze. “I need you inside me.” That might be what she was missing.

“You need to find release one more time.” He denied her his cock.

She scowled. It was her damn body, and she knew what it needed.

Release wouldn’t happen without penetration. She opened her mouth to tell him that.

He drove his hips upward, sliding his rim against her clit.

And he slapped her nipples. Hard.

Her universe splintered into a million pieces. She screamed and shook on top of him. Ecstasy blasted her from all directions. She had to take it and take it and take it. There was no escape.

Her cyborg held her hips, securing her to him.

Her bliss rose, held, held, held, and finally leveled.

“Fuck.” She tilted her head backward and closed her eyes.

The fuckin’ male had been right. Curse him. There had been no need for penetration.

The sweet, sweet pain combined with the extra pressure and the clit stimulation had given her a mind-shattering orgasm.

And now she required a moment to recover.

“You’re beautiful.” Her cyborg rubbed soothing circles into her skin with his fingers. “I’m fortunate you’re mine.”

“I’m your enemy.” That was all she could be.

“You see yourself as my enemy?” His voice was soft.

“I don’t see myself as your enemy *right now*.” She was too sated to deny that truth. The defiance and the anger had been temporarily zapped from her. “My brain isn’t functioning at the moment.”

He chuckled. “Or your brain could be operating at full functionality. You could be seeing yourself, me, us more clearly.”

“I’m thinking with my pussy.” She opened her eyes and gazed down at him. “I’m seeing nothing clearly.” Except his big cock. And his handsome face. And his muscular form. “We remain foes. Nothing has changed.”

“Is that why you’re...fucking me—because you perceive us as foes?” He looked back up at her. “Would you fuck me if we weren’t enemies?”

“I’d fuck someone fighting on the same side.” She shrugged.

His lips twitched. “You’re a true warrior. Every being is either an ally or an enemy.”

“I’m a Valkyrie.” She grinned at him. “I was created to wage war.”

“Cyborgs were manufactured to wage war also.” His eyes gleamed. “We also...” He paused. “We bond with our genetic matches.”

That wouldn’t fuckin’ happen with her. “I’m not your genetic match, cyborg. And Valkyries don’t bond with non-Valkyries.” Her lips flattened. “We don’t play that way.”

“You have a human daughter.” He pointed that out. “That’s a bond.”

“That’s different.” That bond was unusual for Valkyries also.

Her sisters certainly hadn’t approved of it.

But Jane had been a gift from the gods, and Orlun would’ve broken all the rules to be her mom. Although some things had gone seriously sideways after that, she never regretted that decision.

She *did* regret the discussion she was having with her cyborg right now.

“Do you want to fuck me?” She lifted her eyebrows. “Because all this shit

you're talking about is decimating the mood.”

He opened his mouth. Then he paused.

She waited.

“I’ll stop talking.” He made that right decision.

“That would be wise.” She shook her head. Her cyborg was taking their one-shift fling far too seriously. They were fucking and then fighting.

She would kill him.

But not before she fucked him senseless. “Are you ready to lose your mind...and your processors?”

“I’m ready for anything you have planned, my Valkyrie.” He shifted under her.

A bead of cum balanced on the tip of his cock.

She swiped her fingertips over him. He shuddered. His reaction was acute and immediate, and that thrilled her. She held up her right index finger. Did cyborgs have a unique flavor? She flicked her tongue over her skin.

A bubbling sensation filled her mouth. It was similar to the effervescence that had spread throughout her form after they’d kissed.

She smacked her lips. He tasted like the air after combat. It was a mixture of projectiles and discharged energy and battlefield soil, was both organic and mechanical, completely familiar yet excitingly unknown.

The temptation to suck him off was fierce. He was that delicious.

But the need to have him inside her overruled her craving for his cum. “I plan to ride you raw.” She pushed herself upward, straddling his hips with her feet. “You’re not the only being with stamina, my cyborg.”

Intrepid’s lips parted.

She bent and wrapped her fingers firmly around his shaft.

He spluttered.

That had silenced her cyborg.

She smiled down at him. “What’s the state of your processors now?”

“Strained.” He clenched his jaw.

She tightened her grip on him, and he vibrated in her hands. A nice female might’ve given him time to adjust.

Olrún was a fuckin’ warrior, and she showed him no such mercy. She stroked him once, twice, three times, savoring the length and girth of him.

He was a large male. All over. She fuckin’ liked that.

“Can’t. Last.” His eyes blazed with energy.

“You can last, cyborg.” She frowned at him. There were many things she

wanted to do to him, and that wouldn't be possible if he fuckin' found release now. "You're not to come until I give the order."

Intrepid sucked in his breath. His chest expanded with the inhalation.

He nodded.

"That rule is for you, warrior." She pumped him slowly. "The longer you last, the better it is." For both of them. She wanted to come also.

His head dipped again.

Her cyborg was so close to coming he couldn't speak.

She shouldn't test him. Much.

Olrun positioned herself over the tip of his cock. "Brace yourself." She gave him the courtesy of that warning. The going would be tight.

Intrepid stiffened.

She sank down on him. Fuck. He was huge. His big cock stretched her to the point of pain.

Which turned her on. She embraced that hint of hurt and lowered more and more until her pussy lips flattened against his hairless base.

He pulsed inside her, and she clasped him so tightly she felt each pump of blood through his veins. She was tantalizingly full.

Her gaze met his. His jaw was jugged. His lips were set in a grim white line.

But he was holding on to his restraint.

"I knew you could last." She looked at him with renewed approval. "You have the strongest willpower of any being I've ever encountered." That sounded too complimentary. He *was* the enemy. "For a non-Valkyrie."

His lips curled ever-so-slightly upward.

That was a sign of too much fuckin' ease with his situation.

She couldn't allow him to become *too* comfortable. Fuck no. She rose upward. His rim slid along her inner walls. She felt every bit of her retreat.

He felt it also. Her cyborg curved his fingers over her calves and held on to her as though she was his sword and he was in the midst of a passion-infused battle.

She reached his rim and stopped moving, keeping the tip of him inside her. For a couple heartbeats, she hovered over her male, not retreating and not advancing.

Anticipation built more and more within her. And, she suspected, within him.

Her leg muscles ached. Energy flowed from Olrun to her cyborg and back

again. Intrepid maintained her gaze. A thrilling wanting shone from his eyes.

She then fell upon him, impaling herself on his massive cock. A gasp escaped her lips. He felt so good inside her.

Her cyborg moaned. That sexy throaty sound reached deep inside her and coiled around her soul. The connection between them strengthened.

She rose upward, paused, and fell, rose upward, paused, and fell. The tempo she set started slow and increased with each retreat and advance.

Their fucking mirrored the rhythm of warfare. That appealed to her battle-loving heart.

Most non-warriors believed fighting was constant forward momentum. But often wars consisted of a charge followed by a fallback in order to push ahead yet again. Ground was gained, and then a bit of it was lost.

Fucking was the same way. There was a back and forth, an escalation of passion, and then a little relief. The build occurred, but it didn't happen in a straight fuckin' line.

And fuck, that turned her on. Her cyborg turned her on.

She rode him harder and harder, faster and faster. Her ass smacked against his upper thighs. She clasped his forearms to stabilize herself.

He remained still, accepting her command of his huge form.

She used him as she would wield a fuck toy, moving up and down his shaft. Sweat beaded on her skin. A throbbing originated in her core.

"Need to. Move." A plea edged Intrepid's voice. The male was in a bad way.

And he'd been good. She huffed. He'd been damn good.

"Moving is allowed." Olrún gave him the permission to fuck her back.

"Yes." He pushed his hips upward as she slammed down on his cock.

Skin slapped skin. Her flesh hit his unrelenting base. Her breasts jiggled, and a wonderful heat spread from all areas of contact.

"Yes." She liked that combination.

They repeated it again and again and again, working together, charging headfirst toward a shared release. Her wetness eased the burn. The tinges of pain intensified her wanting.

Her surroundings faded from her awareness. That would've been a problem on a fighting field. But on a fucking field, that was... fuck, it remained rare. She usually couldn't turn off her warrior training.

With Intrepid, she could do that, and Olrún refused to analyze why he seemed to be the exception...to everything. Instead, she relished the unique

situation and focused on him, on herself, on them, on the way their bodies crashed together and came apart, on her cyborg's erotic grunting, on the sweet agony and the soon-to-be experienced pleasure.

Having already come twice, hard, she shouldn't crave a third orgasm. But she did. She hungered for it and for him, and she was beginning to question if that need would ever be permanently satisfied.

If it couldn't, fuck, it *didn't* matter. There was no turning back.

And she didn't want to stop. Ever.

She ravished him with all of her being. He ravished her right back, driving his hips upward and then lowering his ass to the vegetation-covered ground.

Rivulets of sweat coursed along Olrun's spine, between her ass cheeks. Her form was warmed by the sun's rays and good fucking. She panted in harmony with his primal noises.

He guided her up and down him, keeping her upright and ensuring her enthusiasm didn't topple her off him. His gray skin was speckled with moisture from her body. His fit physique resembled metal. He was that unrelenting under her.

Some cracks were forming in that façade. Lines etched around his lips. He shook with increasing vigor. His grunts were edged with pleading.

She was also near victory. Her pussy walls closed around his shaft. The friction between them increased. A band of emotion constricted her chest. Her arms and legs and ass ached. She trembled. All over.

The agony of extending their fuck was exceeding her high threshold for pain.

Her gaze met Intrepid's.

And she was torturing her cyborg.

If she waited longer, he would lose control. He would fail the challenge she'd issued him. And that, she suspected, would hurt the warrior's pride.

"I'm taking you three more times." She would push him only a little bit further. "On the third drop, you'll come and come hard. And I want you to tell the universe who made you see stars. Shout my name into the next galaxy."

"No one. Will Question. Who. Owns me." His eagerness was damn adorable.

And it was telling. He teetered on the edge of release.

She drew herself upward. "You'll count." She fell upon him.

“One.” He drove his hips upward, catching her with his form.

They crashed together, and she had to grit her teeth to stop from coming.

If she couldn't fuck by her own rules, that would be fuckin' embarrassing.

She rose up on him again. He cupped her ass, assisting her with the ascent. His palms were appealingly rough and warm against her tender skin.

Intrepid released her.

She plummeted downward.

He met her halfway, thrusting into her. The impact almost snapped her restraint.

“Two.” He relayed the count.

That reminder was needed. Her brain was dominated by her tremendous wanting.

It took all the energy left in her form to push herself upward one last time. Her legs were wobbly. Her knees threatened to buckle under her. She withdrew to his rim.

Her gaze locked with his and, in his eyes, she saw a desire equal to hers.

He was her match. In fucking. In fighting. In life.

As that disturbing thought struck Olrún, she descended.

Her cyborg propelled himself upward, levitating clear off the ground. They connected in the air. He swiveled his hips as they fell together, grinding against her.

They landed. Hard. And the slap of flesh against flesh broke her.

“Intrepid.” She screamed his name and squeezed around him.

“My Olrún,” he bellowed, nearly deafening her with the ferocity of his claim. Cum shot from his tip and blasted her intimate walls.

Effervescence accompanied that sensory assault. The sensation resembled a thousand lightning-fast jabs of the tiniest, bliss-infused dagger and it spread from her pussy to her fingertips and toes.

She screamed again. What did she scream? She had no fuckin' idea. All she absorbed was the pleasure attacking her from every angle and the warrior undulating under her.

His eyes had gone spookily dark. All the brilliant-blue energy had been snuffed from them.

But he was acutely alive. His fingers flexed and released over her hips. His muscles rippled against her form.

Her cyborg came a second time, filling her to the brim and more with his

bubbling essence.

She shook, vibrating like a pulled bowstring on top of her cyborg. The ecstasy climbed to levels she'd never experienced before him.

Olrun had fucked in the past. She was no inexperienced being. But this... this was an entirely different level of fucking. It was accompanied by an intense sensation of connection. All of her was open to all of him. They were temporarily one being, one fighting unit.

The battle they were waging was splintering her brain. Intrepid came again and again, taking her with him on that sensory assault. Tears streamed down her cheeks. The rapture was almost too much. It...hurt. In the best way.

Moments passed.

The erotic onslaught finally ended. Her cyborg became still under her. The euphoria decreased to manageable levels.

But the bubbling inside her didn't dissipate. It had spread to all parts of her.

Fuck. Even her scalp tingled.

And the link between them remained strong. Time didn't weaken it.

Olrun didn't want to face the truth.

Yet it couldn't be denied.

Intrepid had been right. Fucking had changed them.

She had formed a bond with the damn male.

CHAPTER NINE

Intrepid had claimed his Valkyrie. He breathed deeply and his lips curled upward.

She sported his nanocybotics. Every cyborg who encountered her would know she was his and he was hers.

He hadn't been 100.0000 percent certain they would bond. His warrior female believed they wouldn't form that connection, and she could've been correct. No cyborg had ever been gifted with a Valkyrie as their genetic match.

It thrilled him that he could share that link with her.

He kept that intel to himself. His Valkyrie was extremely skittish, and she still viewed him as her enemy.

"Fuck." She collapsed on top of him. Her finely honed form softened. "That was a...unique experience." She rested her cheek on his left pec. Her face was warm. The connection was right.

He considered her words. Unique could mean a variety of things. He lifted one of his eyebrows. "You enjoyed our breeding?" He needed that reassurance.

"Fuck. I saw Valhalla." Her breath wafted against his skin.

According to the databases, Valhalla was a place some beings believed they went to when they died. "You enjoyed it." That was a projection with a 62.4587 probability of accuracy.

"Yeah, I enjoyed it." She propped her chin on his chest and eyed him. "Are you always so needy after a fuck?"

"Yes." He had only fucked, as she called the breeding activity, her.

She was his female. She'd be the only being he ever fucked.

“I’m needy.” His cock hardened fully against her.

“I feel that need, cyborg.” She shook her head. “You’re a machine.”

He was only half machine, and that part of him wasn’t causing his current state.

“Give me a few moments to recover.” She yawned. “And I’ll fuck you into the ground a second time.”

Her eyes closed.

“Rest, my Valkyrie.” He strapped his arms around his female, securing her to him.

“Don’t kill me while I’m sleeping,” she murmured. “We remain on a break from the fighting.”

If he could convince her of it, that break would last for all eternity. “I won’t allow anyone to damage you.” He gave her his vow. “You’ll be fully functional when you wake.”

“I had better be.” She yawned. “Or I’ll beat you senseless.”

He grinned. She was fierce.

And she was his.

Her breathing leveled. Her form sank deeper into his. Her shine dimmed to a soft glow.

She was asleep. Intrepid, being a cyborg, didn’t restore his energy levels in that way. And he had sufficient power for several more shifts.

Give me an update. He took the opportunity to reach out to his second-in-command through a transmission line.

The Valkyrie’s warship hasn’t moved, Captain. Strike relayed that intel. Argot has been communicating with the human female. Do you want him to gather information about the Valkyries?

That might give him an advantage with his Olrun. Intrepid gazed with warmth at his resting Valkyrie. But he wouldn’t force his communications officer to choose between loyalty to Intrepid, his captain, and loyalty to the human female, his genetic match. *There’s no need to gather information for me.* He paused. *Argot can keep his female’s confidences.*

You’re a wise leader, Captain. Strike’s relief was palpable. *The Praecipuans continue to tour their planet. They appear content to have the ships as their temporary homes.*

Those beings had voluntarily relocated during the battle. *Are there any perceived threats to the planet, the sector, the Dauntless, or the crew?*

The crew of the Valorous intercepted a freighter. His second-in-command

sent the coordinates of that confrontation. It had happened along a distant stretch of the border. *The humanoid captain apologized profusely, claiming it was a navigation error, and the freighter immediately exited the space.*

Beings miscalculated, especially fully organic beings. Intrepid kissed the top of his female's head. The sunshine scent of her hair teased his nostrils.

There are no other threats. Strike eased those concerns. *Some of the crew have asked about your status, Captain.*

Tell them I remain functional. Intrepid wasn't yet ready to share all the specifics about his encounter with his Valkyrie.

They would learn soon enough that he had claimed her. She hosted his nanocybotics.

Should I tell them you remain fully functional, Captain? Strike sought more details.

Intrepid lifted his damaged hand and peered at it. It appeared repaired. He folded and unfolded his fingers. But the flesh under the skin hadn't 100.0000 percent recovered. *I remain functional, not fully functional.*

There was a long pause.

Your Valkyrie is skilled, Captain. Respect edged Strike's words.

Intrepid's chest expanded with pride. *She's one of the best warriors I've ever faced.* Cyborgs valued fighting prowess, and his female had that in excess. *She'll make a great addition to our mock battles.*

He projected his Valkyrie would enjoy those events.

Give me the status reports from each of the Dauntless's officers. Intrepid shifted his focus back to his role.

He reviewed each of the reports with his second-in-command. They discussed the minor issues many battle station captains tackled during a planet rotation.

A warship required repairs. An upcoming training session had too many participants. Nourishment bars had been delivered. A socket in a chamber malfunctioned.

As decisions were made, 14.8561 percent of Intrepid's bandwidth was dedicated to savoring all aspects of his female.

She slept as she fought and as she had bred with him – with everything she had. Except for her breathing, her form was still. She didn't wake, and she didn't utter a sound.

Some humanoids mumbled as they rested. Not his Valkyrie.

She was fully focused on restoring her energy levels.

He ended his transmission with Strike and resisted the urge to contact other beings on board the Dauntless. That would undermine his second-in-command's temporary role. Strike was in charge of the battle station while Intrepid was on Praecipua Minor.

Instead, he held his female and monitored their surroundings. A creature screeched in the distance. The breeze blew across his skin. The stars sparkled above their head.

The cyborg Homeland was visible from their position. He stroked his Valkyrie's sides. The location of her kind's planet, if they had one, wasn't in any of the databases.

Her warship might be her home. As his battle station was his.

Though he projected he'd be reprimanded when he returned to the Homeland. And one possible reprimand was the removal of the Dauntless from his command.

That would damage him. Severely. He glanced back down at his female. But one moment with his Valkyrie was worth that pain.

Many of those shared moments passed.

The sun breached the horizon, coloring the sky orange and pink. More unidentified creatures chattered. A delicate-appearing insect with black-and-blue wings fluttered past them.

His Olrun's eyes finally opened. She blinked up at him as though she was surprised to see his face. Then she smiled. Her beauty hit him like a missile. "You didn't kill me while I was sleeping." Her voice was drowsy.

"I vowed you'd be fully functional when you woke." He drifted his fingertips along her cheeks. Her skin was soft and golden and perfect.

"*You're* definitely fully functional." She wiggled against him.

His reverence and his wonder were overridden by pure savage lust. A rumble rose in Intrepid's throat. His body firmed against hers.

Her eyes glittered. She processed what she did to him. "Are you ready to fuck, my cyborg?"

Intrepid was ready to breed. His cock was as hard as the rock digging into his right ass cheek.

But he projected there was a task his Valkyrie would want to complete first. "I contacted Strike, my second-in-command, through the cyborg transmission lines."

"You..." Her eyes widened. "Oh shit. I have to contact Jane also." She scrambled off him. "I'm surprised she hasn't tracked me down. I told her I

would communicate at least once a shift.”

His female located a piece of her body armor and searched through the holsters attached to it.

“Your daughter worries about you.” And his Valkyrie loved the human female. He heard that in her voice.

“Not as much as I worry about her.” His female tossed the searched leg armor over her shoulder and picked up a chest plate. “I tried to leave her on...” She stopped. Her gaze darted to his face. “Where I left her.”

There was an 87.1458 percent probability that place was a secret Valkyrie stronghold.

Intrepid said nothing.

He didn’t expect her to ever share that intel with him. She was an extremely protective being.

And he had no reason to want to uncover that location. The only Valkyrie he had a desire to contact was situated directly in front of him.

“Jane refused to be left behind. She sneaked onto my warship and didn’t show herself until we were out of the sector.” His female shook her head. “My daughter is clever. And she’s fearless.”

Her pride was palpable.

“She was also fortunate.” He wiggled until the stone no longer jabbed into his skin. “If you had run a scan, you would’ve detected her presence.”

Unauthorized beings would be detected the heartbeat they boarded the Dauntless. Scans were constantly run and the readings were compared to the approved manifest.

“Ah.” His Valkyrie waved her right hand. “She knows I don’t ever run those.”

Intrepid stared at her. “You *have* to perform scans.” The prospect that she didn’t implement those security measures horrified him. “The enemy could board your ship.”

“Then I would kill them.” She shrugged. “That fight would add some fun to the trip. There is only so much training a warrior can do, and—” She reached her fingers into a holster and extracted a handheld. “Got it.” She lifted the device as though she had won a great victory. “I gotta call her.” She glanced at him. “Are you gonna listen to our private conversation, cyborg?”

“Yes.” He folded his arms behind his head. His kind had enhanced auditory systems. He would have to relocate far, far away from her not to listen to her chatter.

And he didn't want her to leave the range of his monitoring systems. He might have claimed his female physically, but he was acutely aware she wasn't yet committed to him emotionally.

She could attempt to escape him.

"You're gonna listen to our private conversation." She repeated that fact as though she couldn't believe it.

He nodded. "I'm gonna listen to your private conversation."

She stared at him for a moment.

He gazed back at her.

Her shine was turned up to full brightness, and her beautiful face was spectacularly lit. Frag. He was a fortunate warrior.

"Okay." Her shoulders lifted and fell once more. "Listen to it. I don't care." She tapped against the handheld's small screen, stabbing the device with her fingertips.

"Mom, are you all right?" His female's daughter's voice was clearly audible.

"I'm okay. I'm okay. The cyborg is listening to this conversation." His Valkyrie frowned at him. "I haven't killed him yet."

"Do you *have* to kill him?" The daughter sighed. "Because I *really* like his friend."

There was a 99.8725 percent probability she was referring to Argot. That was the only other cyborg the daughter had spoken with.

Intrepid tilted his head to the side.

The male would never refer to his captain as his *friend*. Those must have been the daughter's words.

His Valkyrie's frown deepened. "Jane—"

"Maybe you can just maim him a little?" Her daughter was as fierce as she was. "Cut off his arms. Maybe one leg. Or both."

Intrepid had lost limbs during battle in the past. That wasn't an enjoyable experience.

"It would take time to reattach those, I'm thinking." The human female warmed to her proposal. "You could retrieve your dagger. Argot said his friend took it to the surface. And we could leave the sector. I doubt they'll follow us out of cyborg space."

Intrepid would follow his Valkyrie across the entire universe. He was never letting her go.

His Valkyrie gazed up at the sky. "Jane—"

“Just think about it, Mom.” Her daughter wouldn’t allow her to chatter. “Because I really, *really* like Argot. And I don’t think he’d ever talk to me again if you kill his friend. That would devastate me.”

“Jane...” His female tried again.

“I think I’d cry.” Her daughter stressed that potential emotional damage. “That’s how much I like him. And I’d do anything—go back to the Sanctuary, stay there forever, not take any more risks—if you let his friend live. Please, Mom, do that for me.”

“You couldn’t talk to him while you’re in the Sanctuary.” His Valkyrie relayed that statement like it was a rule.

“I could...accept that.” Her daughter’s pause conveyed that would be a hardship. “Because I would know he would talk to me when...if I emerged from the Sanctuary. That would be enough for me.”

His warrior female closed her eyes for a moment. “Jane.”

“You don’t have to make a decision now, Mom.” Her daughter was tenacious. “Just think about it, okay?”

His Valkyrie sighed. “Okay. I’ll think about it.”

“Yes.” Her daughter’s voice rang with joy. “Thank you, Mom. I love you. I love you. I love you.”

“I love you too.” His warrior female ended the communication.

Intrepid bit back his envy. He wanted her to say the human and humanoid love words to him.

That wouldn’t happen. Not during the current planet rotation.

But his female might not attempt to kill him. His mood brightened. That was progress.

“You heard that.” She looked at him.

He dipped his head. “I heard that.”

“Is your friend, this Argot being, fucking with my daughter’s soft heart?” His naked Valkyrie widened her stance. She appeared ready to wage war on her loved one’s behalf. “Because if he hurts her, I’ll slice him into pieces so small no one would be able to identify him.”

That was improbable. Argot was a cyborg. Cyborgs could be identified by their nanocybotics. The size of the pieces was irrelevant.

But Intrepid appreciated the processing. “Argot would end his own lifespan before he deliberately damaged your daughter. He will protect her soft heart.”

As Intrepid would protect his Valkyrie’s more battle-battered heart.

She studied him for a moment. Her expression held skepticism.

“Cyborgs can’t lie.” He reminded her of that truth.

“Fuck. Her research confirmed that.” His female’s shoulders slumped. “So this Argot being has it as bad for my daughter as she has it for him?”

Intrepid projected the term *has it as bad* referred to attraction. “She’s his genetic match.”

His Valkyrie stared at him.

“He has it as bad.” He utilized her words.

“Fuck.” His warrior female threw her hands in the air. “Fuck. Fuck. But it doesn’t matter, does it? What this Argot being’s feelings are.” She pursed her lips. “Because this is about my daughter, and Jane rarely asks me for anything. Yet she’s asking me for something now. And the request, yeah, the request. Jane hasn’t stopped me from killing a foe since she had thirteen solar cycles. She knows I’m a warrior. Ending lifespans is what we do.”

It was *part* of what they did. She was much more than a skilled executioner.

Intrepid said nothing.

“Plus, I can’t deal with her tears.” His Valkyrie said that to herself. “When she was hurt...” She shuddered. “No. I can’t handle that. Not again. And I owe her some happiness. If it would be happiness.” She looked at him again. “Would your friend accept a being with mechanical legs?”

Argot wasn’t his friend but... “All cyborgs have mechanical legs.” Intrepid pointed to his limbs.

“Right. She had hoped he’d be okay with them.” His Valkyrie’s lips twisted. “Then we have a problem, my enemy, because I have to make her happy. And that means I can’t kill you.”

“I can’t kill you either.” He was finally able to make that confession.

His reason was different than hers. He wouldn’t kill her because she was his genetic match.

She wouldn’t kill him because her daughter asked her to spare his lifespan.

“I *can* hack off your arms and legs though.” His Valkyrie’s expression brightened. “She *did* give me permission to do that. And I can take my weapons back.”

“Your weapons are scattered all around us.” The blades had been taken to limit their use on him. He hadn’t planned to possess them permanently. “You can take them back now. You don’t have to hack off my arms and legs to do

that.”

He preferred to keep his limbs attached.

“Will you allow us to leave the sector?” She dropped the handheld on the ground.

“You’re not leaving the sector without me.” A growl escaped his lips.

“See?” She turned her right palm upward. “That’s why I have to hack off your arms and legs. It’ll stop you from stopping us.” His Valkyrie paused. “Plus it’ll be fun. A battle without consequences lacks excitement.”

That was true. His kind’s mock battles involved genuine pain for that reason. “Can we breed a few more times before you sever my limbs?” That level of damage took a long time to repair.

He preferred to be at full functionality while pleasing his female. She deserved the best version of him.

“We’re fucking a few more times?” Her gaze shifted to his rigid cock.

Her cute little tongue darted out of her mouth. She skimmed that flesh over her plump bottom lip. The trail of wetness left in its wake shimmered.

Intrepid envisioned that tongue on his shaft, licking, laving, twining around him. His cock bobbed. His balls ached.

“Yeah, we’re fucking a few more times.” His Valkyrie smiled and walked toward him.

Her hips swayed seductively. Her golden glow brightened. He inhaled deeply. The musky scent of her filled his nostrils.

They would breed.

And then she would attempt to slice off his arms and legs.

There was a 35.1266 percent probability she’d be successful. His female was a force. And his processors didn’t operate smoothly around her.

But kissing her, touching her, being inside her would be well worth the agony he might endure afterward. Nothing matched that experience.

Intrepid smiled back at his female.

He was a fortunate warrior.

CHAPTER TEN

Olrun fucked the nuts and bolts off her cyborg three more times.

They rested between rounds. She slept. He retrieved a power booster from one of his holsters and reenergized that way.

And then they fucked again.

She had come countless times, and she should've been sated. Her muscles were sore. Her body was weary.

Yet the craving for him returned. And the bubbling inside her spread.

"I have to overcome this." She rolled off her cyborg onto the vegetation-covered ground beside him and stared up at the blue sky.

"Why do you have to overcome this?" He clasped her hand.

She should pull her fingers away from him. But his touch eased some of the tension building inside her. "Valkyries don't form attachments to non-Valkyries. Even purely sexual ones."

And she wasn't certain their connection was one of those.

"Other humanoids and humans die. Death can be...difficult to deal with." He spoke as though he knew that feeling only too well.

"It is damn difficult to deal with." The prospect of her daughter Jane dying made her a bit wild. "But that's not the only reason for that rule." She was well aware he had a natural unlimited lifespan also. "Attachments make it more difficult to extract the right level of justice for a wrong. In our situation, I'm less likely to hack off all your limbs...even though you deserve that pain."

"I deserve pain because I'm representing the cyborgs, and one of my kind stole your dagger from the Humanoid Alliance." Intrepid summed up the situation without her having to outline everything.

He was an impressively intelligent being.

“And you’ve already killed the Humanoid Alliance beings, extracting the right level of justice for the original theft.” He shared that very wrong assumption with her.

“I haven’t done that yet.” She *would* end their lifespans. With much pain. Her lips curled upward. They had tried to kill her daughter and were the beings responsible for Jane losing her legs.

They were the beings *mostly* responsible. Guilt jabbed Olrún. She bore some responsibility for Jane’s injuries also. She hadn’t protected her fragile human daughter very well.

“I wanted to retrieve my dagger first.” That sounded like a bovine-shit excuse to her own ears. “And I had planned to transport my daughter to a safe location before I waged war on the Humanoid Alliance.”

“You have your dagger.” Her cyborg waved in the direction of the weapon with his free hand. “And there’s no safer place in the universe for your daughter than where she is right now. My crew would protect her. Argot would trade his lifespan for hers.”

According to Intrepid, his friend liked Jane as much as Jane liked him. And cyborgs didn’t lie. If he believed his crew would protect her daughter, they would do that.

Jane might get over her obsession with the Argot being if she spent more time talking with him. She wouldn’t be tempted to leave the safety of the Sanctuary to communicate with him.

“And you would wait here for me to return and hack your limbs off?” She lifted her eyebrows. That was fuckin’ unlikely to happen.

“I would accompany you on your mission.” Her cyborg surprised her with that offer. “I wouldn’t be out of your sightlines.”

She frowned. “And I wouldn’t be out of your sightlines.”

He wanted to monitor her fuckin’ movements.

“The Humanoid Alliance killed every warrior who was manufactured in the same vat as I was.” Her cyborg cared for those beings. She heard that in his voice. “Some died in battle.” That was an honorable end. “Some died in the training ring. They refused to defend themselves against their opponents.” She didn’t know that had been an option for his kind. “Some were decommissioned. They were sliced into pieces while they remained alive, and salvaged for spare parts.”

“Fuck.” She was angry on his behalf. That was a horribly harsh way to

die.

“You can have the satisfaction of killing the Humanoid Alliance commander who had authorized the theft of your dagger.” Her cyborg didn’t attempt to fight her for that foe. Which was good because she wasn’t allowing anyone else to kill the fucker. “I want the satisfaction of killing some of the beings around him.”

“Do you know who that Humanoid Alliance commander is?” She had only recently uncovered that information.

Her cyborg nodded. “My kind has been tracking Commander Arajas. We process who he is, where he is currently located, and what security measures he has installed to protect him.”

All those details would be helpful to have. They would ensure the success of her mission.

Normally, she’d rely on Jane to supply them. But her daughter was... distracted.

And Intrepid was right fuckin’ there, volunteering to help her.

She studied him.

The male was hard. Again. Her cyborg was an unequaled fuck. He had stamina and skill and had learned quickly how to please her.

He was also a gifted warrior. She hadn’t killed him during their battle. That was damn impressive.

And he was a captain of a battle station. Her cyborg must enjoy flying. That was a task she didn’t relish and would rather not fuckin’ do.

“We’ll need another ship.” She would leave the warship with Jane. Her daughter required a way to leave the planet and the sector if a danger emerged.

They couldn’t take her cyborg’s battle station on a stealth mission either. And the shuttle craft he’d flown to the planet’s surface hadn’t been designed for long flights.

“We’ll have our choice of cyborg ships.” Intrepid smiled.

The damn male was happy.

And the fucked-up thing was—she was happy also.

She had a better chance of reaching the Humanoid Alliance commander with her cyborg by her side. He would be a training partner during the long voyage. And they’d fuck. Numerous times a planet rotation.

By the time she returned to Praecipua Minor to retrieve Jane, both she and her daughter should be over their cyborg obsessions. She would sever all

Intrepid's limbs, and then she would leave, never to think of him again.

A small voice inside Olrun whispered she was lying to herself.

She ignored it. "We should list all the supplies we need."

A shift later, most of the planning had been completed. It turned out Intrepid's kind had hunted down and executed quite a few Humanoid Alliance commanders.

That was good because he was familiar with the breadth of the mission. But it was also bad because the remaining Humanoid Alliance commanders were on high alert. They had installed increasingly challenging-to-overcome security systems.

Her cyborg was confident they could access the thieving fucker, however.

"Strike, my second-in-command, is compiling the supplies, including the additional weapons we'll require." Intrepid donned his body armor, covering up his perfect gray skin and gorgeous form.

That was a damn shame. She openly admired his physique. But it had to be done.

She put on her armor also. "I'll retrieve my guns." She should tell her daughter about their decisions face-to-face. Jane would have questions. And some concerns. "And I'll meet you at your shuttle craft."

"Take these." He held out the weapons he'd seized from her.

She sheathed them one-by-one. He brushed his thumb over her fingers during each transfer, and she trembled every fuckin' time.

Her fixation on the male was ridiculous. Her lips flattened.

"And take this one also." Her cyborg returned the dagger the Humanoid Alliance had stolen from her.

As she slipped the blade into its sheath, a sense of rightness fell over Olrun. Her battle armor and her primary arsenal were once again complete. Nothing was missing.

And nothing could be used against her or her daughter. Jane would be better protected once she entered the Sanctuary. The other Valkyries in that top-secret location would also be safe.

"I'll be waiting for you by my shuttle craft, my Valkyrie." Intrepid gazed at her with glowing eyes.

Fuck. He was handsome.

She forced herself to turn away from him, and she ran at her top speed toward the warship.

The sun was setting yet again. She'd spent almost two planet rotations with the cyborg. Her glow lit her path, cutting through the stretching shadows.

When she reached the vessel, Jane was sitting on its ramp. Her damn daughter hadn't donned protective armor. She was wearing a flight suit. And no helmet.

"You were supposed to stay inside the warship." Olrun frowned at her.

Her human daughter would have better shielding there.

Sure, it wouldn't stop a missile attack. She winced. They'd learned that the hard way.

But situated outside the vessel, a mere projectile, fuck, a huge hailstone could've ended her fragile lifespan.

"You were supposed to defeat your foe within a shift." Jane rolled her eyes. "Tell me he's still alive."

"The cyborg is still alive." Olrun opened the cargo hold and rummaged through its contents. "Don't worry. Your friendship with your Argot remains intact."

"Thank you." Jane beamed at her.

It was the happiest Olrun had ever seen her.

Not killing Intrepid had been the right decision.

For a few reasons. But she wouldn't examine that right now.

She gripped her favorite missile launcher. "There you are."

"Why do you need *that*?" Her daughter's eyes widened.

"Death cometh from the skies." Olrun quoted that line from Valkyrie lore, and she strapped the missile launcher to her back.

"Beings don't say cometh anymore." Jane rose to her booted feet. "And I need more information than that, Mom."

"The cyborg and I are hunting the Humanoid Alliance commander who authorized the theft of my dagger." Olrun filled some of her empty holsters with guns. She chose a variety of weapons, as she didn't know what she'd need. "I might blow some shit up before I slice that fucker into pieces."

"You *and the cyborg* are hunting Commander Arajás?" Her daughter joined her near the cargo hold. She bumped against her side. "You're working with your foe, the male you spent two planet rotations trying to

kill?”

They had done quite a bit more than fight. But Olrun kept that information to herself. “You told me not to kill him.” She shrugged. “And someone has to die.”

Because the theft had been of more than the dagger. The Humanoid Alliance had robbed her daughter of her natural legs.

“That is the Valkyrie way.” Jane handed her a much-loved short-range gun.

Olrun had utilized it so much the handle had been worn by her touch. She placed it in one of her hip holsters. “Vengeance will be ours.”

“Will it be ours?” Her daughter leaned against her. “Am I joining the two of you on this killing spree?” Her eyes widened. “Oh. Is Argot coming with us also? Will it be the four of us?”

“Four warriors are two warriors too many for a stealth mission.” Olrun looked over her other battle supplies. Nothing in the containers seemed necessary. “The cyborg and I will handle this.”

“You don’t want me to accompany you.” Hurt edged Jane’s voice.

“This isn’t about what I want.” Olrun sighed. “I *need* you to keep an eye on the rest of the cyborgs.”

She gave her daughter that flimsy excuse. Because what she truly needed was the knowledge that Jane was safe.

“That surveillance will require regular conversations with your Argot and perhaps a few visits from him.” Olrun extracted the much-loved short-range gun from her hip holster and stuffed it into one of the front pockets of Jane’s flight suit. “Use this on him if he says or does anything you don’t like.”

“Thank you, Mom.” Her daughter hugged her hard. “Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.”

Jane did a little jig around her.

Olrun couldn’t suppress her smile. Her daughter’s joy fed hers.

“And Argot would never say anything I didn’t like. He understands me, Mom.” Jane glowed almost as brightly as a Valkyrie did. “Did you know he’s an E Model? E Models have beautifully dark eyes. But he says many humans and humanoids find them a bit scary. They would make terrible comments about him, calling him unnatural and freakish.”

Her daughter knew what that felt like because beings had made the same comments about her due to her legs.

Olrun’s lips flattened. She would kill that fuckin’ humanoid nourishment

deliverer at the medic bay. He'd rue the planet rotation he hurt her daughter.

But first, she'd kill the Humanoid Alliance commander who had authorized the missile that severed Jane's limbs. She placed another, less-loved gun in her hip holster.

Jane chattered about Argot, about his every word and thought. Caring warmed her daughter's voice. She liked the male. Very much.

Olrun was pleased for her daughter. Forming connections with non-Valkyries wasn't her kind's way. But Jane was a human, and humans operated by different rules.

Her daughter deserved happiness. And she deserved affection.

Her cyborg's damn friend had better not fuck that up. "If Argot hurts you, I'm killing him." That was a vow.

"I'll likely be the one to hurt *him*." Jane's shoulders slumped. "I won't be able to talk to him when we're in the Sanctuary, and Mom, I'll *need* to talk to him." She paused. "No Valkyries have mechanical legs." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "They didn't accept me when I was all organic, and now, they *really* won't accept me."

The dread wrapped around her daughter's words hurt Olrun's heart.

Especially because she couldn't fuckin' refute it.

Jane was right. There *were* no Valkyries with mechanical legs.

Her kind healed quickly and completely. The replacement of entire limbs took time, but it was possible.

And her sisters *might* not accept Jane. Fuck. They certainly wouldn't understand her.

She experienced more misgivings about her grand plan to protect her daughter.

"You can talk to Argot all you want while I'm away." Her tone was gruff. "The warship can stay here. The locals will be returning to their settlement, but I'm told they'll leave you alone. You have enough nourishment bars and containers of beverage to last you. The training simulator is working. You—"

"I'll be fine, Mom." Her daughter placed one of her hands on Olrun's right arm. "And I'm a communication away if you need me to research anything. Or fix a technical problem. Though the cyborg should be able to help with that."

The cyborg would help with more than that. Olrun wiggled her ass. "I'll be fine also, Daughter. And I'll contact you. You can tell me all about your Argot." She suspected she'd be hearing a lot about that male. "I'll give you a

death-count update.”

Jane winced. “Please don’t kill Argot’s friend.”

“I won’t kill my cyborg.” Intentionally. “There are more than enough Humanoid Alliance fuckers to slice to bits.”

“*Your* cyborg.” Her daughter stared at her.

Shit. She’d said too much. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“I want to talk about it.” Jane wasn’t letting the topic go. “Valkyries don’t have relationships with non-Valkyries. That’s one of your rules.”

“That’s a Valkyrie rule.” Olrun hadn’t set it. “And we’re going on a mission together. And there are numerous cyborgs. You have your cyborg. I have mine.”

“You have *yours*?” Her daughter’s voice squeaked.

Olrun was fuckin’ this up, and she knew of one guaranteed way to force Jane to change the subject. “He has a huge cock.”

“Ugh.” Her daughter slapped her hands over her ears. “Mom. No. I don’t want to hear it. He’s Argot’s friend, and you’re...you’re my mom. We have a deal about this.”

Olrun didn’t talk about her fucks. And Jane fought behind her on the battlefield.

“You said you wanted to discuss it.” Olrun shrugged. “I have to return to *the* cyborg before he decides to complete the mission himself.”

But first, she had to say goodbye. Temporarily. She hoped.

Olrun gazed at her daughter. Whenever she went off to war, there was always a chance, slim but existing, she wouldn’t return. She wouldn’t see Jane again.

Being a warrior *and* a mom was damn hard.

“You won’t take any risks?” She placed one of her hands on her daughter’s shoulder.

“I won’t take any risks physically.” Jane must be thinking about Argot again and that emotional risk. “Come back with your head attached.”

Decapitation was one of the few ways to kill a Valkyrie. “I’ll try my best.” Olrun grinned. “I love you, Jane.” She squeezed her daughter’s shoulder.

Jane placed her hand over hers. “I love you, Mom.” She met her gaze. “And thank you for giving me more time with *my* cyborg.” Her eyes sparkled. “I won’t squander it. Time, as we both know, is limited. Especially for a human like me.”

It was too fuckin' limited.

A big ball of emotion formed in Olrun's throat.

She'd miss her daughter.

"We'll talk often." She said that for herself and for Jane.

"We will." Her daughter nodded.

Olrun hugged Jane one more time. Fiercely.

Then she grabbed the go pack she always had ready, turned, and stalked in the direction of her cyborg's vessel.

She resisted the urge to look back at her daughter.

Jane would be safe on Praecipua Minor. Intrepid said his crew would protect her. And she would have some moments of joy with her Argot. The male might rebuild her daughter's battered confidence.

Fuck. Olrun hated the Humanoid Alliance commander for orchestrating the attack on Jane.

Her fingers curled into tight fists.

With her cyborg's help, she'd track down the male, and the first wound she'd inflict would be to his knees. She'd sever his legs completely. He would feel what Jane had felt.

And then he'd feel more. He would scream for death long before she killed him.

A Valkyrie's vengeance had no limits.

And the full strength of her fury was now directed at the human male, a being deserving of her anger, her rage. Her retribution would be glorious.

Olrun's lips curled into a grim smile as she walked toward that destiny.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Intrepid leaned against the side of his shuttle craft, and he waited for his female to return to him. It had taken all his willpower not to chase after her.

There was no logical reason to do that.

Other than his desire to constantly be with his Valkyrie.

She remained within his monitoring range. He processed she hadn't escaped him.

And she needed her space. Their bond was new, and his warrior female hadn't fully accepted it yet.

That would happen...in time.

Their mission to kill the Humanoid Alliance commander would speed up the process. They'd travel in the same ship, train together, breed, do other things. That would solidify their connection.

His body hardened at the prospect.

The supplies have been loaded into the freighter, Captain. Strike gave him that update through a private transmission line.

Intrepid didn't want Power to hear about the mission before he and his Valkyrie left the sector. If the Cyborg Council leader didn't process their plans, he wouldn't tell them not to undertake them.

His command of the Dauntless would be revoked. That was now a 99.8999 percent certainty.

He hadn't killed his Valkyrie, as Power had expected him to do. The two of them had forged an alliance, something the male hadn't authorized. And they were leaving the sector without permission, to kill a high-ranking enemy, also without the Cyborg Council leader's permission.

Intrepid would prefer not to add ignoring a direct order to his long list of

transgressions.

That lack of response would be...disrespectful.

Power might be an arrogant ass. But he was the Cyborg Council's leader, and he warranted some deference.

My female and I will be boarding the Dauntless within the shift, he informed Strike.

That was a projection. His Valkyrie could require more or less time to recover her weapons and chatter with her daughter.

We're happy for you, Captain. Strike sounded as though he spoke on behalf of everyone on board the battle station.

If you display that happiness, my Valkyrie will sever your head from your neck. Intrepid warned him. *I expect everyone to keep their comments to themselves. That includes Grid.*

I'll relay that expectation, Captain. His second-in-command's transmission lilted with a hint of humor. *And I'll ensure there are containers of beverage and additional nourishment bars delivered to your private chambers. Do Valkyries have additional requirements?*

No. Not that he processed. *And our stay on the Dauntless will be short. We might not require my private chambers.* His Valkyrie would be eager to start their mission. *You'll remain acting captain.*

I won't fail you, Captain. Strike took the role seriously.

As Intrepid projected he would. The male was a skilled officer.

Remain on the bridge during our arrival. He didn't want his skittish Valkyrie to be greeted with a formal ceremony or a large group of beings. *We'll rendezvous with you and the other officers there.*

We won't leave our posts, Captain. His second-in-command gave him that vow.

Intrepid relaxed. *What intel have you uncovered about the Humanoid Alliance commander's security systems?*

Strike relayed the details they'd gathered thus far. Intrepid listened and asked questions and constantly scanned his surroundings.

The humanoid lifeform he was tracking finally moved. His Valkyrie rushed at cyborg speeds toward him.

Excitement coursed through Intrepid's circuits. He immediately ended the transmission with Strike and applied all his bandwidth to his approaching female.

His simulated spine straightened. He squared his shoulders and widened

his stance, planting himself in his current spot.

His Orlun came into visual range. And he was glad he'd physically prepared because her beauty threatened to knock him to the ground.

The glow radiating from her warmed his heart. Her cheeks were flushed with golden pigment. Her eyes glittered. Her hair flowed from underneath her helmet like a stream of liquid sunshine.

His Valkyrie carried a large pack in one of her hands, sported an impressive arsenal of guns and blades on her form, and had a missile launcher strapped to her back next to her sword. Her stride was long. Her tread was soundless.

She leapt over a large boulder and landed without decreasing her speed.

Within mere heartbeats, she skidded to her booted feet in front of him. Her chest heaved. Her skin glistened with sweat. Her fingers were curled over the hilts of two sheathed daggers.

Intrepid grinned. His female was all warrior, and he liked that. Very much. "Do you have more weapons in the pack?"

She smiled back at him, and his systems almost went down. His female was that gorgeous. "I considered bringing more weapons. But I thought I should take a couple fuckin' flight suits and some other girly shit."

"That's wise." He opened the cargo hold. "I don't have much *girly shit*."

He should've prepared better for the possibility of finding his genetic match.

"I didn't think you'd have *any* of that shit." She plunked the pack and the missile launcher and a couple of guns on the metal floor. "I'm trying not to be a dumbass. It's challenging sometimes."

"It's very challenging." He wanted to hook his arms around her waist and kiss her with everything he had.

But that had a 79.1258 percent probability of being a dumbass move, as she'd call it. He—

She stepped nearer to him. Her armor-clad breasts pushed against his equally covered chest. She reached upward with one hand, curved her fingers over his nape and tugged.

He lowered his head, obeying her silent command.

She claimed his lips in a system-straining kiss.

Frag. She was magnificent.

He surrendered to her sensual advance, and she twirled her tongue around his. The nanocybotics in her mouth met the nanocybotics in his. The

effervescence exploded in their mouths.

She sucked, tugging on his flesh, drawing him deeper into her.

A growl rolled up Intrepid's throat. He wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her closer to him.

She swiveled her hips, grinding her armor-covered mons against his frustratingly restricted cock.

His wanting escalated more and more. He struggled to maintain control of his form. It was a battle he was slowly losing.

His Valkyrie showed restraint he no longer had. She stepped backward, drawing away from him. "That needed to be done." A smug smile curved her lips.

He stared at her. His processors weren't fully functioning.

She shook her head. "Are we leaving or what?" She stomped up the ramp.

Without waiting for an answer to her query, she entered the shuttle craft. She assumed they were leaving, and he was accompanying her.

That assumption was fraggin' accurate.

Intrepid hastily followed his Valkyrie into the vessel. He tracked her by scent and found his quarry on the bridge.

She was sprawled in the seat next to the one reserved for the captain.

"You're not flying the ship?" He was surprised his take-charge female would give up that control.

"You don't want to fly it?" She lifted her eyebrows. "Isn't that what a captain does—fly shit?"

"A captain does more than *fly shit*." He claimed the captain's chair. On the Dauntless, Drift, his pilot, would normally do the flying. He performed other duties. "But yes, I prefer to be at the controls."

"I prefer to control the being at the controls." She leaned back in her seat, linked her fingers behind her helmeted head, and propped her booted feet on the console.

No one on his crew would ever dare to do that.

But she was his female. And there was no limit to her daring.

"Your daughter flew your warship." That was another projection.

He performed a pre-flight check of the systems. Everything was fully operational.

Intrepid started the engines. They purred under him.

"Jane likes to fly." His female's lips quirked upward. "And I suck at it."

He wouldn't have to battle her for the captain role. That pleased him.

“You have wings on your helmet.”

“We move so quickly we feel like we’re flying.” She shrugged. “And we can look like we are...to beings whose eyes couldn’t track us very well. The humans on old Earth would tell stories about Valkyries flying all over the place.” She laughed. That glorious sound sparkled inside Intrepid’s chest. “They were as funny as all fuck.”

Intrepid chuckled. He guided the shuttle craft upward. Joy coursed through his circuits. He was flying, a task he loved, and he had his female by his side.

“I liked visiting old Earth.” Her eyes glowed. “As did many of the other Valkyries. The humans were constantly fighting battles against each other. And in the early planet rotations, they would use clubs and blades.” She shivered dramatically. “It was delightfully harsh.”

The Humanoid Alliance humans had the same nature. Intrepid nodded. His brethren were often on the receiving end of that harshness. That wasn’t as delightful.

“Guns and missile launchers are efficient.” His female didn’t attempt to hide her love of battle. The other cyborgs would adore her almost as much as he did. “But the kills are...sanitized. And it’s too fuckin’ easy. Ending a lifespan should be difficult, both skill-wise and emotionally.”

“The Humanoid Alliance humans don’t fight many of their own battles now.” They had manufactured his kind for that reason. Then, when he and his brethren had rebelled, they had created robots and brought back dead warriors to ensure they didn’t have to do their own killing.

“That’s how they tricked me.” His Valkyrie’s lips flattened. “One of their top officers challenged me during a battle. As we fought, the others moved farther and farther away from us until we were isolated. He made a mistake. They always make mistakes.”

“The humans can be sloppy.” Intrepid was counting on that Humanoid Alliance tendency to assist with the upcoming mission. He flew the shuttle craft toward the Dauntless.

“I fucked up also.” His female sighed. Her distress pulled at his heart. “The Humanoid Alliance officer paid for his mistake with his life. I threw a dagger, and hit him right in the left eyeball. It popped. The goo splattered all over his face.”

She had a cyborg’s satisfaction over that victory.

“Before I could retrieve my blade.” Her gorgeous face hardened. “The

Humanoid Alliance sent a fuckin' missile straight into our warship. My daughter, my fragile human daughter..." Her voice broke.

She looked away from him for a moment.

"She lived." Intrepid reminded her. Everything in him wanted to repair her emotional damage.

"She barely lived." His Valkyrie said that softly. "She was...injured. Badly. My focus was her. I didn't give a fuck about my dagger. Until later."

"They needed that distraction to steal it." The Humanoid Alliance had no honor.

"Yeah. And they sacrificed one of their top officers to get it." She lifted her chin. "The Humanoid Alliance commander responsible for my dagger's theft deserves the worst pain a being can handle, and I plan to deliver that to him."

"It'll give me happiness to help you deliver that pain." He would stand by his Valkyrie's side as she delivered vengeance on behalf of her daughter.

Her daughter, his communications officer's genetic match.

Fraggin' hole. "Argot should be part of our mission."

The male's presence would hamper the bonding Intrepid wanted to do with his Valkyrie. But he had to include him in the mission.

Argot would want to avenge his female. That was his right, as her warrior.

"No." Intrepid's Valkyrie projected otherwise. "No fuckin' way. You swore he'd protect my daughter. And she expects him to visit her while we're away. I might not have hacked off your arms and legs...yet...but I *will* sever all his limbs if he insists on joining us."

"Then we can't tell him the Humanoid Alliance commander targeted your daughter." Argot would insist on accompanying them if he processed that.

"Of course, we can't fuckin' tell him that." His female stared at Intrepid as though his processors were malfunctioning. Which they threatened to do around her. He needed her that much. "It's my daughter's place to tell your friend about that incident, not ours. I only relayed that story to you because you need to know why I'm so fuckin' determined to kill the Humanoid Alliance commander. Not so you can blab about it to all and everyone. Fuck."

His female had honored him with her trust. "I won't betray your confidences."

"You'd better not do that." His Valkyrie grumbled her unhappiness.

“Fuck.”

“How far away were you when you threw your dagger at the Humanoid Alliance officer?” He sought more details about that battle.

His female answered his query and added more information. Her mood lightened more and more as she recounted other wars with other opponents.

By the time they reached the Dauntless, she was smiling again.

They were hailed. “Intrepid and Olrun requesting to dock in the Dauntless.” He answered the communication.

“Welcome back, Captain.” Strike granted him authorization. “And welcome, Olrun, to the Dauntless. I’m Strike, the captain’s second-in-command. If you have any requests, I’ll ensure they’re fulfilled.”

“Thank you, Strike.” His Valkyrie’s gratitude pleased Intrepid.

The communication ended. Intrepid landed the shuttle craft in the docking bay.

The space was crowded with warriors. Every male assigned to that part of the battle station was present. And many of them didn’t feign they were completing tasks. They stood along the perimeter, chattering and gazing with open interest at the landing vessel.

His lips twisted as he cut the engines. The males wanted to meet his female. “We don’t receive many non-cyborg visitors. My crew will be... curious.”

“Valkyries are the best damn warriors in the universe, and we also look different. We’re tall and female and we glow.” She rose to her booted feet. “I’m used to the gawking, my cyborg. It happens every fuckin’ time I join a war. I’ve learned it’s best to let them stare. They get over the distraction quicker, and it’s less likely to kill them on the battlefield.”

Intrepid stood also. “You’re a wise being.” He grasped one of her hands.

She looked down at their linked fingers and frowned. “If you hold my hand, they’ll all know we fucked. Do you want that?”

“I want that.” His crew would process the two of them had bred without the physical contact. They would smell his nanocybotics on his female.

“Okay.” Her shoulders lifted and fell. “Then let’s fuckin’ do this.”

Intrepid took the lead, guiding her through the shuttle craft. When he reached the exterior doors, he slapped his free palm against the control panel. The doors opened and the ramp extended.

He stepped out of the vessel first. The probability of there being any danger to his female was 0.2569 percent. But that wasn’t zero. He was

prepared to protect her with his form if that was needed.

“Captain.” His crew straightened around them.

Their eyes widened as his Valkyrie moved beside him. He was aware of the image they made. She was beautiful and golden and lit the area around her. He had gray skin and black hair and was manufactured to fade into the shadows.

He waited for a moment, allowing them to focus on her, to get over the distraction—to use his female’s words.

She squeezed his hand.

“Warriors, Olrun—” He tilted his head toward his Valkyrie. “—will be our guest here on the Dauntless. I expect you to show her the respect you show me.”

“I appreciate that courtesy, my cyborg, but I expect to receive nothing I haven’t earned.” She lifted her chin. Her voice was strong and steady and held the unmistakable ring of command. “I can’t battle all of you in the training chambers during my stay.” They had chattered about the training rings during their trip to the battle station. “Our duration on board the Dauntless is short, and we have other tasks to complete. But I can fight four or five of you.” She paused. “In at least one session. *That* is possible.”

There was a stretch of silence.

His warriors then cheered. The docking bay vibrated with noise and excitement. And the transmission lines within the Dauntless buzzed with admiration for Intrepid’s female.

She loved battle as his males did. Valkyries were fighters of legend. Their skill was well processed. Her confidence confirmed those stories.

According to the chatter on the transmission lines, his crew deemed her worthy of their captain. They envied Intrepid. He had found his female, and she was formidable.

He processed his good fortune. His chest expanded with pride. He tightened his hold on her hand, and they walked down the ramp side by side, as equals.

The crowd parted as they reached the floor level.

“I have some weapons in the cargo hold.” His Valkyrie looked back over her shoulder.

“I’ll transfer them to the freighter—” Repercussion, one of his warriors, offered to perform that task. “—if you trust me with your weapons, Captain’s Olrun.”

Her gaze met Intrepid's. "Captain's Olrun?" She shook her head and returned her attention to the warrior. "You have a role on Intrepid's battle station. Of course, I trust you with my weapons."

That answer earned her his crew's undying loyalty. All the males around her stood a bit straighter.

"Thank you, Repercussion." Intrepid nodded to the male.

"Yeah, thank you." His Valkyrie waved her free hand. "And you might wish to test the missile launcher before you stash it in the other cargo hold." She smiled at the warrior. "I had the manufacturer change it up a bit. It's a sweet piece."

Repercussion gaped at her.

She had rendered a cyborg speechless.

"Come." Intrepid pulled her toward the doors dividing the docking bay from the rest of the battle station. They had to exit before warriors started pledging their love for his Valkyrie.

She was a force.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Olrun had fought for and against a lot of fuckin' leaders during her long lifespan. She was damn good at judging those beings by the way their warriors acted around them.

Intrepid was a skilled and respected leader. His warriors would trade their lifespans for his. They looked to him for guidance, and they trusted him completely.

She benefited from her association with him. They assumed she was trustworthy and skilled also. Which felt fuckin' awesome.

The two of them moved through the battle station. Every expanse of it was immaculately maintained. She could see her face in the floor tiles.

Intrepid's cyborgs lined the hallways. The males stood straighter as they passed.

There must've been thousands of them, and Intrepid greeted each one by name.

Olrun kept track of that information as best as she fuckin' could. By the time, they reached the bridge, her brain was spinning.

The doors opened. They entered the space hand-in-hand.

All heads turned toward them. The cyborgs on the bridge were different models. Many of them had gray skin, black hair, and electric-blue eyes, but none were as attractive and as commanding as her male.

"Captain has the bridge." The male's voice identified him as Strike, her cyborg's second-in-command.

"Thank you, Strike." Intrepid led her to the captain's chair.

She claimed the empty seat beside it.

The males continued to gawk at her. She was accustomed to the staring.

Valkyries were unique. She took some getting used to.

“This is Olrun.” Her cyborg made the introductions. “She is to have the same security access as I do. You can speak openly in her presence.”

“I won’t abuse that access. Much.” She grinned at him.

Her male was as protective of his battle station and his crew as she was of Jane. That he granted her full access was extremely flattering.

And it was a little daunting. She knew every damn thing there was to know about battle strategies and killing beings. Her knowledge of battle stations was shit all.

Intrepid sat in his chair of power. Fuck. He was sexy.

She wanted him now. Always.

That made her a little nervous also. Valkyries didn’t form connections with non-Valkyries.

But they had a long journey ahead of them to and from the Humanoid Alliance commander’s planet, and she was sure to be sick of him by the end of that time frame.

“Strike, as you already process, is my second-in-command.” Intrepid indicated the first speaker. “He’s in charge of the Dauntless when I’m not on the bridge.”

“It’s nice to put a face to the voice.” She smiled at the male.

Strike blinked.

“Is my glow too bright?” She slowed her breathing, and her radiance dimmed.

“Cyborg visual systems can automatically adjust to your *glow*,” Intrepid reminded her.

He ever-so-casually extended his leg and slid one of his big booted feet between hers. His body armor-covered shin pressed against her garment-protected left calf.

That physical connection with him calmed her stressed ass. Her shoulders lowered. She fuckin’ relaxed.

“Drift is our pilot.” Her cyborg continued the introductions.

One of the other males nodded.

“Drift is your *highly skilled* pilot.” That was an assumption. Her cyborg was skilled at flying. He wouldn’t give the pilot role to someone less competent than he was.

“Thank you, Captain’s Olrun.” Drift’s chin lifted with pride.

“Is there another Olrun on the battle station?” She murmured that

question to Intrepid. Was that why beings were identifying her by her relationship to him—to differentiate them?

“No.” The damn male didn’t expand on that answer. “Argot is our communications officer.”

A dark-eyed cyborg met her gaze. “Thank you for keeping my female safe, Captain’s Olrun. I am in your debt.”

She narrowed her eyes at the male. “If, by *your* female, you mean *my* daughter, I want you to know I expect *you* to keep her safe while I’m away on this mission.” She extracted one of her daggers from a sheath. “If she’s harmed in any way, I’ll hunt you down and slice you into tiny pieces.”

“Frag.” One of the not-yet-identified males looked between her and Argot.

“If she’s damaged in any way, you won’t have to kill me.” Her daughter’s friend looked at her gravely. “I’ll already be dead. That’s the only reason any being could reach your daughter to harm her.”

Olrun held the male’s gaze.

Moments stretched.

“That’s the right fuckin’ answer.” She finally dipped her head.

Her gut told her the male was sincere. His intensity level was through the bridge’s ceiling.

And cyborgs couldn’t lie. That was according to both Intrepid *and* Jane.

Argot truly would die for her daughter.

Fuckin’ right. Olrun gave him her begrudging approval. Jane deserved a *friend* who would defend her, chatter with her, and not obliterate her confidence because she had fuckin’ mechanical legs.

That humanoid nourishment deliverer at the medic bay was near the top of her kill list.

The Humanoid Alliance commander was right at the top of it.

“My Valkyrie?” Intrepid murmured.

She pushed away her plans for vengeance and met her male’s gaze. “My cyborg.”

“Grid is our Navigator.” He inclined his head toward the warrior who had cursed.

“I’m keeping my comments to myself.” The male’s eyes glittered. “As ordered.”

He was a shit disturber. Olrun could recognize one of those beings half a battlefield away.

She wouldn't indulge his chaos. "Following the orders of a skilled leader has saved the lifespans of many a warrior."

Something wasn't right with how she had said that statement. If Jane was there, she'd tell her a more modern way of phrasing it.

But her daughter wasn't there. And she missed her so damn much.

Grid, the shit disturber, opened his mouth, likely to say something he shouldn't say.

"Not now, Grid." Intrepid shook his head. "Cure is our medic."

"Your scans are within acceptable ranges for a humanoid, Captain's Olrun." A cyborg in a white jacket pointed a device at her.

She didn't agree to being fuckin' scanned. Olrun frowned at Intrepid.

Her cyborg sighed. "He scans everyone. He says it assists him in his role."

"It *does* assist me." The medic turned his device toward Intrepid. "It's an essential part of any evaluation, and most warriors won't voluntarily enter a medic bay and ask to be scanned."

"That *is* true." Olrun had to admit to that. "I once fought alongside a Palavian who had his top right hand severed in battle. He refused to see a medic, insisted it would heal itself, and if it didn't heal, he had three other hands and could defeat a human opponent with any one of them."

The cyborgs around them grinned.

"There's nothing in the databases about Palavians having enhanced repairing...enhanced healing abilities, Captain's Olrun." Cure focused on that part of her story. "Did he survive his damage?"

"He might have survived it—" She didn't know anything about Palavians and their healing abilities either. "—if he hadn't had his skull split fully open by a battle-ax-wielding Chamele clone in the next round of fighting. That injury, he couldn't recover from. His brains were splattered all over the battlefield."

Many other warriors had met the same gruesome fate during that skirmish. Both sides of the war had suffered tremendous fuckin' losses. It had been a bloodbath.

"I like your female, Captain." Grid's eyes shone with glee.

The other males nodded.

Olrun's cheeks heated. She wasn't anyone's female, but it was nice to be fuckin' liked.

Intrepid's lips curled upward ever so slightly. "Choice is one of our

engineers.” He brought her attention to the largest cyborg on the bridge. “He has recently joined our crew here on the Dauntless.”

“You’re a C Model.” She’d seen an image of those early cyborgs when she was researching Intrepid’s kind with Jane, preparing for their confrontation. “You’re the oldest warrior on the bridge.”

“Frag, no.” Grid answered for the male. “He’s the most newly manufactured warrior on the bridge.”

“Choice is the offspring of Rage, a C Model warrior, and Joan, that warrior’s human female, his genetic match.” Intrepid explained the situation.

He was back to that fated-mates bovine shit. Olrun resisted the urge to roll her eyes.

“You’re definitely the largest warrior on the bridge.” She softened her fuckin’ embarrassing mistake with that compliment. “That gives you an advantage in battle.”

Choice’s shoulders squared.

“He was also trained by Rage, one of the best warriors we have.” Warmth encased Intrepid’s words.

“Rage is a good friend of yours.” She said what he wouldn’t share.

Her cyborg nodded. “Rage *is* a good friend of mine. But Choice was chosen based on his own merits. He’s a fraggin’ skilled engineer.”

“You wouldn’t accept anyone else on your battle station.” Olrun knew that about her mission partner. Fuck. One look at his vessel, and *everyone* would know that. It was in top shape. “Now that I’ve met everyone, you must have captain tasks to complete.” She didn’t require him to entertain her. “And I have to inventory my weapons.”

She could entertain herself.

The review of her weapon selection was an unnecessary task. She knew the arsenal strapped to her form as well as she knew her name.

But she had to do *something* while he was working. And her choices of tasks were limited.

She extracted every blade and gun from the holsters and sheaths and laid them out on the console in front of her. Most of the blades were Valkyrie issued. They were crafted from gold metal and were bonded to her and her energy. She had collected the guns over her many solar cycles of living.

“Frag.” Grid cursed again. “You carry more weapons than a cyborg.”

“Grid, have you plotted a course from here to Serpens 4, Commander Arajas’s planet?” Intrepid frowned at the male.

“I’ve plotted three viable courses, Captain.” The male gave his leader his full attention.

Olrun polished her weapons and listened as Intrepid and his team chattered around her. She learned more about the upcoming mission, and she gained some insight into the running of a battle station.

Intrepid’s warriors returned to their assigned tasks. The gawking stopped. She became one of the team.

That felt...good. Like the ancient times, when she would fight alongside hundreds of her Valkyrie sisters.

That was before their kind, to avoid being targeted, had been forced to split up. The battles with non-Valkyries didn’t have the same vibe to them. She was treated as a mercenary by the human and humanoid warriors. There was no sense of togetherness.

Of belonging.

Jane would love the atmosphere on the Dauntless.

Olrun gazed down at one of her daggers.

She pictured her daughter’s smiling face reflecting in that blade.

Fuck. She wished Jane was with her.

“Would you like to communicate with your daughter in private?” Intrepid somehow read her thoughts. “Or will doing that here suffice?”

“Here is okay.” She doubted they’d be sharing any secrets during their conversation.

“Argot, open communications with my Valkyrie’s daughter.” Her cyborg relayed that instruction to her daughter’s *friend*.

“Oh, this should be good.” Grid leaned back in his chair.

The shit disturber clearly expected chaos. Olrun’s lips flattened.

“Opening communications with your Olrun’s daughter, Captain.” Argot’s eagerness to do that earned him some serious side-eye from her.

The male liked Jane much more than any being liked a friend.

“Did my mom arrive safely, my warrior?” Jane’s gorgeous face appeared on the main viewscreen. Her eyes glowed. Her smile was wide.

And she addressed the male as though he was already hers.

Olrun quashed a curse. Argot had better not fuck with her daughter’s heart.

“Your mom has arrived safely, my female.” There was a tremor in the cyborg’s voice.

He looked at Jane as though she was everything he could ever hope to

find.

Fuck. They were both all-in on their relationship.

That made Olrun uneasy because it had happened so damn quickly.

Argot tilted his entire form toward the main viewscreen. “She’s—”

“She’s right here.” Her tone was dry. “We’re talking from the bridge, so we can’t chatter for long, but I wanted you to know I’m okay and also to check in on you.”

“I missed you too, Mom.” Jane knew what she had been trying to say. “You met my Argot.”

“I met your Argot.” Olrun glanced at the male. He appeared...nervous. “He’s okay.”

Her daughter beamed. “Awww...you like him.” She clapped her hands. “Argot, when my mom says something or someone is okay, that means they’re *really* okay. She likes you.”

“It’s early planet rotations yet, and that could change.” Olrun sought to caution her daughter. “Neither of us know him very well.”

Though Intrepid had assigned him to the Dauntless, which said a lot about the male. And he seemed...nice.

“You like him.” Jane sang those words. “I’m so glad, Mom.” She moved closer to the recording device and lowered her voice. “Because I *really* like him too.”

“I know you do, Daughter.” And the damn male knew that also because everyone on the bridge had heard Jane’s confession. “I’ll chatter with you later.”

“Okay.” Her daughter waved. “Bye, Mom.”

She must have ended the communications. Her face froze on the main viewscreen.

Argot gazed at that image with palpable adoration.

Olrun had sympathy for the male. She couldn’t tear her gaze away from her daughter’s beautiful face either. Jane was a ray of fuckin’ sunshine. Her smile was brighter than a Valkyrie’s glow.

Fuck. Parting from her was damn hard.

Especially as Jane was a mortal. Her lifespan was already too fuckin’ short. And Olrun was squandering moments she could have spent with her.

But the Humanoid Alliance commander had to die. He had to pay for what he had done to her daughter. And Jane wanted to have some alone time with Argot.

“I’ve saved that footage in my processors.” Intrepid covered her hands with one of his. That physical contact with him eased some of the tension inside her. “We can replay it anytime you wish.”

She didn’t know how he knew what she was thinking. But he did. She nodded, too emotional to fuckin’ speak.

“Argot.” Her cyborg’s voice cracked like a whip over the male.

Argot almost shot out of his seat. “Ending communications, Captain.” The image on the main viewscreen reverted to footage of the planet Olrun and her cyborg had recently left.

“I have to kill something.” She had too many feelings pulling her apart. Battle usually sorted all that turmoil out.

“Don’t we all need to kill something?” Grid grumbled that response.

“You’ll have to settle for mock killing, my Valkyrie.” Intrepid squeezed her fingers and then straightened. “There will be a mock battle next shift. Olrun and I will lead one team. Strike—”

“I’ll take the bridge during the mock battle.” Strike claimed that task.

“He doesn’t want to fight against the captain.” Grid offered that explanation.

Strike leveled a hard gaze on the male.

As did her Intrepid. “Grid, you’ll lead the opposing team.”

“Yes.” The male fist pumped the air. “My first pick is Choice. The kid’ll decimate everyone.”

Choice said nothing, but the young C Model didn’t disagree with that prediction.

Intrepid looked at her. “My Valkyrie?”

He was conceding the first pick to her.

If she wanted to win, she should name one of the other C Models they’d encountered on their walk to the bridge. Their size and strength, if not their skill, would match Choice’s.

But there were things more important than victory on the battlefield. That was true even for Valkyries.

“My first pick is Argot.” That choice would make her daughter happy.

And it would be...illuminating. A warrior uncovered a lot about beings when they fought side by side. Olrun would know some key fuckin’ things about the male by the end of the mock battle.

“Thank you, Captain’s Olrun.” Argot appeared pleased with her decision also. “I’ll prove my worth on the mock battlefield.”

“To you and only to you—” She flicked her gaze at Grid before returning it to Argot. “—I’m Jane’s mom.” Her voice was gruff. The cyborg naming conventions for females were fuckin’ bizarre, but she would work with them. “And you’ll prove your worth by keeping her safe. *And* happy.” She added that stipulation. “Do that, and you can always fight on my team.”

“On *our* team.” Intrepid softly corrected her. He looked at her with open approval.

Which shouldn’t count for fuckin’ anything. Yet it did.

Her chest warmed. “Our team will kick ass.”

She had fought *against* him on Praecipua Minor. In one shift, she would fight *with* him in the mock battle.

That prospect excited her. A bit too much.

“Your team will have their asses kicked.” Grid threw her words back at her. “You haven’t fought the cyborgs I’ll be recruiting, Captain’s Olrún. Be prepared to mock die.”

Smack talk was often part of battle. It didn’t intimidate her.

She swept her gaze over the males on the bridge. “None of you have ever fought a Valkyrie. Your captain has done that.” She looked at her handsome male. “And he has, I’m guessing, also fought many of the cyborgs you’ll be recruiting. What’s *his* prediction?”

“My Valkyrie damaged me. Three separate times.” A smile spread across her male’s face. “Our team will kick ass.”

Olrún grinned. Victory would be theirs.

And her daughter would be pleased with her.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Intrepid's warriors adored his Valkyrie before the mock battle. Toward the end of the fighting, they were ready to swear their undying loyalty to her.

"I'm taking down Choice next." His female bumped against him. She swung her allocated sword, the weapon chosen for the event, and mock severed Massive's head.

The male, one of Intrepid's best warriors, bellowed and fell to his body armor-clad knees. The damage was virtual but the pain was very real.

As his Valkyrie had discovered before the mock battle. His wild female had tested the sword on herself. Although she hadn't uttered a sound, her eyes revealed her agony.

Intrepid had struggled to suppress his howl. Her hurt was his hurt. He couldn't bear to witness it.

"Argot, we need your help." His Valkyrie had kept the warrior close to her.

Intrepid projected she was evaluating his communications officer's skills. She was extremely protective of her human daughter and wouldn't allow an unworthy male near her.

Argot dispatched his opponent and rushed to their side. "Tell me what you want me to do, my Jane's mom."

There were now only five warriors remaining on the battlefield. The three of them—he, his Valkyrie, and Argot—faced Grid and Choice.

The audience loudly proclaimed their alliances. The support was split between the two sides.

46.2358 percent of his crew wanted the all-cyborg team to be triumphant. They viewed the pride of their kind to be on the line during the mock battle.

The remaining 53.7642 percent believed a warrior and his genetic match were an unbeatable combination. They were eager to find their own beings and improve their fighting prowess.

Intrepid shifted his sword from his right hand to his left. Since breeding with his female, he *was* stronger. And faster.

His awareness of impending danger had also extended to his Valkyrie. He had blocked several mock-death-delivering blows, protecting her, keeping her in the mock battle.

“Argot, you’ll attack first.” Intrepid’s female issued that order. “You are to shield your captain and me. As you would shield Jane.”

His communications officer squared his shoulders. “I understand, my Jane’s mom.”

Intrepid hoped he understood the assignment.

Because his Valkyrie was testing the male. The next couple of moments would influence Argot’s future with her daughter.

If he failed that test, Intrepid projected his female would withhold her support. And that would make it very difficult for the male during the claiming process.

Judging by the conversations he’d overheard, Jane greatly respected her mom’s opinions.

“Your instructions to Argot were audible, Valkyrie.” Grid yelled that truth across the space. He moved closer to Choice.

“They were meant to be audible, cyborg.” She mouthed an additional word.

Intrepid was 94.7887 certain it was dumbass.

The crowd roared with laughter.

“Grid is yours.” His Valkyrie awarded him that prize.

“Consider him mock dead.” He nodded, accepting his assignment. His first priority was safeguarding his Valkyrie. Once she was out of danger, he’d mock dispose of Grid.

“Okay, warriors.” Intrepid’s Valkyrie’s shine brightened. “Let’s go.”

Argot rushed toward Choice. As he ran, he spread his arms slightly, turning himself into a larger shield, protecting the beings behind him.

Intrepid processed the abilities of both males. In a brute-strength fight with little possible maneuvering, Choice had the advantage. And the C Model wasn’t attempting to safeguard anyone.

The odds of Argot surviving the confrontation was 2.3612 percent.

Both the male and Grid must've completed the same calculations.

Grid backed away from Choice, allowing the warrior additional space to mock end Argot's lifespan quickly.

Argot gritted his teeth, bracing for pain, and attacked his much-larger foe.

Choice easily blocked the blow and then tried to throw Argot backward.

Argot dug his bootheels into the floor, holding his ground. He grunted with the exertion. The crossed swords moved closer and closer to his exposed neck.

Mock death and real agony were coming for the male. Yet he didn't twist out of the weapons lock. He didn't expose them to possible damage.

Grid took advantage of the distraction. He circled them and attempted to attack from the rear.

Intrepid's gut screamed a warning. He turned and defended his Valkyrie.

Grid bounced backward and attacked again. Intrepid stopped the assault.

They sparred, exchanging cyborg-fast strikes. Metal sparked.

Argot bellowed behind him. The male had mock died.

Intrepid's female had lost her living shield.

He partially turned toward her as though to assist her. That was a deliberate move. Intrepid processed his navigator. He processed how he would react.

Grid, as he had predicted, projected it was an error. He swung his sword, aiming the blade at Intrepid's exposed neck.

Intrepid dropped to the floor and mock sliced through his foe's body armor-clad stomach.

Grid's eyes widened. His lips formed a circle. He toppled backward.

Intrepid turned in time to see his Valkyrie run up Argot's prone form and then jump over Choice.

She cleared the huge male by the length of her hand. The power in her physique was fraggin' impressive.

His warrior female landed on the other side of her opponent, quickly turned and, with a thrilling battle cry, mock stabbed Choice in his body armor-covered back.

The kid shrieked with pain and with outrage. He fell to the floor with a loud thump and gyrated as he mock died.

"Victory is ours." Intrepid's Valkyrie lifted her sword in the air with one hand and reached for Intrepid with the other.

He rushed toward her and clasped her hand.

She linked their fingers and raised their hands in victory.

He lifted his sword also. The flush of satisfaction flowed through him. They had fought hard and defeated their opponents. Together.

The entire crowd, both their supporters and Grid's, enthusiastically acknowledged the win. They cheered and then swarmed the battlefield, gathering around them.

Intrepid drew his Valkyrie into his arms and curved his form protectively around hers. The males relayed hardy congratulations to them. They pounded his back, shoulders, arms.

Argot recovered from his mock death. The male hovered at the edge of the group.

His countenance was dark. His lips were set in a severe line.

His communication officer's emotional damage was palpable.

"Argot, get your ass in here and savor our victory." Intrepid's Valkyrie beckoned to the male. "It wouldn't have been possible without you."

"I failed to protect you." Argot frowned at them. "I would have failed to protect my Jane."

"You mock died to protect us. And we survived due to that sacrifice." Intrepid's Valkyrie scowled back at him. "You would have fuckin' died to protect my daughter. Everyone saw that. And that sacrifice would have given her a better shot at survival. A mom, even a Valkyrie mom, couldn't ask any more from a being."

Argot's head lifted. "I would never place your daughter in a position where she faced that level of danger, my Jane's mom."

"If you can stop my daughter from joining you on the battlefield, you have more skill at that than I do." Intrepid's Valkyrie laughed. "She insists on fighting."

Her daughter would be adored by Intrepid's crew also. They all loved battle.

"You defeated me using strategy, Captain." Grid swaggered toward them. "You processed I couldn't resist an easy target."

"That is a recurring error." Intrepid dipped his head. His navigator had fallen for similar tactics in the past. "You fought well."

"You fought well also, C Model." Intrepid's Valkyrie acknowledged Choice's abilities.

"I didn't anticipate you would sacrifice one of your team members." The kid's face flushed with pigment.

“It wasn’t an intentional sacrifice,” Intrepid’s female admitted. “I had hoped to strike before Argot died. But you were too skilled.” She shrugged. “And then his body was right fuckin’ there. We have to use whatever we find on the battlefield to stay alive, don’t we?”

All the warriors around them nodded.

Intrepid’s chest expanded with pride. His Valkyrie was skilled. And she was clever.

She would make a valuable addition to the Dauntless and her crew.

A shift passed. They returned to the docking bay, opened the cargo hold of the modified freighter they’d claimed, and reviewed the supplies and weapons stored there.

“Repercussion, did you test my missile launcher?” Intrepid’s Valkyrie addressed the male lurking near the vessel.

The number of beings in the docking bay had multiplied.

Intrepid’s lips twisted. They all wanted to be near his warrior female.

“I tested your missile launcher, Captain’s Olrún.” Repercussion gave her a small smile. “It’s a beauty.”

“It is fuckin’ awesome.” Intrepid’s warrior female appeared pleased with the male’s review. “I have a gun you’ll want to test when we return.”

When we return. Those words sounded nice in Intrepid’s auditory system.

“That’s one more reason to wish you a quick and safe return, Captain’s Olrún.” Repercussion’s devotion was almost painfully obvious.

“Thank you.” She returned her full attention to Intrepid.

And he had the urge to beam as widely as his warrior. She had that impact on everyone she met.

“Are we ready to leave, my Captain?” Her eyes glittered.

He preferred to linger longer on the Dauntless. It was a safe space. And he wanted her to experience more of it. But they had to exit the sector before Power uncovered their plans.

“We’re almost ready to leave, my Valkyrie.” He turned to Strike.

The male had wanted to witness his departure.

That left Drift temporarily in control of the bridge.

Intrepid suspected all his other officers were currently investigating ways

to improve the battle station's already high-performing engines.

That was the speed-loving pilot's primary focus.

Intrepid shook off his concerns and met his second-in-command's gaze. "If Power contacts you, respond to all his queries." He didn't want his crew to share in his reprimands. "The mission was my initiative. I made all the decisions regarding it. You and the others were following orders."

"Our loyalty is to you, Captain." Strike lifted his chin. "And we answer only to you. If Power contacts us, we'll tell him nothing."

Intrepid swallowed a sigh. "I'll speak with him when we return. You're a great leader, Strike, and I would want no one else to be in charge of the Dauntless and her crew while I was away." He thumped one of his palms against the male's right shoulder. "Contact me if you require my insights."

"I'll review all major decisions with you, Captain." Strike was an extremely stubborn being.

His second-in-command's resolve was frustrating to deal with at times, but Intrepid valued it. Greatly. It was a good trait in a leader.

Intrepid gripped one of his Valkyrie's hands. "We're ready to leave now," he told her.

They walked side by side up the ramp. He matched her stride, her pace. The mock battle had served to solidify them as a team. He processed how she moved, the way her clever brain functioned.

That would benefit them during the mission.

They entered the ship, closed the doors, retracted the ramp, and then headed toward the bridge.

"Your warriors are extremely loyal to you, my cyborg." His Valkyrie's gaze shifted back and forth. She was looking for threats. His female was a true warrior. "That's fuckin' impressive."

She was fuckin' impressive.

"They're loyal to you now also." He wanted her to process she had a place by his side when they returned to the Dauntless.

If they returned to the Dauntless. Intrepid sucked back a sigh. There was a high probability Power would take the battle station and his role away from him.

The leader of the Cyborg Council would view the mission as yet another act of insubordination. Power had a low tolerance for anyone he viewed as being disloyal to him.

"Do you have mock battles often?" His Valkyrie's voice lilted with

interest.

They entered the bridge.

“We have mock battles at least every ten planet rotations.” His warriors required that exertion. They also benefited from the training.

“Nice.” His female claimed the seat beside the captain’s chair.

He longed to hold her, but he projected she wasn’t yet ready for that continuous contact. Intrepid lowered to his seat. “If your energy levels require replenishing, there are nourishment bars and containers of beverage on the console.” He indicated the supplies his males had left for them. “And you can rest while I fly the freighter.”

He completed the pre-flight checklist.

“I’m okay.” His Valkyrie’s yawn belied her words. “Do you need to stick a cable in your ass or something?” She grinned.

“The cables go in my wrist sockets.” He chuckled. Her sense of humor was fraggin’ wonderful. “And yes, I should recharge myself.” He hooked himself up to the console outlet. “We can’t project the future. It’s good to be fully functional at all times.”

“You’re certainly fully fuckin’ functional.” She kicked off her boots and curled up in her chair.

“We’ll breed as soon as we reach open space, my Valkyrie.” He started the engines. His cock was as hard as her body armor.

Her wanting equaled his. He breathed deeply. Her decadent scent flooded his nostrils and threatened to down his systems.

“I’ll fuck your brains...and your processors out when we reach open space, my cyborg.” Her voice lowered to a murmur.

He looked forward to that bonding. Intrepid guided the modified freighter out of the battle station.

It felt strange to be leaving the Dauntless so soon after they had arrived. It had been his universe for solar cycles.

And now his Valkyrie was his sole focus. He glanced at her.

She was studying him. Her expression held a sadness he would kill to banish.

“What are you processing, my female?” Was she missing her daughter again?

“We’ll fuck on this trip but that’s it.” She said that as though she was chattering to herself. “We can’t get attached. You belong on the battle station with your warriors, and I...I don’t fuckin’ belong anywhere or with anyone.”

His skittish female was putting emotional distance between them. Again.

“You belong with your daughter.” He reinforced that connection, hoping it would help her accept theirs.

“That belonging is temporarily.” She sighed. “I only have a little time left with my daughter.”

Intrepid recalled the situation with Choice. The kid had left Rage and Joan, his parents, and that had been a challenging transition for his friends.

“Offspring leave.” He covered his Valkyrie’s hands with one of his. “That’s what they do.”

“Yeah. That’s what they do.” She blew out her breath. “Fuck. And human offspring leave too damn soon.”

She was referring to death.

That should no longer be a concern. “Your daughter is Argot’s genetic match.”

“Are we on that fated-mates bovine shit again?” His female rolled her eyes.

It wasn’t bovine shit. But she didn’t seem ready to accept that yet.

He said nothing.

Moments passed.

Intrepid held onto his female with one hand and flew the modified freighter with the other. He could have flown it with no hands. His link with the vessel didn’t require a physical connection. But he preferred that tactile experience.

“Okay, fuck. I give up.” His Valkyrie huffed. “What impact does your communications officer feeling Jane is his *genetic match* have on her mortality?”

Argot didn’t *feel* Jane was his genetic match. He processed that with 100.0000 certainty.

As Intrepid processed his Olrun was his genetic match. “Cyborgs are genetically compatible with one or, in extremely rare circumstances, two or more beings. We can sense this by scent.” He breathed deeply, inhaling her tantalizing aroma. “By touch.” He squeezed her hands. “And by voice.”

“Ahhh...” She nodded. “That’s why he has vowed fidelity to Jane without fuckin’ meeting her face-to-face.”

“He heard her voice and recognized who she was to him.” Intrepid had heard his Valkyrie’s voice and realized that same truth.

“So he’ll be devoted to her until she dies.” His warrior female sighed.

“Which will be too damn soon.”

The damage in her voice clawed Intrepid’s heart. “If he claims her and protects her, she won’t ever die.”

“What?” His Valkyrie bolted up straight in her chair.

Her auditory system was as enhanced as his was. She heard his words.

“Argot will transfer his nanocybotics to her during breeding.” All the previous cyborgs had been able to bond fully with their human females. It was logical that Argot would form a successful bond with his Valkyrie’s human daughter. “Those nanocybotics will repair any natural damage. He’ll safeguard her from unnatural damage.” Intrepid would do the same with his female. “Your daughter could live forever.”

His Olrun stared at him.

He remained silent, allowing her time to absorb that modification in her daughter’s fate.

“She won’t ever die?” His warrior female’s voice trembled. “My sweet Jane won’t ever die?”

“She won’t ever die.” He confirmed that truth.

“She won’t ever die.” His Valkyrie repeated that statement. “I won’t lose her. She’ll be like a Valkyrie in that way.”

She’d be like a cyborg in that way.

Intrepid didn’t correct her.

“Jane and Argot will fuck. That’s a certainty. Argot is likely making plans to leave for the planet as we’re speaking.” His Valkyrie nearly vibrated with excitement. “And then Jane will be immortal. Like me. I won’t have to worry about her dying. We’ll have a forever together. And we won’t have to go back to...” Her gaze met his. “To where we’d planned to go back to.”

“The Valkyrie secret stronghold.” He supplied the location.

Her eyes widened.

And then she smiled. “That tells you nothing.”

It told him sufficient information. He didn’t require more than that.

“This has to be their decision, however.” She tilted her head. “As much as we want to influence their antics, we have to stay the fuck out of it. Jane will do what she wants to do. She’s always been that way. Once when she had fifteen solar cycles, she got the idea to create her own Valkyrie sword.”

His female talked about her daughter and the past. He listened to her as he flew their modified freighter. Their lifespans had consisted of battle, adventure, and an enviable amount of laughter and caring.

His Valkyrie's energy reserves gradually decreased. Her glow dimmed. She yawned more and more, and her chatter slowed.

"I lied to you, my cyborg." Her voice was barely audible. "When I said I didn't belong anywhere or with anyone."

He processed that. She belonged with her daughter.

"Because I feel like I belong with you." His Valkyrie surprised him with that revelation. "And that should be freakin' me the fuck out." The pauses between her words lengthened. "But it doesn't freak me out. And I don't know what to do with that. I wish..."

Intrepid waited.

She said nothing more.

"What do you wish, my Valkyrie?" He looked at her.

Her eyes were closed, and her breathing had leveled.

His female was asleep.

He considered removing her helmet. That skull armor couldn't be comfortable.

But he didn't want to wake her. And he projected his beautiful warrior would do that if any being touched her. She was accustomed to always being on guard.

Physically and emotionally.

Intrepid released a deep breath.

They'd made progress. She'd claimed him verbally, and she admitted to feeling like she belonged with him.

But they had much further to go. And their bond remained fragile.

At the end of their mission, it might break. She could leave him.

Forever.

He could also lose command of the Dauntless. Power could take the battle station away from him.

Intrepid might end up with nothing.

He returned his gaze to the stretch of space displayed on the main viewscreen. There could be danger lurking in that darkness, and his sole duty now was to protect his female.

She was his biggest gamble. He was risking everything to be with her, to gather more moments of happiness, accumulate more slivers of sublime joy with his warrior female, to touch her, chatter with her, breed with her.

Not a heartbeat of their time together would be squandered. Every smile of hers, every caress, every husky laugh would be recorded and saved in his

organic brain and his internal databases, where they could be replayed again and again.

Intrepid's lips curled upward as he increased the freighter's speed.

If he was left with nothing except those memories, he'd consider that to be a win.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Olrun slept the sleep of the emotionally relieved.

Her beloved human daughter would soon be immortal. She wouldn't ever die. That worry, that weight had lifted from her shoulders.

Her body rewarded her with restorative slumber.

She woke on the bridge of the freighter and felt fuckin' amazing.

Her cyborg was seated beside her. That added to her happiness. The wires were no longer stuck in his wrist. He must be fully recharged or whatever his kind did.

She didn't recognize any of the star systems displayed on the main viewscreen. "Where the fuck are we?"

"We exited the cyborg sector without incident half a shift ago." He smiled at her. "The closest star to our present location is Arietis Beta. There are no humanoid inhabitable planets within monitoring range."

"Fuck me." She widened her eyes. "I was sleeping for a while."

"There was no need to wake you." Intrepid shrugged. "I had everything under control."

"You had *everything* under control, my cyborg?" She lowered her gaze to the huge bulge in his body armor.

His hands flew over the panel embedded in the console in front of him. "I'm activating the guidance system's pilot function. It's advanced, and I'll be monitoring all activities remotely. We'll be in no danger, my Valkyrie."

"I won't be in danger." Her voice turned husky with her need. "*You're* in grave danger of coming so hard your guidance system melts down."

"That's improbable." He lifted his eyebrows.

"I like a challenge." She rose to her feet. The metal tiles were cool against

her bare soles.

“Cyborgs don’t have guidance systems.” He watched her with an exciting level of intensity.

She would give him a fuckin’ show. “That’s a mere detail.” She removed her helmet and placed it on the console. Her hair was plastered to her skull. She raked her fingers through the tendrils, shaking it out.

Her cyborg’s eyes glowed brighter than her shine.

Her lips twitched. She had great fuckin’ hair. “I can overcome it. As I will overcome you.”

She removed her left arm protection, dropped it to the floor, then removed her right arm protection and did the same.

“You’ve already overcome me, my Valkyrie.” He mimicked her action, discarding his own arm pieces. “I’m yours. Completely.”

“I’ll satisfy you. Completely.” She curled her arms and flexed her biceps.

Her cyborg flexed also. His muscles were bigger than hers were. And that thrilled her. But the two of them had almost equivalent strength. She liked that also.

Next to go were her leg protections, first the left and then the right. She took them off slowly, teasing him with glimpses of her form.

Her male, in contrast, ripped his garment off at cyborg speed. The pieces plinked against the tiles.

“Are you a bit eager, my warrior?” She laughed.

His desire for her was damn sexy. She felt more powerful than a being should feel.

“I’ve been wanting you desperately since the mock battle.” His voice resembled an endless crevasse. It was seductively deep. “No one fights like you.”

“I *am* a Valkyrie. Fighting is what we do.” She released the fasteners holding her chest and back armor in place. They fell to the floor.

She pulled the fabric covering over her head, dropped it on top of those garments.

Her form was bare from the waist up.

“You add much more to the universe than the fighting, my female.” Her cyborg didn’t move his gaze from her face. That was flattering. But it wasn’t where she wanted his focus to be.

She wanted to strip him off all control. “Yeah, I can fuck also.” She cupped her breasts. “Look at me, my cyborg.” She pinched her nipples,

delighting in that sharp pain. “Look at all of me.”

He lowered his gaze. “I’m looking, and your beauty is unmatched anywhere in the universe. All of you is golden. All of you shines. You are power and grace and—”

“And I’m horny as all fuck.” She gripped her hip armor and pulled it from her body. Her ass armor fell to the floor. She tossed the front piece over her right shoulder.

Her cyborg inhaled sharply. “I smell your arousal, my Valkyrie.” He yanked off his remaining armor. That freed his huge cock.

“You should see my arousal, my warrior.” She placed her right foot on his left thigh and stroked her leg. “I’m wet for you.” Her pussy juices bathed her skin. “Do you see how soaked I am?”

She caressed herself, spiraling her wanting upward.

A stimulating rumble rolled up her cyborg’s chest. “I see your wetness, my Valkyrie.”

“Feel my wetness.” She wanted his hands on her.

He made a hurting sound and swept his fingertips over her pussy lips. She quivered. He strummed her some more.

A bead of pre-cum formed on the tip of his cock. He was as turned on by the fondling as she was.

She rocked against his hands, applying decadent pressure and then taking it away, applying it and taking it away. His hips undulated to the same rhythm.

They were in sync.

That had happened during the mock battle also. She’d open her mouth to ask for him to cover her and he would already be where she needed him to be. They’d move at the same speed in the same direction. He would block a strike from an opponent while she was delivering the mock death blow.

Their connection was eerie. Yet it felt right.

As his hands felt right on her form. All of her rejoiced in his touch. The nanocybotics he’d transferred to her seemed to sense he was near. They bubbled with vigor inside her, and that added to the sensation of being surrounded by her cyborg.

“Fuck.” She was close to coming. Need circled her, drawing tighter and tighter and tighter.

Her arms and legs shook. He wrapped one of his arms around her waist to stabilize her. His fingers were wet with her wanting.

“Fuck.” She rode her cyborg’s right palm with increasing desperation. “Fuck.” Her release was within reach. She required a little more. She—

He smacked the heel of his hand against her clit while he pushed all four of his fingers inside her pussy, stretching her to her breaking point.

The hurt pushed her over the edge. “Fuck.” She screamed.

Pleasure rushed upward to catch her. She clutched his arms, holding onto him, her shield in a battle storm of emotions.

And she gyrated against him. Her glow burned brightly. Her pussy juices streamed down his forearm, making his gray skin glisten like a newly polished gun.

Her rapture crested and then eased. Her legs crumpled under her.

He slipped his arm under her ass and stopped her descent before she hit the floor. She slid onto his lap, straddling him. His hard cock, caught between their bare forms, pressed against her pussy lips.

She placed her hands on his bare chest. His pecs fluttered under her palms.

A companionable silence swirled around them.

Being with him felt good. It felt right.

Her cyborg didn’t push her to continue. He allowed her time to recover.

She was a Valkyrie. The duration required to do that was short.

And she wanted to continue. She wanted more.

Olrún tilted her head back and met her male’s gaze. “I had my turn. Now, it’s yours.”

He lifted his eyebrows. “It’s my turn for release?” His cock bobbed against her.

“It’s your turn for release.” She wouldn’t deny him that joy. “And it’s also your turn to take control.”

He stared at her. “I’d control our breeding?”

“Yep.” She hadn’t extended that offer to a being.

Ever.

Others expected her to be dominant. She was a Valkyrie, a warrior of legend. And she had never trusted a partner like she trusted Intrepid.

“What do you want to do?” She thought of all the acts warriors boasted to other males about doing. “You want to fuck me up the ass?” She wiggled against him. That wasn’t her favorite position, but she would agree to it. “You want me to sink to my knees before you and suck you dry.” Taking the submissive role would be kinky. “You want me to—”

“I want to do this.” He bracketed her face with his big hands and captured her lips with his.

She froze.

He could do anything he desired to her and he chose a kiss?

Her cyborg lowered his aim. He caught her bottom lip between his teeth and pulled.

Fuck. She grasped his shoulders. He was giving her the hurt she liked.

She opened her mouth.

He released her lip and surged into her. His tongue coiled around hers. He took that terrain without hesitation. It was a struggle not to counterattack, but she managed to remain passive.

Her cyborg sucked on her flesh. His nanocybotics popped and pinched everywhere.

It was his turn. She shouldn't be as stimulated as she was. Yet, passion rushed toward her. It was a head-spinning emotional assault she couldn't defend herself against.

She moaned into his mouth and leaned into his form. The tips of her breasts brushed over his chest. He slid his hands downward, along her neck. And she swallowed. Hard.

That area was vulnerable on her and on past enemies. She often targeted it during battle.

Her cyborg, however, wouldn't harm her. She knew that in her soul. He skimmed his thumbs under her chin. It was the lightest, the gentlest of contacts.

As he adored her neck and her chin with his hands, he ravished her mouth, fucking her tongue with his. Intrepid's erection was unabated. His balls must be ready to explode. Yet he leisurely explored her form.

She didn't have his patience. “My cyborg...”

“Lie back on the console, my Valkyrie.” He moved her to that flat surface. The coolness against her heated skin sent a shiver of delight over her. “And spread your legs.”

She complied, reclining and parting her thighs, giving him access to all of her. To peruse. To touch. To use.

He stood. “You're a skilled warrior, one of the best I've ever encountered, and you're a Valkyrie, a being without rival.” Her cyborg gazed down at her.

Her position made her vulnerable, and that caused her to be a bit fuckin'

nervous.

“But those aren’t the only reasons I want you.” He curled his fingers around his hard shaft. “You’re clever and you’re brave. You love fiercely. You protect the beings you love.”

Fuck. This was embarrassing. She turned her head.

“Look at me.” The command in her cyborg’s voice compelled her to obey him.

She met his gaze.

His eyes glowed. “You’re strong and you’re beautiful, so very beautiful, especially now. Lying on our ship’s console, with the images of open space on the main viewscreen displayed above your head, you resemble a sun rising from behind a planet.” He pumped his cock. “I want to explore your terrain, fly close to your heat. And none of my processing, in this moment, none of my need, is due to your skills on the battlefield.”

She clenched her jaw. What the fuck was he doing to her?

“You’re more than a warrior.” His lips flattened. “Say it.”

“I’m more than a warrior.” She expected that to sound like a lie.

But it didn’t. It sounded like the fuckin’ truth.

“You’re a good female.” His praise warmed her chest.

She was weak ass. For him. And she couldn’t, wouldn’t fight that. “My cyborg...”

“I process what you need, my Valkyrie.” He teased her entrance with his cockhead.

She twitched. Her wanting approached pain-like levels. There wasn’t much more she could tolerate before breaking.

Intrepid pulled his hips back and then thrust hard and deep. She screamed, coming around his shaft. His jaw clenched. He pistoned in and out of her release, extending it more and more and more.

She was stretched physically. Her inner walls hugged his thick shaft.

And she was stretched emotionally. The euphoria pulled her in all different directions. She—

“My Olrún.” Her cyborg tilted his head back and bellowed her name toward the ceiling. He drove into her up to his base and then detonated. Nanocytobotic-infused cum shot from his tip, hit her inner walls.

And she went feral. She screamed and twisted. He pinned her hips to the console with his physique, caged her form with his arms, and battered her with ecstasy. She raked her fingernails over his forearms, fighting to be free

yet knowing she was where she belonged.

She belonged with him. The link between them intensified.

He came again and again, filling her with his unique essence. His eyes were black. There wasn't a speck of blue energy in their depths. His lips were set in a thin white line. His muscles rippled.

She panted, captured between the hard console and a harder male. There was no yield in him.

Fuck. That was sexy.

He emptied all of himself into her. As the onslaught ended, her pleasure leveled.

She went limp underneath him. There was no strength left in her arms and legs, and no thoughts except of him in her mind.

If she was attacked by a tiny defenseless bunnadear, that ball of fluff would defeat her. She had nothing in the barrel. Her projectiles were all spent.

"You're much more than merely a warrior, my Valkyrie." Intrepid fell backward, taking her with him.

He landed in the captain's chair. His ass smacked the seat.

She crashed on top of him. Their bodies collided.

Her cyborg strapped his arms around her and held her to his heaving chest.

She pressed her ear to his left pec. His heart beat strongly in a triple tempo. The link between them didn't dissipate. It remained strong and frighteningly real.

"I don't know how to have any kind of fuckin' relationship that lasts longer than one war." Olrun whispered that confession into his skin. "I tried to be a mom to Jane, and I almost got her killed." Her daughter was permanently altered due to her fuckup. "I have no fuckin' idea how to be your female or whoever else you need me to be."

"I've never had a female." Intrepid ran his hands over her hair. The petting soothed her. "I need you to be you and to give us a chance. That's it. We'll uncover how this works as we progress."

She gazed at him. "I might freak out and run." That was a possibility.

"If you run, I'll chase you." He bent his head and kissed her forehead. His nanocybotics sparred across her skin. "And I'll catch you. I fly fast."

He was a great pilot. She smiled. "You would definitely catch me, cyborg. I couldn't run too quickly from you." And she would have to seek

Jane's help to escape him. "I suck at flying."

Her cyborg chuckled. He was extremely skilled at flying ships, yet he didn't seem to mind she was a barely competent pilot.

A comfortable silence stretched between them. He stroked her hair. She listened to his heart beat.

It was...nice.

And it was easy. Olrun didn't have to work to be with him.

Maybe she'd try the relationship thing for a while with her cyborg. There was an eternity of belonging and caring and some awesome fucks to gain.

All she had to do was...

Risk her heart.

Something told her she'd already placed that part of her in peril.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The trip to Serpens 4, the planet the targeted Humanoid Alliance commander ruled, was devoid of excessive danger.

The monitoring systems in the modified freighter had been greatly expanded. Intrepid detected other ships before those captains detected them, and he shifted course, avoiding additional contact with the unidentified vessels.

Power sent him increasingly irate messages. Intrepid ignored him.

They communicated with his Valkyrie's daughter. For the past nineteen planet rotations, Argot also participated in those communications.

The pair had bonded. Nanocybotics had been exchanged. Jane's natural lifespan had been extended to all eternity. She was no longer completely human.

Intrepid's female had celebrated her daughter's immortality, and she had grown to accept Jane's connection with Argot.

As she appeared to accept her own connection with him.

Their time together had solidified their link. They trained for their upcoming mission, they ate nourishment bars, his female drank beverage, and he held her as she slept.

And they bred. Five or six times a planet rotation. They took turns being in control of those thrilling encounters, and they learned about each other.

He projected he processed her.

But that might've been an error.

"You can drop me off on the surface, orbit the planet a few times, and return for me once I've completed the kill." His Valkyrie donned a black, hooded cape.

Her garment was crafted of regular fabric.

His cape had been fabricated from a simulated vegetation that blocked lifeform scans. The Dauntless had been sent five of the garments during a supply replenishment. They had been told the capes were for emergency use only.

Intrepid had deemed a landing on a Humanoid Alliance-controlled planet and the killing of one of their top commanders to be an emergency use.

“You should hear about the kill over communications channels.” His Valkyrie plunked her perfect ass in the captain’s chair. “A dead leader is a source of chatter. Or watch for increased activity on the planet’s surface. Beings will react.”

“It’ll be easy to verify you’ve killed the commander. I’ll be standing beside you when that happens.” He studied his skittish female. Her processing confused him. “I’m accompanying you on this mission.”

“Valkyries prefer to fight alone.” She scowled at him.

“My Valkyrie fights with her cyborg by her side.” Intrepid would accompany her, every step of the way, protecting her back.

And her front. And every angle of her.

“I don’t want you by my side.” Her gaze slid away from his as she flung that verbal weapon at him.

It inflicted damage, but it didn’t kill his determination. “Why don’t you want me by your side? We trained together. We process how—”

“They’ll target you to distract me, okay?” She shouted that rationale. “Like they targeted Jane to distract me. Except they might succeed in killing you, and that...that...”

He sucked in a breath and waited for her next words.

“That would kill me.” Her voice was barely audible.

He exhaled raggedly.

His Valkyrie had equated him with Jane, the daughter she loved beyond limits. She would be damaged if he died.

That had to mean... “You care for me.”

“Fuck you.” She glared at him.

That wasn’t a denial. And his warrior female would deny it if it wasn’t true.

She cared for him. For *him*.

His chest heated. “I care for you also. Greatly.” He reached out his right hand, captured her chin between his thumb and finger, and turned her face

toward his. “We’re doing this together. You’ll safeguard me. And I’ll safeguard you. And no one—other than the Humanoid Alliance commander and twenty or thirty or forty of his males—will die.”

She stared at him.

He held her gaze.

One, two, five heartbeats sounded.

“I want to kill some of those males,” his Valkyrie finally grumbled. “You can’t have all that fun.”

“You can kill as many as you like.” He bent over and kissed her, fast and hard. “We’re entering Humanoid Alliance space.” He was flying the freighter remotely. “They’ll be hailing us soon. We have to prepare for that exchange.”

Intrepid claimed the seat beside her, the chair his Valkyrie often sat in. He wrapped the cape around his form and pulled up the hood.

“I can’t see any of you.” His warrior female confirmed he was covered.

“I’m running a lifeform scan on our modified freighter.” He accomplished that remotely also. His processors were connected to all the vessel’s systems. “One lifeform has been detected. A humanoid.”

“That’s me.” Her tone was flippant. “You’re now invisible to them.”

“Let’s make you invisible also.” He initiated the projection.

An image of an Akkorokapus male layered over his female’s beautiful face and form.

“I’m very...pink.” The tentacle-faced humanoid’s mouth moved as his female spoke.

“You’re in sync.” That feature was functional. And the broadcast was narrowed to the projected image. Anyone contacting them wouldn’t see Intrepid. “I’m amending your voice.”

“The voice change freaks me out a bit.” She sounded as though she was a human male attempting to speak under water.

“It’s a temporary change.” It unnerved him also. His Valkyrie resembled another being. He breathed deeply. Yet she continued to smell like herself. And their connection hadn’t diminished.

“My cyborg, when I said—”

“We’re being hailed.” He would have to wait to hear what she wanted to say. “Are you ready?”

“I’m fuckin’ ready.” The voice was the male’s. The words were all hers. “Let’s do this.”

“Answering the hail.” He also opened a private transmission line with

Strike. His second-In-command would relay the information they'd need.

"You've entered Humanoid Alliance-controlled space." An image of a human male appeared on the main viewscreen.

A tiny furry being sat on his uniform-clad shoulder. That being had a metal band around their neck. A chain led from it.

"Identify yourself and state your purpose." The Humanoid Alliance male wrinkled his nose. "Fuck." He turned his head and looked at the furry being. "Did you just shit on me?"

The furry being said nothing.

"You *did* shit on me." The Humanoid Alliance male yanked on the chain.

The furry being squeaked.

"Fuckin' freak." The Humanoid Alliance male returned his attention to the communication. "Do I have to repeat myself? Identify yourself and state your purpose."

"Captain Staaf is my name." Intrepid's Valkyrie followed the carefully crafted script. It had been derived from intercepted communications from the freighter captain. "I have a delivery for your commander. It is an item he has been searching for."

"Great. He's getting another freak," the Humanoid Alliance male muttered. "I'm assuming it requires a secured docking bay?" He tapped on a control panel.

"That might be best. The being who loaded the item into the cargo hold had an unfortunate...accident." That information had been manufactured.

"A secured docking bay, it is." The Humanoid Alliance male rolled his eyes. "They're all currently in use. You'll have to land at an open site and wait for one to clear. Follow protocol. Don't exit your ship or open any doors."

"I understand the protocol." Intrepid's Valkyrie sniffed.

"It's a miracle—a freighter captain who understands protocol." The male muttered that also. "What's your identification number, Captain Staaf?"

Strike retrieved that information from Yebet, a cyborg constantly hacked into the Humanoid Alliance's secured databases, and he relayed it to Intrepid.

Intrepid displayed the 24 digits on the modified freighter's main viewscreen.

His Valkyrie recited the number.

Silence stretched.

Intrepid accessed the modified freighter's defense systems. If there was

any hint that identification number was wrong, he'd raise the shields and then fly the frag away from the planet.

"That's confirmed." The Humanoid Alliance male pressed his lips together. "Submit your fingerprint scan."

The fingerprint scan had already been loaded into the freighter's system. Intrepid sent it through the communication lines.

"The fingerprint scan has been submitted." His Valkyrie informed the male.

There was another pause.

"Those *are* your fingerprints." The male flicked his finger at the tiny furry being. "I'm performing a lifeform scan. And then there's only one more step."

Intrepid's Valkyrie stiffened.

Intrepid was as alarmed as she was. There shouldn't be any more steps.

"One humanoid has been detected. And, according to my records, that's you." The Humanoid Alliance male tugged on the furry being's chain. "Time to do your thing, freak. What do you see?"

The furry being stared at the recording device.

A wave of energy swept over the modified freighter. It was so slight and so gentle Intrepid almost didn't detect it.

I have been waiting for someone like you, cyborg. A voice tapped into a transmission line. Kill the commander and as many as you can. They all deserve death.

There was an 84.1256 percent probability the voice belonged to the furry being.

That being must be a captive of the Humanoid Alliance.

He and his brethren had once been captives also. They were able to free themselves.

The furry being must not have that ability.

Intrepid could help him. *Where are they holding you?*

It is too late for me, cyborg. The furry being sighed over the transmission line. I will be dead before you land your freighter. If you want to help me, kill the commander. He is the only outsider alive who knows the location of my home. He has ensured that by having the other outsiders involved killed. When the commander is dead, no one will be able to find one of my kind to replace me. They will live in peace, and I will die in the same state.

We'll kill the commander. Intrepid gave the being his vow.

Thank you.

The soothing energy in the modified freighter dissipated.

“What did you see?” The Humanoid Alliance male jerked the furry being’s chain. “Are you broken?”

“I see nothing that alarms me.” The voice matched the transmission.

“I see a freak.” The Humanoid Alliance male rolled his eyes. “Captain Staaf, you’re authorized to land at the open-air site.” He sent the coordinates for that site.

Then he turned his head abruptly.

“Did you just shit on me again?” The Humanoid Alliance male shrieked at the furry being. “You did. You’re dead, freak. Wait.” He glanced back at the recording device.

And then he tapped his fingers hard and fast against the control panel.

The communication ended.

The image on the main viewscreen reverted to footage of the planet.

“We’ll land at our assigned spot.” Intrepid deactivated the voice modification program and the projection. “It’s a short run...for a cyborg and a Valkyrie...to the commander’s compound.”

His female’s forehead furrowed with processing lines. “After we kill the commander, can we save the little chained being? I would like to be someone who fuckin’ saves beings.”

“The furry being is beyond our help.” He projected the Humanoid Alliance male planned to kill the being. “But you can save the furry being’s kind. They told me, through a transmission line, that killing the Humanoid Alliance commander would allow their kind to live in peace.”

“Then we kill that fucker.” His Valkyrie jumped to her booted feet and moved to the side. “Take your chair back, my cyborg. That’s your rightful fuckin’ place.”

His rightful fuckin’ place was with her. Always with her.

Intrepid brushed his form against his female’s as he passed her.

He needed that physical contact. It was frustratingly brief and he wanted more.

But they had a mission to complete. He claimed the captain’s chair. And

His warrior female flung herself onto his lap.

His breath rushed out of him. His cock hardened.

“Am I squishing the shit out of you?” She straightened. “I’m a large

female. What the fuck am I thinking? Of course I'm squishing the shit out of you." She wiggled forward.

"You're a perfect-sized female." He hooked one of his arms around her waist and drew her backward once more. "Does it feel like I'm being squished?" He pushed his bulge in his body armor against her equally covered ass.

"I can't tell anything from your hard-on." She ground against him, and he had to fight to fly the modified freighter in a straight line. "I like a bit of pain. You might like being squished."

He liked it...too much. "You can test that theory during the return voyage." He wanted her to sit on his lap forever.

First, they had to kill their target.

No one contacted them as their modified freighter entered the planet's atmosphere. Warships cruised past them. They didn't slow. There were no hails.

He flew their vessel slowly over the commander's compound. "The structure appears to match the specs." Strike had sent them that information.

"Fuck, yeah." His Valkyrie nodded. "There are the back doors." She placed a circle over the image of the doors on the main viewscreen.

"You'll stay behind me at all times during the mission." He'd block any projectiles with his body armor-clad form.

"We already fuckin' agreed that made sense." She didn't fight his taking the lead. "You can scan the terrain, looking for lifeforms and shit. I don't have that ability."

"I can also sense danger." Intrepid flew the modified freighter over a path leading from the compound to their assigned coordinates. That route varied slightly from their intel.

And he braced himself for his Valkyrie's response.

His ability was illogical. He processed that. And he rarely shared knowledge about it with another being for that reason. His crew and others merely projected he was lucky.

But she was his female. She should have that intel. Even if it damaged her perception of him.

Or her caring.

"You can sense danger." She repeated his revelation. "One time, I had a bad feeling Jane was in trouble. There was no reason to feel that fuckin' way. I just did. And I ran at top speed to where I last saw her. I arrived in time to

catch her as she fell from the top of an extremely high wall.” She shuddered. “Jane would’ve died if I hadn’t been there.” His Valkyrie looked at him. “Is your thing like that?”

“It is *exactly* like that.” Relief whooshed through him. She processed him.

“That’s fuckin’ awesome.” Her voice rang with approval. “And then, yeah, double yeah on you taking the lead on this mission. Do your thing.”

His *thing* would be protecting her.

Intrepid landed the modified freighter. Their designated spot was, as the Humanoid Alliance male had stated, an open site. There were no barriers to entry. Not from the sky. And it appeared to be unpatrolled.

Beings were situated there. A few heads turned as they set down. But those males immediately looked away. The modified freighter didn’t interest them.

No one approached their ship.

“The Humanoid Alliance is lax with their security.” Intrepid shook his head. Those humans had learned nothing from the cyborg rebellion and from the attacks against the other commanders.

“They’re depending on their screening process to keep their enemies away from the planet.” His Valkyrie slid off his lap. “And this is Commander Arajás’s home.” She parted her cape and ran her hands over her weapons, as though assuring herself they were there. “He likely doesn’t want to be surrounded by guards and gates.”

Any home Intrepid shared with his Valkyrie would be extremely secure. “We have to assume there will be security elsewhere.” He stood and checked his weapons also.

His female nodded. “Great warriors assume there are threats fuckin’ everywhere.” She strapped her sword and her specialized missile launcher to her back.

He swung a pack of explosives over one of his shoulders. “You’ll stay two steps behind me,” he reminded her.

“Yeah, yeah. I’ll keep an eye on your gorgeous ass.” She smacked that part of him. Hard. “Come here, cyborg.” She circled him. “Let me show you what you’re fighting for.” She reached upward, curved her fingers over his nape, and pulled.

He lowered his head, and she captured his lips with hers. They both opened to the other at the same time. Previously transferred nanocybotics met new ones. Their tongues touched and swirled.

Her hood fell backward, and she bathed him in her glow. All of her was golden, was precious and rare and his.

He drew her closer to him. Their body armor clanked together. She bit into his bottom lip.

They moaned, in unison. That was how in sync they were, how connected.

He ran his fingers over her form. She ravished his mouth. The musky scent of her twined around him. Her heat warmed him to his metal frame.

Their passion built quickly, burning higher and higher. It threatened to rage out of control.

That couldn't happen. Not now.

Intrepid reluctantly pulled away from his female. It was an effort, and his chest heaved against hers. If he could, he would kiss her forever.

But they had a shared enemy to defeat.

"That's a prize any warrior would fight for, kill for, and die for, my Valkyrie." Her wouldn't hesitate to trade his lifespan, everything he was and everything he had, to keep her safe.

"You're not any warrior." Her voice was husky. "You're mine. And if you don't stay alive, my cyborg, I'll be so pissed off I'll fly into Valhalla itself, retrieve you, and beat your ass senseless."

That was his female. He grinned. "And then?" There was more. He projected that.

"And then I'll kiss you all over and fuck you into the ground." She shook her head. "But focus on the beating-your-ass-senseless part. And don't get yourself fuckin' killed. I couldn't...I couldn't..."

"You won't." Intrepid didn't need to hear the words. He processed what she was saying. "We're two of the best warriors in the universe. We'll survive this, and we'll complete our mission."

He was manufactured for war, fabricated for that purpose.

And he would battle to keep them both alive.

They *would* return from their mission triumphant.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Olrun now understood why the Valkyries-don't-form-relationships-with-non-Valkyries rule existed.

It wasn't due to the mortality of those other beings, as Intrepid had believed.

Her male had the same unlimited natural lifespan as she had.

Nor was it due to the impact those relationships might have on Valkyries seeking justice, as she had thought.

Her intention to kill the fucker who had ordered the attack on her daughter hadn't waned.

No, the rule had been set because it restricted the number of relationships a Valkyrie could have.

And that decreased the odds of them losing their fuckin' minds when a being they cared about died.

Because, if her cyborg was killed during their upcoming mission, Olrun knew with absolute certainty she'd experience an agony she and many others wouldn't survive.

She would die with Intrepid.

And she would take hundreds, perhaps thousands of beings with her. Her sword would drip with blood. No one would be safe from the ferocity of her grief.

She had to protect him.

Olrun followed Intrepid through the modified freighter. As she walked, she fought the urge to knock him unconscious and leave him in the vessel.

He was a warrior as she was. She had to allow him to accompany her. He deserved to do the thing he was manufactured to do, the thing he loved – to

fight.

It was her task to shield him from harm.

“Are you ready, my Valkyrie?” He paused in front of the exit doors. His shoulders were broad. His booted feet were braced apart.

No. She wasn't ready.

But every passing moment made the situation more dangerous. The sooner they killed the Humanoid Alliance commander and left the planet, the safer they would be.

“I'm ready, my cyborg.” She rested her helmeted head against the wide expanse of his back. That connection with him eased some of her trepidation.

He was with her. He was alive. She would ensure he stayed that way.

Her warrior smacked one of his palms against the control panel on the interior wall. The doors opened, and he ran down the extending ramp.

She followed him, matching his speed. They knew the other's abilities. He knew she could keep his grueling pace.

The modified freighter's doors closed behind them. That flimsy lock was the vessel's sole security. Other ships were situated too close to theirs to activate the perimeter alarms.

She fuckin' hoped their ride would be there when they returned.

The two of them rushed forward faster than a human's eyes could follow. The surrounding ships blurred around them.

They passed a group of humanoids and were out of their sightlines before the chattering males turned their heads.

Olrún and her cyborg left the landing site and zoomed along a series of pathways. They turned left and then left again, right, and another left.

Her cyborg jumped.

She didn't know why he did that but, not being a dumbass, she jumped also. Her leap was identical to his. She was careful to push off where Intrepid had pushed off, and she duplicated his height and trajectory.

It was only when she was airborne that she saw the thin red line of energy crossing the path.

The enemy had situated a laser beam in that spot. It had been a trap for unsuspecting attackers.

She landed on the same spot her cyborg had landed and continued running.

Her leg muscles strained. She pumped her arms. Sweat trickled down her spine.

The rays of the planet's one sun beat down on her armor-clad shoulders. There were no trees to shade them. Anything that could conceal a being along the pathways had been removed.

They encountered three more laser beams. One had decapitated a feathered flying creature. Olrun doubted *it* had been trying to kill Commander Arajias.

She would end the Humanoid Alliance male's lifespan for that crime against the universe also.

The compound came into view. She drew her hood over her head and wrapped the cape around her as they ran around the structure. Her cyborg's sources had told him the back entrance was the least secure. And it had a control panel he was 100.0000 percent certain he could access.

Two human males were stationed there. Intrepid knocked out the one on the right. She butted the hilt of her sword against the second male's skull. He dropped like boulder to the ground.

There was an image of an eyeball perfectly carved into that soil. Its pupil was a series of triangles rotated around one point.

Olrun tilted her head to the side. She'd seen that somewhere. She couldn't remember where.

Her cyborg reached out his hand to access the control panel.

She grabbed his wrist, stopping him.

He glanced at her.

She shook her head and pointed at the image of the eyeball. There was a semicircle consisting of those symbols surrounding the control panel.

Her cyborg could access any *human-created* system.

The extra layer of security wasn't human-made. It was created by another one of the Humanoid Alliance commander's stolen beings or artifacts.

She studied the images and gestured to her warrior.

He moved closer to her.

She indicated the tiny lettering around the edge of the iris.

Her cyborg extracted a handheld from a holster, captured the image, and then scrolled through data. He then showed her the screen.

I see everything in the darkness and under the sun.

She looked upward. They weren't in darkness, but they were certainly under the sun. It was almost as bright...

As she was.

An idea struck her. If it didn't work, she suspected alarms would be

sounded.

But they would have to take that chance. There would be additional security at every entry point they tried to access.

She pointed to her hood and mimicked pulling it down. Then she pointed to her cyborg and made a pushing motion with her hand in the direction of the control panel.

He nodded and repositioned himself in front of that access point.

She took a deep breath and lowered her hood.

Her cyborg placed his right palm on the control panel.

A blast of energy hit them. A heartbeat passed, and a second blast smacked them harder. The third blast almost knocked Olrún over.

She gritted her teeth, physically preparing for the fourth blast.

The doors opened. Her cyborg entered the structure first.

She raced after him.

Her cyborg snapped a human male's neck, downing the guard positioned directly inside the building.

Olrún kicked the second guard in the throat. That body part collapsed under her bootheel. The male dropped to the floor. His body twitched.

They ran toward the Humanoid Alliance commander's private chambers, killing every being they saw. The hallways were lined with stolen artifacts. Beings had died trying to protect those pieces. Olrún and her cyborg delivered justice on their behalf.

It felt good. It felt right.

The doors to Commander Arajas's quarters were closed. They dispatched the guards quickly. The males didn't see them approaching.

It was easy.

It was too fuckin' easy. The Humanoid Alliance commander should've been better protected.

Trepidation filled Olrún. She touched her cyborg's armor-covered arm.

He met her gaze.

She lifted her eyebrows and gestured around them. Where the fuck were the other guards?

He nodded. His lips flattened.

Her cyborg was concerned also.

She slid her fingers along his arm and squeezed his hand. They would deal with whatever waited behind the door for them. Together.

Intrepid dipped his head and skimmed his lips over hers. The kiss was

frustratingly fleeting. Then he pushed her partially behind him, and he drew one of his guns.

She extracted two of hers, filling both of her hands with weapons. Projectiles could down more warriors in a short duration of time than blades could.

Her cyborg placed his free hand on the control panel on the wall outside Commander Arajas's chambers. The doors opened.

A beam of energy zipped from the left to the right.

Oh fuck.

Her damn warrior was moving before her brain realized what she was seeing.

He pushed her out of the way.

But he couldn't evade that defensive measure completely. The beam sliced the fuckin' top of his head off. Blood gushed everywhere.

He didn't make a sound.

Terror gripped Olrun. "Are you fuckin' dead?" She scrambled to his side and pulled him out of the doorway. "Did it slice through your fuckin' brain?"

His entire face was bathed in crimson.

"I'm not dead." Her cyborg swiped his hands over his eyebrows and flicked that blood away. "Only my flesh was damaged."

He looked a mess. Fuck. She could see his shiny metal skull.

But he was alive.

Neither of them would remain in the plane of the living if they entered the chambers through the opened doors. Streams of energy crisscrossed the space. The laser beams were so powerful they spanned the hallway and cut into the far wall.

"We can't enter that way." She studied the Humanoid Alliance commander's defensive measures. "The movements of the lasers are predictable, but there're too many of them, and they're moving too quickly for us to avoid them."

"No being is that predictable." Her cyborg looked at the doorway also. "They're following a program that is disconnected from the structure's systems. But that means their range is set."

"Yeah, they're set to the entire doorway." That wasn't helpful.

"We won't go through the doorway." He gazed pointedly at the wall beside it.

"Fuck yeah." She unstrapped her favorite missile launcher from her back.

“This baby can blast through a small planet.”

“This challenge is all yours, my Valkyrie.” Her cyborg moved behind her.

She braced herself, aimed, and fired. The boom was nearly deafening. The missile blasted through the reinforced wall like it was made of mist.

“Don’t just stand there,” a being yelled. “Block the hole.”

A scraping sound followed.

Olrun fired another missile into the hole. The second boom was quieter. But the aftermath was noisier.

“Shrapnel got me.”

“My leg. My leg.”

Beings screamed.

She switched her missile launcher for her guns. “I’m going through.” And she was going first. She wasn’t risking her cyborg’s lifespan a second time.

He was much too important to her.

She ducked as she stepped into the hole in the wall. A projectile skimmed along her arm armor. She turned in that direction and shot.

The being wasn’t visible. Dust clouded the chamber.

She heard the thump as they fell to the floor.

They must’ve thought that if she couldn’t see them, she couldn’t hit them.

But she’d been fighting long before they were born. The angle of their projectile had shown her where they had been standing.

A shadow moved to her right.

Before she could press the trigger, gunfire sounded from behind her. And the shadow dropped.

“I’ll cover you as you locate the commander.” Her cyborg had joined her in the chamber. He bumped against her.

That brief physical connection fuckin’ revived her. She moved forward, peering into the haze, treading quietly.

The air smelled of projectiles, dust, blood, and urine. Severed cables snapped with energy. Someone sobbed.

Her cyborg tapped his triggers and the crying stopped. He downed being after being after being as they searched the chamber.

Some targets were lying on the floor. Their bodies were riddled with shrapnel. But they reached for their guns as soon as they spotted her.

That earned them a swift death from her big male.

Olrun finally found the commander. The gray-haired human male stood behind three younger males. He held an amulet to his flushed forehead.

“You take the two on the right.” She assigned those targets to her cyborg. “I’ll take the one on the left.”

Her target whimpered. He raised his guns.

She shot both of them out of his hands. The weapons landed with a clink, clink on the floor, and slid across the tiles far away from the Humanoid Alliance male.

Her cyborg disarmed his targets as easily as she did.

“Were you the being who activated the laser that hurt my warrior?” Olrun glared at her target. One of the males had initiated those defenses. That someone deserved a slow, painful death. *No one* hurt her cyborg. “Let’s see how you like having your head shaved off.”

She aimed at the top of the male’s head. Her intention was to carve some of the hair and skin off his not-at-all-reinforced skull. That would hurt him but not kill him.

Her damn target, however, ducked.

The projectiles hit Commander Arajas.

Right in the amulet.

They bounced off that palm-sized, lopsided circle of engraved metal. The amulet didn’t break, and the Humanoid Alliance Commander miraculously wasn’t harmed.

“It protected me.” He kissed the amulet. “The stories were true. I am now unkillable.”

His eyes gleamed with a maniacal fervor.

Olrun frowned. The male wasn’t operating with a full arsenal.

“That means I don’t need you anymore.” Commander Arajas calmly drew a gun and shot her target in the back.

The male’s guard fell face-first to the floor. His arms and legs gyrated.

Then he stilled. And a pool of blood spread around him.

“That target belonged to my Valkyrie.” Her cyborg shot the gun out of the commander’s hands. “You can have one of my targets, my female.”

“I’m not dying for that fuckin’ fiend.” One of his targets ran toward the hole in the wall.

“That one is yours.” Olrun shot the other male in the left eyeball.

His brains splattered against Commander Arajas’s uniform.

The male’s fingers whitened around his amulet.

But he didn’t move. He didn’t run. He didn’t attempt to retrieve his weapon.

The fucker was certain his neck decoration would protect him.

“This kill is for the tiny furry being.” Intrepid turned and shot the fleeing guard in the back of his neck.

The male’s head fell to the tiles first. Then his body followed.

That left only one target in the chamber – the Humanoid Alliance commander.

The two of them faced the male. They aimed their guns in his direction.

Commander Arajas was her kill. Her cyborg had given her that honor.

But it reassured her that, if she couldn’t make the shot, for some fuckin’ bizarre reason, her warrior would complete the task.

Justice would be served.

Sweat beaded on Commander Arajas’s forehead. The fucker knew he was in danger. “You can’t kill me.” He held up the amulet. “I’m protected.”

“I don’t plan to kill you. Immediately.” Her smile contained no humor. A quick death would be too kind for an evil being like him. “This is for my daughter.”

She aimed for both of Commander Arajas’s knees and pulled the triggers.

The male screamed and toppled to the floor. He landed hard on his blasted-apart kneecaps, and more screams were ripped from his lips.

Olrun glanced at her cyborg. “That was satisfying.”

“Vengeance often is.” He grinned at her. His head was a bloody mess.

And that angered her. “This is for my cyborg.” She parted the Humanoid Alliance commander’s hair and skin with projectiles.

The male screamed louder. Blood streamed down his face. Red bubbles formed on the seam of his lips.

“There should be a medic pack somewhere around here.” She glanced with concern at her cyborg. “It’ll have pain inhibitors. Inject yourself with some of those.”

He must be in agony.

“I’m repairing.” Her male was so fuckin’ stubborn. “And I’m not leaving your side, my Valkyrie.”

“What is happening?” Commander Arajas clutched his amulet. “I’m supposed to be protected.”

“You’re not fuckin’ dead, you cruel ass fucker.” If the amulet worked, as the male believed it did, she might not be able to kill him. That would fuck up her plans for retribution. “But I also haven’t shot you anywhere lethal.”

To illustrate that point, she blasted the tips of his ears off.

The Humanoid Alliance commander screamed. More blood spurted.

Her cyborg frowned. "I accessed the compound's systems when I opened the exterior doors, and I gave myself remote access, my Valkyrie. According to the chatter on the communications systems, the guards at the back entrance have been discovered."

Fuck. They had to leave. Soon.

First, she had a bad fucker to kill.

She exchanged her guns for a dagger. "Do you recognize this?" She angled the blade to reflect light into Commander Arajás's eyes. "You stole this weapon from me. No one steals from a Valkyrie. And no one hurts someone loved by a Valkyrie."

Jane was only one of the beings she was referring to.

Her damn cyborg was the other being. She loved the fuckin' male.

"You can't kill me." Commander Arajás held up the amulet. His tone was smug. "I have protection."

The fucker truly believed he couldn't die.

"Let's test that fuckin' theory, shall we?" She flung the dagger at the male.

It was a perfect throw. The blade sliced along his neck, severing his right carotid artery.

The energy released by the weapon crunched the Humanoid Alliance commander's ear cartilage, cheek, and neck bones.

His eyes widened.

Her target dropped the amulet. It fell to the floor. He grabbed his neck wound.

Blood gushed between his fingers.

Commander Arajás toppled over, gyrated for a couple heartbeats, and then became still.

The fucker was dead.

Olrun retrieved her dagger. She wiped the blood on the Humanoid Alliance commander's uniform and sheathed her weapon. "The amulet didn't fuckin' work." She picked that up also. "What does this say?" She handed the object to her cyborg.

"According to the databases, it's written in the language of the Durgadynn." He turned the amulet in his hands. "They were annihilated during a Humanoid Alliance invasion. The writing says, 'Those who are pure in heart will never die.'"

She snorted. "Commander Arajias certainly wasn't pure at heart."

She took the amulet from her cyborg and placed it in one of her holsters. Protective objects weren't her thing, but she wouldn't leave it in the chamber for another Humanoid Alliance fucker to find.

"We did what we came here to accomplish." She gazed at her warrior. The Humanoid Alliance commander was dead. They had avenged her daughter's injuries and stopped the male's rampage of horror. "Let's fuckin' go home."

"Home." Intrepid's lips curled upward.

He set the pack of explosives close to a sparking live wire.

"Yeah, home." Her home was wherever her cyborg and her daughter were.

Olrin clasped her warrior's hand.

He linked their fingers.

And they ran at Valkyrie speed out of the chamber.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Intrepid had almost lost his Valkyrie. Permanently.

If his inner alarms hadn't sounded as the door to the Humanoid Alliance commander's chambers had opened, he wouldn't have pushed her out of the way in time.

She would have been sliced into two.

And he would have died with her. Because he couldn't live without his warrior female. She was the heart in his chest, his purpose, his everything.

That replayed in his processors over and over again as he exited the compound with his Valkyrie.

They passed humans and humanoids along the pathways leading to the modified freighter. There was no need to stop and kill them. They were moving at cyborg speed, and the other beings couldn't track them with their challenged visual systems.

All the beings saw was a brief blur of darkness and an equally fleeting blaze of light.

More deadly beams of energy had been activated along the route. That didn't slow them either. They jumped over those defenses and continued running.

The airspace above their heads was crowded. Warships filled the skies.

And it would soon become more occupied. As they arrived at the landing site, many of the vessels that had previously been parked there were taking off.

The remaining crews were rushing to leave.

"Move faster." A male in a captain's uniform yelled at a subordinate. "They're closing the airspace. If we don't lift off now, who knows when

we'll be able to get off this planet."

The mass departures could work to their advantage. Intrepid tilted his head to the side. It might hide their departure.

But first, they had to deal with a couple of thieves.

"Come on. You can hack it." Two human males were attempting to access their modified freighter's systems through the exterior control panel. "We have to get into this wreck. They're killing three-eyed tree-loving freaks across the galaxy, and we're missing all that fun. If we don't leave now, while everyone is distracted, we'll be stuck guarding those ugly old containers forever."

Not everyone was distracted.

Intrepid drew one of his daggers and inclined his head toward the male on the left.

His Valkyrie nodded and unsheathed one of her blades.

They disposed of the males quickly, synchronizing their kills. The thieves didn't notice them until the daggers were at their throats, and they died with little noise.

Intrepid opened the doors remotely, and they sprinted inside the vessel. He closed the doors, retracted the ramp, and performed the pre-flight checks.

The exterior control panel was no longer functional. The two males must've damaged it. But the modified freighter was otherwise operational.

"Am I blowing up ships as we leave?" His warrior female claimed her seat.

He sat in the captain's chair. "Avoid blowing anything up, if that is at all possible." He started the engines. The floor tiles vibrated under his booted feet. "The less attention we draw to ourselves, the higher the probability we'll make it off the planet alive."

"Got it, my cyborg." She tapped her fingers against the control panel embedded in the console. "I'll merely ready the weapons systems as per the plan. If any of them get too close, I'm blasting them into the next galaxy."

That was his Valkyrie. Intrepid grinned as he guided the modified freighter upward.

That was a challenging feat. The space around them was busy with the other departing vessels.

"I'm accessing Humanoid Alliance communications." He hacked into those systems. The information relayed might help them with their departure.

"The commander's facedown on the floor. There's blood everywhere."

The being on the Humanoid Alliance communication lines sounded hysterical. “I think...I think he’s dead, sir. I’ll...Is that pack on fire? Put it—”

There was a loud boom, and that communication abruptly ended.

“The commander is dead. I now have the authority.” Another being uttered that declaration. The being’s tone was smug. There was a 96.1277 percent probability he was a Humanoid Alliance senior officer. “Lock down the planet. No one else leaves the surface.”

“Locking down the planet.” The third voice was curt. “What do we do about the ships in the air, sir?”

“We let those ships depart.” The senior officer was sloppy...like many of his kind were. And that would benefit Intrepid and Olrún. “The killer couldn’t have left the surface that quickly.”

“A Valkyrie could do that,” the third being muttered.

“Are you questioning my orders?” The senior officer barked at him.

“No, sir.” The third being said that louder. “Authorizing those ships to depart.”

“You’ve been listening to rumors.” The senior officer verbally reprimanded the being. “And that makes me question your intelligence. Valkyries.” He snorted. “Famed female warriors. Everyone knows females aren’t competent fighters.”

“Can I blow *him* up?” Intrepid’s Valkyrie scowled. “What a dumbass.”

“We’ll blow him up at a later time.” If the male survived. The probability of that was low because the senior officer *was*, as his Valkyrie colorfully stated, a dumbass.

Intrepid flew the modified freighter higher and higher. Panels rattled as they climbed. There was resistance, resistance, resistance.

And then they were free of the planet’s pull. Their vessel shot into open space.

The tension in his form eased.

“I’m getting some pain inhibitors.” His female left her seat, searched through compartments, and returned to him with the medic pack.

“I’m repairing.” The hurt was...manageable.

“You still look fucked-up.” She loaded an injector gun with pain inhibitors, pressed the muzzle to his neck, and tapped the trigger. “I’m cleaning you too.”

“I won’t...object...to that.” The pain was gone. And he felt like he was floating. Intrepid patted the chair’s armrest. He remained seated. The floating

sensation was a false input.

“You’re spacing out your words strangely.” She dabbed a cleaning cloth over his face. “Can you fly?”

“I can fly with no functioning processors.” He smiled.

“Just to be safe, how about we get some help with the fuckin’ flying from the guidance system, huh?” She reached over and activated that system. The return route had already been inputted as part of the mission planning.

“You’re a clever female.” He gazed up at her. “And you are so beautiful.”

“Pain inhibitors fuck up cyborgs, don’t they?” She grinned down at him. Her glow was magnificent. It shone all around her.

“I’m not fucked-up.” He blinked at her. Everything felt...great. He placed a hand on her hip. She felt great.

She captured his face between her palms and gazed at him. “Yeah, you are so fucked-up.”

“My head is in your hands.” He liked that she was touching him, but he didn’t like the implications of that. “Does that mean our battle is over?”

Her face softened. “Our battle will never be fuckin’ over, my cyborg.”

“Good.” His joy returned. “I like fighting with you.”

“I like fighting with you too.” She slid onto his lap. “I’m putting a pause on the cleaning and the mushy talk until we get out of the sector. And I’m helping you fly this fuckin’ thing.”

He opened his mouth to object. Then he closed it again.

Intrepid wrapped his arms around her waist and drew her nearer to him. He liked having her near him. If he said something, she might go back to her own chair.

He bent his head to smell her hair. The tip of his nose smacked the back of her helmet.

“Too much armor.” His face reflected in the shiny gold metal.

“I’m removing it, okay?” She did exactly that, placing it on the console.

That freed her hair. The tendrils fell, bouncing against her shoulders. Light was captured by those golden strands.

He gathered some of them in his hands and buried his nose in that decadence. Her scent was all around him. He breathed deeply.

“You’re so fucked-up.” She laughed.

That happy sound made his heart malfunction. It skipped a beat.

Emotion built in Intrepid until he couldn’t contain it any longer.

“I love you, my Valkyrie.” The words burst from his lips. “I project you

don't want to hear that. Valkyries don't form relationships with non-Valkyries. But I need to tell you the humanoid love words." He paused. They were the humanoid love words. But he was saying them. They were *his* words. "The cyborg love words." That didn't sound right either. "The love words."

"I need to say them also." She leaned against him. "I love you, my cyborg."

His processors spun. He replayed her reply.

It remained the same.

"I *am* fucked-up." He had to be that way. Nothing else was logical. "I processed you said the love words back to me."

"You *are* fucked-up, but not about that." Humor wrapped around her words. "I *do* love you. I love you more than fighting, more than life, more than the Valkyrie rules."

"You're a Valkyrie." He tightened his hold on her. She felt real.

"Yeah, I'm a Valkyrie." She strained forward. He gave her more space to move. She accessed the embedded control panel. "You're not going to remember this fuckin' conversation. So I'm inputting the love words, as you call them, into the ship's systems. The Valkyrie. Loves. Her cyborg. There." She straightened. "You'll see that when you're less fucked-up, and we won't have to go through all this shit again."

He scanned through the modification.

And then he started laughing. Hard.

"Why are you laughing like a fuckin' fool, my cyborg?" She turned her head and frowned at him. "Have the pain inhibitors completely broken you?"

"You..." He couldn't stop laughing.

"Focus." She slapped his thighs so hard he felt the sting through his body armor.

His mirth paused for a heartbeat. "You sent that communication to every contact in the system."

"Oh fuck." His Valkyrie stiffened. "Who do you have listed as a contact in the system?"

"Your daughter is listed." He had added that contact for her.

She groaned.

"And Strike." They had communicated often with his second-in-command.

That groan was louder.

“And Power.” That controlling male had added himself to every cyborg ship’s contact list.

“No. Not him.” She covered her beautiful eyes with her hands.

“And every cyborg in existence.” Distress calls were sent to all warriors.

“Oh fuck.” His Valkyrie tilted her head back and gazed up at the bridge’s ceiling.

Moments passed. Intrepid looked at her message again and again, struggling to absorb it. She loved him. His Valkyrie *loved* him.

And every cyborg they encountered now processed that miraculous development.

His warrior female shook against him.

Alarm filled Intrepid. Was she crying?

He stroked her arms, her sides, and studied what he could see of her beautiful face.

There were no tears glistening on her cheeks.

Her vibrations increased more and more.

A laugh escaped her lips. And then another. And another.

Her mirth was infectious. He laughed also.

They clung to each other and laughed and laughed. Everything in the universe was right and radiant.

And full of love.

His Valkyrie loved him. He loved her.

They were going home.

Two shifts passed.

They exited the Humanoid Alliance-controlled sector and continued on their trajectory toward the Dauntless and Praecipua Minor.

The floating sensation Intrepid was experiencing dissipated. The edges in his visual system became sharp once again.

But the message in the modified freighter’s systems didn’t modify.

His Valkyrie loved him.

And he loved her.

She contacted her daughter. There was much teasing about her universe-wide confession of love. But then her daughter issued her own confession.

She loved Argot, Intrepid's communications officer, and wanted to live on the Dauntless with him.

When the communications ended, Intrepid's Valkyrie turned on his lap to gaze at him. "Will it be a problem—the two of us moving into your battle station?"

If the Dauntless was still his battle station, it wouldn't be an issue. "We have to contact Power." He'd been ignoring Power's transmissions.

"Fuck." His warrior female summed up the situation with that one word.

"I'm opening a communication channel with him." That had to be done.

Power's face appeared in the top right corner of the bridge's main viewscreen. His female, Eirene Ours, the Rebel Cyborgs' leader was out of the frame, but Intrepid processed she was there.

The two rarely parted.

"Projecting your bond with the Valkyrie to every cyborg in existence was a miscalculation." The male was very, very angry. "Garnering that support from your brethren might've influenced a different leader. It has no impact on me."

Intrepid's female squeezed his hand. "That was a fuckup. I didn't mean to do that."

"Did your cyborg *mean* to leave the cyborg sector without authorization?" Power lifted his eyebrows. "Did he *mean* to disobey multiple direct orders? Did he *mean* to place his brethren, all genetic matches, and all offspring in danger?"

"I take responsibility for all that also." Intrepid's Valkyrie lifted her chin.

She was a force. He loved her. And he wouldn't allow her to accept blame for his decisions.

"Your orders would've resulted in the death of my female." He met the Cyborg Council leader's gaze through the viewscreen. "I processed there was no danger to my brethren, the genetic matches, or the offspring. And our temporary absence from the cyborg sector resulted in the death of a Humanoid Alliance commander, one of our enemies."

Power pressed his lips together. "Your vows to me were worthless."

"I upheld every vow I made to you." Intrepid stiffened. He wouldn't have his honor questioned. "The dagger was never outside the range of my monitoring systems." He had been with his warrior female the entire time. "And the Valkyrie has been dealt with." He linked his fingers with hers. "Permanently."

“The cyborg has been dealt with. Permanently. Also.” She said that under her breath.

Power glared at him. “And what’s your logic for ignoring my transmissions?”

Intrepid projected that was the male’s biggest issue. “I didn’t yet have the answers for the queries I projected you’d present.”

The male narrowed his eyes at him.

Intrepid gazed back at Power.

“Being stripped of your role is the reprimand for insubordination.” The cyborg leader delivered his sentence.

He would no longer be the captain of the Dauntless. That home would be denied him.

And his Valkyrie.

If she remained with him.

He couldn’t ask her to make that sacrifice. She loved her daughter, and she deserved to be with Jane.

His heart ached. “I accept that reprimand. But I request that the Valkyrie be given private chambers on board the Dauntless. Her daughter is the genetic match of one of my...of one of the Dauntless’s officers.”

“Fuck no.” His warrior female objected to that request. “I’m going with you. There are plenty of beings outside the cyborg sector who would kill to have a Valkyrie and a cyborg fight on their side. We’ll protect those beings. Fuck the cyborgs.”

Power turned his head. He appeared to be communicating with his genetic match.

Intrepid was focused on his own female. “You won’t be able to see your daughter, my Valkyrie.” He wouldn’t allow her to pay that steep cost to be with him. “Ever.”

“That’s bovine shit.” His warrior female scowled at him. “I’ll see her every damn planet rotation through the communication lines. They can’t stop us from fuckin’ talking, can they?”

He frowned. “There’s no technical reason why you couldn’t communicate, but—”

“There are no buts.” His Valkyrie’s passion was all absorbing. “You’re not fighting wars without me. Someone has to ensure you don’t get the top of your head sliced off. Again. The first battle we’ll wage is—”

“You are *not* fighting for other beings,” Power shouted.

Both of them looked at the male.

“Being stripped of your role is the reprimand for insubordination.” The leader of the Cyborg Council repeated his judgment. “But we’re making an exception this one time—” He glanced to his right. “—due to you having assisted the Cyborg Council in the past.”

Intrepid and his crew had helped save Power’s lifespan. That was how he had assisted the Cyborg Council.

“Once you return to the sector, you’re not to leave it again without authorization.” Power laid out the rules. “The Valkyrie is to remain within your monitoring range at all times.”

Intrepid hadn’t planned to ever be farther than that distance away from her. He curved his body armor-clad form around her equally protected body.

“The Dauntless will be assigned new terrain to cover.” Power sent those coordinates through a private transmission line.

Intrepid swallowed a groan. The stretch of border allocated to them was situated as far away from the Homeland as possible without being located outside the sector.

It was a dead zone. Few ships crossed the border there.

“And your battle station will be relegated to secondary patrol.” That reprimand was directed at Intrepid’s entire crew.

There would be a loss of status. Warriors would no longer battle to be assigned to the Dauntless. And some warriors might request to be reassigned.

Secondary patrol was also extremely boring. They would be floating in space, doing nothing.

Intrepid would have to fabricate more tasks to keep his warriors occupied.

“You’ll lend support to the other battle stations.” Power reinforced his modifications.

That was unnecessary. Intrepid’s lips twisted. Every battle station captain processed how redundant secondary patrol was.

“And you won’t directly interact with non-cyborg ships or crews.” The Cyborg Council leader sought to isolate him fully. “Do you process that?”

Intrepid wiped all his irritation from his face and from his voice. “I process that.”

He processed the reprimand could have been much worse.

He might be floating in space with no valued duties for an undetermined duration.

But he’d be doing that with his female. They’d have a home and each

other.

“Disobey a direct order again, and we won’t be as lenient.” Power was determined to be an ass. “Ending communications.”

The image of his face disappeared from the main viewscreen.

Intrepid’s Valkyrie turned on his lap and gazed at him. “Does secondary patrol suck?”

“It’s...boring.” He would tolerate it happily because he would be with her. “We’ll have to host more mock battles.”

“Fuck yeah.” She grinned. “I love mock battles.”

He loved *her*. She was his future, and that future was thrillingly bright.

Intrepid bracketed his Valkyrie’s beautiful face with his hands.

And he kissed her with all the passion in his big cyborg heart.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Ninety-two planet rotations later, Olrun was kneeling on her armor-clad knees in front of her cyborg, showing him how much she loved him.

They were situated on the bridge of the shuttle craft they'd used to travel from the Dauntless to the surface of Praecipua Minor. That transport vessel was now parked in a field.

Intrepid remained in the captain's chair. His feet were spread. His hands clasped the armrests.

She had his big cock in her mouth and was working him with tremendous fuckin' zeal, bobbing up and down, up and down, up and down.

Lines were etched around her cyborg's grimly-set lips. He was clinging to the last remnants of his restraint, but the cracks in that control were showing.

She'd blast them apart. Olrun ravished his cock.

His girth was almost too much for her to handle. Her lips were stretched around him. But she liked that hint of danger, that whisper of pain. It wet her metal-covered pussy.

She advanced farther and farther. His tip tapped the back of her throat. That might've stopped another being. She tilted her head back and continued forward until all of him was inside her.

"Fraggin' hole." His eyes widened. "You're fearless, my Valkyrie."

Damn right. She was fearless. Olrun retreated, took a few fast breaths and advanced again.

That would show him the first time was no fluke.

She truly was that fuckin' awesome.

Her fingers splayed over his bare thighs as she inhaled him. His muscles were unrelenting under her palms. He was flesh over metal frame, and all

hers.

She took him deep, deep, shallow, shallow, deep, shallow, varying her cock sucking, seeking to keep her cyborg off-balance. The goal was to not allow him to retrench or recover. That would make their battle easier for her to win.

Her cyborg fought fiercely. He kept his ass in the seat for the first few moments, granting her total dominion over their encounter.

As they progressed, his knuckles whitened around the armrests more and more. The metal bent under his grip. He was breaking the shit out of the chair.

She would break him. Olrun slapped his shaft with the flat of her tongue as she sucked him deep.

“Must. Move.” He lifted his hips. Sharply.

His base slapped her lips.

Fuck. Olrun blinked. Her eyes watered. That was unexpected.

But she had handled the push. Barely.

She withdrew slightly and wrapped her fingers around his shaft.

That created a barrier. He couldn't go too deep and blow out her throat.

She liked some hurt but not that much.

Once she'd secured that hold on him, he rode her face with wild abandon.

He pistoned in and out of her mouth.

She clung to him and applied and released pressure.

Thrillingly savage noises originated from her normally controlled cyborg. He rumbled and snarled and grunted as he thrust into her.

Fuck. She loved him. So fuckin' much. She met his gaze and allowed all her caring to show.

His eyes blazed with passion. “My Valkyrie.” His hips hitched upward.

He took her by surprise again.

Her teeth grazed the length of his cock.

Her warrior lost his shit. “Love. You.” He howled and drove deeper. His base hit her finger blockade, and he emotionally detonated. His eyes went dark. His muscles flexed tight. Nanocytobotic-infused cum blasted from his tip and struck her flesh.

That propelled her into erotic space. She came hard. Her body gyrated with the most sublime pleasure. Her brain struggled to absorb the bliss.

He continued filling her with his essence. She swallowed and swallowed and swallowed, battling to keep up with the onflow. Effervescence shot down

her throat into the very core of her. She fizzed and popped everywhere. Rapture battered her. Wetness bathed her inner thighs.

“Love. You.” He bellowed louder and relayed more of himself to her. The armrests crumbled into shards of metal under his hands. The pieces fell to the floor next to her.

Her ecstasy elevated with each pump of his hips. Fuck. When she’d dropped to her knees, it had been a selfless act on her part. She’d wanted to show him pleasure. Yet her elation matched his. It rocked her, and had her brain spinning.

She didn’t retreat. Olrun sucked him ferociously, not wasting a single fuckin’ drop of his gift to her.

Time stretched, elongating into forever. The euphoria bombarded her.

Until the erotic onslaught finally ended. He was spent.

“Love. You.” Her cyborg’s ass hit the seat with a smack. “Love. You. So. Much.” He threaded his fingers through her hair and massaged her scalp.

“I love you too.” Her voice was hoarse.

She licked him clean, and then rested her heated cheek on his hard right thigh.

His nanocybotics bubbled inside her. All her little hurts faded.

Their connection remained. It was with her.

Always

“You asked me once, when we first met, if Valkyries dreamed.” That seemed like a fuckin’ lifetime ago. Her world was so much larger now. It held much more caring. “I dream of you. Every fuckin’ rest cycle.”

He bent over and kissed her temple. “Am I wearing garments in those dreams?”

“Fuck no.” She smiled. “You’re bare-assed in every fuckin’ one.”

Her cyborg chuckled.

A warm wonderful silence fell upon them.

Intrepid stroked her loose tendrils, playing with those strands, and he caressed her cheeks, her chin, her neck.

She savored the gentleness and the caring in his touch. Pain was good. It turned her on. But being cherished was fuckin’ nice also.

As was the connection between them. It had strengthened so much, she sensed immediately when something shifted within him.

“What is it?” She lifted her head and, without thinking, reached for the daggers strapped to her thigh armor.

The two of them might be situated on a cyborg-protected planet in a cyborg-guarded sector, and yeah, that was likely the safest place in the universe. But she was a warrior, and she was always ready to fight.

“There’s no perceived threat to us, my Valkyrie.” Intrepid covered her hands with his. His palms were tantalizingly rough against her skin. “Your daughter asked Argot to warn us Choice has located the nourishment the Praecipuans prepared for the celebration this planet rotation.”

“Oh fuck.” Olrún jumped to her booted feet. “That’s a fuckin’ emergency, my cyborg.” She swept her hands over her armor, ensuring the protective garment was in place and all the sheaths and holsters attached to it were filled with weapons. “That C Model can eat. We have to get there before he cleans them out of nourishment.”

Her cyborg stood also. “I warned Grin and Raw and their females we had C Models on board the battle station.” He donned his body armor and boots quickly.

That speed told her he wasn’t 100.0000 percent certain the amount of nourishment had increased enough to compensate for those big-eating warriors.

She grabbed her helmet and plunked it on her head. “Cyborgs don’t drink beverages so, at least, there’ll be booze left.”

The inhabitants of the Praecipua Minor had invited the crew of the Dauntless to the planet to share nourishment and fermented beverage and, likely, an impromptu mock battle or two.

It was one last celebration before the battle station departed to their new assignment—guarding the border between the cyborg sector and the buttfuck of nowhere.

Strike, Cure, and Drift had volunteered to remain on the battle station. She suspected Intrepid’s second-in-command wanted the additional time at the helm.

“Cyborgs don’t require beverages to survive.” Intrepid grasped her hand, and they walked toward the shuttle craft’s exterior doors. “But they very much like drinking fermented beverage.”

“Oh fuck.” There might be no fermented beverage left for them either. “We have to move our asses, my cyborg.”

The two of them laughed as they increased their pace.

The party was in high spirits when they arrived. Olrun and her cyborg heard the boisterous laughter and chatter before they reached the clearing. The air rang with celebration.

Her daughter was the first being to greet them. “Mom, you’re finally here.” Jane ran up to Olrun and hugged her. Her face glowed with happiness and a little too much fermented beverage.

Immortality and being in love agreed with her daughter.

“We got your message about the nourishment.” Olrun grinned. She was content as all fuck. “And we hustled here.” Her gaze lifted over her daughter’s right shoulder. “Thank you, Argot.”

“Your daughter was concerned about the quantities of nourishment, my Jane’s mom.” The male nodded.

He stood protectively behind Jane. A small smile curved his lips.

Argot adored her daughter. And he kept her safe.

“Captain.” The male acknowledged his leader’s presence.

He was also fiercely loyal to his captain, her warrior.

All that had gained him Olrun’s full approval. “Jane knows I like to eat.” She patted her armor-clad stomach. “Fighting works up an appetite.”

“Is that what we’re calling it now—fighting?” Taytu laughed as she approached them. The female’s warrior, Raw, accompanied her. “If it is, we also engaged in some fighting before this planet rotation’s celebration.”

“My male and I are the planet’s Guardians.” Mohini and Grin joined them. “It’s essential that our fighting skills remain honed.” Her eyes sparkled.

“We train too much, according to Adam.” Euryale and Strive’s faces appeared on the giant viewscreen erected near the edge of the clearing.

Adam, the crowd-hating god inhabiting their forms, was the reason they couldn’t be physically present at the celebration. According to Euryale, he enjoyed folding beings into nothingness.

He was too fuckin’ controlling for Olrun’s comfort, but she said nothing because she’d seen stranger things over her long lifespan.

And she didn’t want to die. Her gaze shifted to the cyborg by her side, then to her happy-as-fuck daughter and her daughter’s male. She had too much to live for.

“Captain requested we deliver these.” Grid and Choice juggled numerous containers of beverage in their big hands. The males held those offerings out to them.

“Your captain is a clever being.” She passed Intrepid a container and kept

one for herself. "I'm glad I didn't kill him when I had the chance."

Choice spit out a mouthful of fermented beverage.

"You never had the chance, my Valkyrie." Intrepid sipped his drink. His eyes glowed.

With lust. The male was eye fucking her in front of his warriors.

Her toes curled in her boots.

"Ohhh..." Grid, that shit disturber, watched them with interest. "Those are battle words."

"We *should* have a battle to determine who is the better warrior." Olrun glanced at Intrepid.

"Yes." Grid fist pumped the air.

"Choose your first warrior, my captain." She gave her cyborg that honor.

He met her gaze. "I choose you, my Valkyrie. You're always my first pick. I want you on my team forever."

Damn. She stared at her cyborg. That was hot as fuck.

"Wait. What?" Grid frowned. "Is that allowed?"

"It's allowed." It was their battle and their rules. "I guess you fuckin' win this fight, my captain." She shrugged. "Because no one can beat me in battle."

Everyone around them laughed.

Including Grid. "I like your Olrun, Captain." He said that to Intrepid at least once every five planet rotations. "Where can a warrior get a mock fight?" He yelled that question into the crowd as he wandered away from them.

The male was likely looking for that battle he sought.

"I *love* my Olrun." Intrepid leaned over and kissed her forehead.

His nanocybotics bubbled over her skin.

"The rest of our crew won't participate in a mock fight without my authorization." Her cyborg sighed. "I'll arrange one for Grid and for the others and return to you."

"I'll be here." A solar cycle ago, she would've fought to join that upcoming battle. But that was before she'd met her warrior and discovered there were activities more enjoyable than waging war.

Though waging war *was* extremely fun.

"Thank you." Intrepid kissed her on the forehead again, and then he turned and followed Grid.

"I'll accompany you, Captain." Argot gave Jane a quick kiss and then

hustled to catch up with him.

“We should check on the nourishment situation.” Mohini, Taytu, Grin, and Raw headed toward the origins of that delicious scent.

That left Olrun and her daughter standing at the edge of the clearing.

Olrun hugged Jane to her side. The two of them silently watched the happy chaos unfolding before them.

Beings chattered and laughed and showed each other weapons and other tools. Fermented beverage flowed. And some spilled on the ground, watering the trampled vegetation.

On the viewscreen, Strive attempted to capture the scene on a panel while his female added input. The block of metal floated in the air, unsupported by anything.

Olrun suspected that was the mysterious Adam’s doing.

Her gaze returned to Intrepid and the growing group of cyborgs gathering around him. He was so fuckin’ dominant, and she loved that. She loved him.

And she cared for the warriors he led.

The Praecipuans drifting around the clearing were welcoming humanoids. They were nice—a little too nice, and friendly—a little too friendly.

But the cyborgs on the Dauntless were her beings. They understood her. And she understood them. She felt comfortable with them. They valued what she valued.

Her Valkyrie sisters wouldn’t approve of her relationships with the crew of the Dauntless, with the battle station’s sexy captain, and with her no-longer-entirely-human daughter.

But fuck them. She wouldn’t abandon those connections for all the battles in Valhalla. Her heart warmed. She had found joy with them. Her gaze settled on Intrepid again. She had found love.

“You feel it too, don’t you, Mom?” Jane’s voice was soft and full of wonder. “The belonging?” She smiled. “We belong with the cyborgs.”

“We *do* belong with them.” That was the right fuckin’ word.

“I *know*.” Her daughter made a happy little noise.

The cyborgs had embraced Jane, and they had embraced her mechanical legs. She now had the ability to live forever as they did. Olrun would never lose her daughter. That horrific fear had been banished by Jane’s bond with Argot. The cyborgs respected the two of them for having waged wars in the past.

There was acceptance. There was caring.

And there was belonging, something Jane had always been looking for and had always wanted.

Olrun had been subconsciously looking for belonging also. She merely hadn't fuckin' realized that. Not until they had found it.

With the cyborgs.

They were the safe space she'd been searching for. For her daughter. And for herself.

"He's coming back." A tremor of joy vibrated Jane's voice. Her daughter was looking at Argot.

Olrun was looking at Intrepid. He *was* coming back to her. There was a bounce in his step and a smile on his handsome face. The love reflecting in his eyes warmed her to her toes.

She belonged. Fuck yeah. She did.

So fuckin' much.

If you enjoyed Intrepid Encounter and would like to receive updates on characters plus a notification when Strike Zone, the first story in the Dauntless Cyborgs series, becomes available, sign up for Cynthia Sax's monthly newsletter at:

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STRIKE ZONE - EXCERPT

Here is an unedited excerpt from Strike Zone, the first story in the upcoming Dauntless Cyborgs series.

Kesser was wedged into the gap between the bridge's console and the floor. The space was small but, fortunately, so was she. She fit. Barely. Her flight suit-clad back was pressed against the metal tiles.

She studied the jumble of exposed wires hanging above her. Her ship had been...obtained well-used and many of the cables had been frayed. She had pieced them back together, twisting them into place.

Everything appeared to be connected now. She furrowed her forehead. Yet the power must have been interrupted somewhere.

The life support systems and some of the lights were working but that was it. Her ship was dead in space.

She touched one of the wires.

Metal scraped against metal.

Hope unfurled within her. She must have activated the doors. Her nipples tightened and her pussy grew wet. And that success seemed to turn her on. She wiggled her ass. Stars. She had spent too much time alone. Her body was reacting to—

“The malfunction originated near engine number 1.” A deep voice interrupted her musings.

Kesser jolted upward. Her forehead smacked against the bottom of the

console. Lights burst in her brain. Pain streaked over her skull.

“Fuck.” She lowered her head and gingerly touched her hairline.

Her skin was sticky.

She was bleeding.

Before she could determine the depth of her wound, bands of pressure coiled around her boot-clad ankles. She was dragged feetfirst out of the space.

“Let me go.” She reached for the gun she kept in the front pocket of her flight suit.

That weapon was knocked out of her hand. It skittered across the floor.

“You damaged yourself.” The stranger standing over her scowled.

She blinked up at him.

He was the handsomest being she’d ever seen. His chin was square. His lips were grimly set. He had gray skin and black hair.

And he was furious. His brilliant blue eyes blazed with that fierce emotion.

Which made no blasted sense because *she* should be the one who was angry.

He had invaded *her* domain.

“Who are you? And what are you doing on my ship?” Her vessel had broken down in open space. There had been nothing positioned near it.

Yet he had somehow boarded her mobile home.

The male dropped to his body armor-covered knees. “My name is Strike.”

He leaned over her, bringing his face close to hers.

His breath wafted against her left temple

“I have to repair your damage.” He laved her forehead with the flat of his tongue.

“Did you just lick me?” She stared up at the male. Her skin bubbled. And some of her hurt eased.

“Yes. I licked you.” He swept his tongue over her a second time.

“You did it again.” She fought to hold onto her outrage.

Because the licking felt *good*. Her toes curled in her boots. It was a kink she’d never realized she had.

“You require more repair.” He lapped at her skin and the fizzing spread over her forehead.

“You can’t lick strangers.” Kesser gawked at him. She wasn’t sure what the fuck was happening. “Or board ships without permission.”

Which was a blasted hypocritical thing for her to say.

Because she'd boarded her ship without permission. She'd stolen it from an ass helmet of a Palavian seven solar cycles ago.

But she wasn't sharing *that* information with the male.

"It *must* be possible to lick strangers and board ships without permission." He shrugged. "I did both of those things." The male pulled his head back and examined her wound. "That should be sufficient nanocybotics. Your bleeding has stopped and the discoloration has decreased."

Her face heated. She must look like a mess. "Are the...nanocybotics causing the weird bubbling on my skin?"

"My nanocybotics are repairing you." His tone was dry. "You'll become accustomed to them."

She wouldn't become accustomed to them. Because... "You're not licking me again?"

He lifted one of his eyebrows.

Panic filled her. That hadn't been a question. Her voice shouldn't have lilted upward at the end.

"You're *not* licking me again." She infused the statement with all the certainty she could gather.

It must not have been very convincing.

He gazed at her and didn't say anything.

Kesser suspected there would be more licking in their future.

That shouldn't excite her as much as it did.

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ABOUT CYNTHIA SAX

USA Today bestselling author Cynthia Sax writes contemporary, SciFi and paranormal erotic romances. Her stories have been featured in Star Magazine, on TV, and on numerous top ten lists.

She lives in a world filled with magic and romance. Although her heroes may not always say, “I love you,” they will do anything for the women they adore. They live passionately. They play hard. They love the same women forever.

Cynthia has loved the same wonderful man forever. Her supportive hubby offers himself up to the joys and pains of research, while they travel the world together, meeting fascinating people and finding inspiration in exotic places such as Istanbul, Bali, and Chicago.

Sign up for her dirty-joke-filled monthly newsletter and visit her on the web at www.CynthiaSax.com

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