

“Go ahead! Ask her!”

The group of furs were pushing Dahvu lightly, urging him on.

“If you don’t ask her, then I will. You’ll be sorry as hell then.”

The others laughed, and Dahvu blushed slightly. He glanced in her direction to see if she saw, but she wasn’t looking in his way. He didn’t think she had so far. Maybe not ever.

“Look, I’ll ask her, but it’ll be on my time. Not like there are a whole lot of places to take her here anyway.”

Dahvu felt a massive headache come over him, and he looked around like he wasn’t supposed to be here. Sterilized, white walls, long hallways and flashing alarm lights. Wait, the lights were gone. Had there been some sort of emergency?

“Well we’ve only got a little bit left. As boring as you think this place is, it will be a lot less exciting once we make planetfall. Think you’ll find anything close to a nice restaurant down there?”

They all laughed again, but Dahvu only felt nervous. His heart was racing, and he could feel himself begin to pant lightly. His tail twitched fretfully, and his teammates were noticing.

“We’re here to support you, right? You need to be more of a social cheetah anyway. Even if you get rejected... at least you tried.”

“I don’t want to think about it.” Dahvu said, looking towards the ceiling nervously. Were the lights flashing again? “Did you hear that?” Was that an alarm?

His friends ignored the question, still urging him on, but they seemed to fade. He ignored them in turn, looking towards the coyote. She was perfect, or at least he had thought.

Lights were flashing around her, showing off her wonderful frame. Why wasn’t she worried by the lights or alarms? That was her, of course, calm even under stress. It was the first thing Dahvu ever noticed about her. The next thing was her thin muzzle and her eyes. Piercing? “Piercing” was the word they used in all the stories, and he couldn’t think of a better description. It was like she looked through him, saw every part of him and knew every one of his secrets, which only embarrassed him further when he felt arousal stir him. Her fur was rich, lovely caramelized colors of brown and grey and tinges of black on the edges of her hands and ears. Her fatigues weren’t particularly revealing, but he could tell she had a fantastic figure, especially when the lighting was so perfect. She wasn’t mannish, like most military women, but she also wasn’t skinny. She had a lithe, thin muscle along her arms and legs, tightly packed so that even if it didn’t look like much, she was still strong enough to restrain an unruly patient before battlefield medical care. She still had feminine curves without looking like a muscle head, which was perfect.

Dahvu didn’t think he was a great dating specimen, though. He was fairly average as far as height and weight go for cheetahs. That made him arguably slimmer and faster than most furs, but strength was

not his strong point. Didn't most women chase strong guys? He had always witnessed this, from high school on. While he was studying to become a leading biological researcher, other furs were getting... experience in other categories. While he didn't envy them in particular, he did wish he had gotten *something* from his time in school. As of now, he was just an average-looking cheetah with rather above-average smarts with no dating life. But now... maybe all he needed was self-esteem and some luck. After all, she didn't seem like the normal type. She was smart.

His ears turned bright red again from the thought of asking her, and at the same time alarms flashed, mimicking the colour. He shook his head to clear it, but everything only faded. He wanted to see the coyote woman again, but she turned grainy and colourless. She started to turn away from her work, her tail wagging slightly as she looked at him and smiled.

"I've got you now. Take a deep breath."

Dahvu felt confused, but not ungrateful. He was definitely panting now, and he could feel pain in his legs. What was going on?

There was a snapping sound, and the back of his head felt tight and then he was looking up into the coyote's face. She smiled hopefully at him, readjusting the oxygen mask on his face.

He snapped back into reality with a painful jerk upwards. He sat straight up, almost smashing his face into hers, looking around the room.

"The hell is going on?" he exclaimed. He was in a small room, obviously on the medical side of things. There were two gurneys, the one he was currently on and another. He was hooked up to a saline drip and an oxygen mask covered his face, which he started to pull at before a hand pressed him back into the bed.

"Calm down. Dahvu is it?"

The cheetah nodded, keeping his eyes on her. He felt much better for some reason. Her hand still pressed him lightly, keeping him where he was.

"Dahvu, there was a malfunction. I managed to pull you into a cruiser, but you inhaled too much smoke. You'll have to recover here for a bit. I'm Kalah."

Dahvu practiced it vaguely under the oxygen mask. "Kay—" he croaked.

"Yes. Kalah. I'll be in the cockpit trying to land this thing. Stay put."

Dahvu sat up again as she left, looking after her. Once she was gone, he shook himself out of his stupor. Her calming presence and a high concentration of oxygen had been keeping him sane, but now all he wanted to do was get up and check on the situation. His heart was still racing, but at least his breathing was normalized. He checked his vitals, having a vague understanding of where they should all be. They looked pretty okay. He didn't know why he had to stay here when he could be getting his equipment...

And why were we in a cruiser, trying to land on the planet? What kind of malfunction could possibly have caused them to evacuate?

Dahvu leaned his head against the wall behind his gurney and closed his eyes. They burned slightly, probably from the smoke earlier. He could hear cockpit alarms going off a little way down the hall and a frustrated groan of effort. He wondered how fast they were going.

His legs jerked, and he could see that they had been burned slightly, the fur singed away beneath what was supposed to be fire-retardant pants. They had some major patches of burned material, now, but at least everything above his knees were basically okay. He touched a burn and discovered Kalah had applied some analgesic cream to them already. He smiled despite the pain.

He couldn't stand it any longer. Too much had been going on, too much needed to be found out, and he couldn't do it from the gurney. He stood up unsteadily, pulling the mask off and the IV out. He had always hated that part, not so much for the pain as the strangeness of having something inside his body when it seemed like it shouldn't be. It made his spine crawl.

He stepped tentatively forward and through the little hallway. He had to duck, the cruiser was so small, but finally he stumbled into the cockpit. It was small, too, with pilot and copilot seats set into a slight recess in the floor. Argilus was flying beneath them. Fast.

He half fell into the copilot seat beside Kalah before she even noticed he was there. When she did see him, she did a double-take and gave him a stern glare. "You can't sit still for five minutes?"

"I wanted to know what was happening."

She gave a slight disapproving sound, but was distracted again. She was trying to steer a ship that obviously did not want to be steered. It kept leaning to the left, and she was forced to constantly adjust pitch and yaw like there was something wrong with the stabilizers. And it was all manual, as if computer guidance had given up.

"Is autopilot not working?" Dahvu panted, looking around for a labelled switch.

"Autopilot depended on the Pteryx."

"Where is the Pteryx?"

"At this very moment? Not sure. When we left it, it was falling straight towards Argilus' moon."

"Why?"

She didn't respond, instead pulling a number of switches, extending flaps for landing. "There's... an island here. It's our only chance."

The island appeared on the bow screens, a massive expanse of colorful wildlife. It went on for a few miles, all of it shrouded in mists and thick canopies. A few trees towered over the rest, marvelously tall and with branches extending hundreds of feet.

“Was that...” Asked the coyote, peering at one of the screens distractedly.

“Was that what?”

“Never mind. I thought I saw something.”

Dahvu peered at the screen now, trying to see what Kalah might have seen. Did she just notice the enormous trees?

Either way, the island grew closer and closer, and as it neared, Dahvu could finally tell how fast they were going.

“Uhhh.... How do we slow down?”

“I’ve got it! Don’t worry. Really, you shouldn’t even be up here.”

“I couldn’t stay away.”

She looked at him quickly, as if he had some alternate meaning.

“No! I don’t mean I couldn’t stay away from you. Well, I mean... not that I would want to... but I meant...”

Her hand closed around his short muzzle, closing off his babbling. His heart sank for a moment, but when he looked at her, she was smiling good-naturedly at the bow screens.

“I’ll chalk that up to shock. You did inhale a lot of smoke.”

She flipped a few more switches and then looked over to him. “Hold on to something.”

Dahvu could barely remember what happened next. She punched a yellow button, he could recall, and the sudden deceleration almost made him black out. They slowed, but it was not enough, and they grazed a towering tree, bursting into the canopy. They smashed another few trees, flying into a mile-wide clearing where they bounced over a lake. Some clutter kept flying through the cockpit, and Dahvu looked at some of it as they smashed into the other side of the clearing, knocking into a few trees. The clutter changed direction very suddenly, raining over his body. Paper, cups, litter, and even a few data drives smacked against him and Kalah. And then a cooler smashed Dahvu’s head and he finally did pass out.

~

It was night on Argilus when Dahvu woke.

At first, Dahvu could not comprehend where he was. He looked into the night sky, barely seen past a thick canopy of branches. For a while, he did not think, he just gazed on and on, examining every star, of which he could see vast amounts.

“Oh, you’re awake.”

Dahvu shook his head to clear it, but immediately regretted the action, feeling an intense, searing pain creep from his temple to his cheekbone. He felt at the fur and found fresh stitches on his face.

“Yeah, there will be a wound there for a bit, but the fur should grow back. Sorry I couldn’t do more.”

As he sat up, his eyes were seared from the sudden look he gave the crackling fire. It was sizeable, with a few dead branches poking from it. Kalah was sitting on what looked like the cooler that had smashed him in the face not long ago. She was poking at the fire with a dead branch, then finally snapped it in half and tossed it in.

“Here, I found the rations. There’s enough to last us a good while. Usually a cruiser has enough rations for 20 people.”

“Where are the others?” Dahvu sat up, looking questioningly at the food. They were freeze-dried rations, meant to last through almost any disaster for any length of time. He snapped open some sort of grain packet. There was hard bread inside.

“The others?” Kalah asked, looking honestly confused.

Dahvu could remember not so long ago being with some friends, almost asking out the woman who he was now alone with. They had laughed, urging him to stop being so socially awkward.

“The others. My teammates. Our protection...”

“As far as I can tell... they’re doing one of two things. They crashed onto the moon—” she motioned vaguely upwards and he tried to see if he could see it from here. “—or they landed somewhere on this planet. Like us. I’ve already started signaling for help, grabbed all the rations I could, medical supplies, shelter... everything we’d need. And of course, I grabbed you.”

He sat forward, making himself a little more comfortable in front of the fire as he examined his meal.

“Are we stuck here?”

She sighed, long and heavily. “I think so. But one of the things we were taught in survival training is to keep ourselves occupied after survival is taken care of. We’ll get some sleep tonight, and then in the morning we’ll take a look at this wildlife, yes?”

The cheetah finished chewing on something that might have been fruit at one point. “Do you think mission orders still stand?”

“We’re supposed to operate as if it does. We’re here. We were supposed to be here anyway. Tomorrow you’ll head out and document every life form you see. That was your job, was it not, Dahvu?”

Dahvu liked when she said his name, and he smiled without thinking. “Yes. And you... you were part of the military on the Pteryx?”

“Yes. I’m a medic, mostly, but I go through the same basic training as the others. I just learned how to use what’s between my ears a little better than the other grunts. And apparently I operate well under pressure.” She gave a small, sharp laugh.

“Medic. That would explain the, uh,” he felt at his face.

“Hey.” She spoke sternly, firmly pulling his hand away from his stitches. “Don’t mess with it. Do you want it to heal?”

Dahvu was completely conscious of the fact that she still held his hand, almost blind to everything but that. His ears turned red and he nodded. She gave him a smile, looking quickly back into the flames as she let go of his hand.

“Anyway, finish your meal. I don’t think you have a concussion, but I don’t know if I want to take chances. I’ll be waking you up every hour, so you won’t be getting much sleep tonight after all.”

~

Dahvu was wide awake. Maybe it was the amount of sleep he had already gotten from being knocked out. Maybe it was the trauma of the day, possibly losing all of his friends. Maybe it was Kalah. He couldn’t tell. His mind was so... active. On the one hand, he still, somehow, over all the problems they just experienced, being marooned on a forsaken planet surrounded by possibly dangerous wildlife, and overhead, their only escape crashing directly into a rock a million miles away, over all that he still wanted to court this coyote.

He heard her stir from where she sat by the campfire. She had not even tried sleeping yet. She kept watch for anything dangerous while also taking care of him medically.

“Psst.”

Dahvu jerked his head up, looking in her direction. His head sent a spasm of pain down across his muzzle, but he ignored it.

“Still awake?” she wondered from her perch.

He nodded. “I think I’m jet-lagged.”

She chuckled softly and patted the cooler next to her, offering a seat. “Do you feel okay?”

He got up slowly, stretching his lithe body and picking up the blankets he had used for comfort and warmth, wrapping them around himself and sitting down next to her. He tried to get comfortable, tried to look like he was comfortable, but could not find the right distance to sit. Should he sit next to her like they are friends? Should he keep his distance so he didn’t look desperate? A hundred troubles went through his mind, but in the end, he ended up sitting rather close to her, possibly by accident. Possibly

not. He regretted it, though, mentally slapping himself in the forehead, wondering if she thought he was trying anything.

"A little bit of a headache. I might need some more burn cream soon."

She chuckled again, lightly smacking him with her tail. "No, I meant are you okay. With all this. Earlier you seemed a bit jumpy. I'm trained in psychology if you wanted to talk, though admittedly, I wasn't as good at that as I was with patching up compound fractures."

"Oh, yes. I mean, no, I'm okay. I'm just... confused."

"What about?" She pulled her pack close and pulled some analgesic from it. Dahvu watched her warily, not sure if she would just hand it to him or not. He wanted simultaneously for her to put it on his legs and to run away in embarrassment from wanting such a thing.

"Well, it's such a turn of events. It seems like moments ago, I was on the Pteryx with my team. In the next second, I was on that cruiser with you."

Kalah uncapped the tube of cream and gently pulled one of his legs onto her lap. He obliged, turning his body so she could work easily. "You don't have to do tha—" he started to object.

"Nonsense. This is my job. So you had some amnesia? I don't blame you. You passed out and knocked your head against a bulkhead. Your team... they all ran. You stayed and helped me. I wanted to contain some damage, but I'm not exactly trained with computers. You ended up getting blasted with hot smoke, probably some heavy metals in there, too."

"I... I stayed?" Dahvu asked nervously. He didn't think he would have been the kind to rush bravely into danger.

"You did. It was pretty incredible. You managed to do some stuff I couldn't, managed to contain some of the damage. You may have saved lives. You proved yourself to me, for sure. I'm definitely thinking of saying yes."

She finished up with his leg, but held it in her lap as she looked at him.

"Saying... yes?"

She smacked her forehead. "Oh, duh. You don't remember. You asked me out seconds before everything went to hell. Before... well, I didn't know you. But after seeing you act under pressure, you are a bit stubborn when it comes to doing the right thing. I like that."

Dahvu was stunned with the new information. He couldn't remember any of what she described, but he was elated either way.

"This isn't the best first date." He said, a little exasperated. "As far as dates go, traditionally, falling out of the sky usually ranks lower than going into a restaurant."

“Oh, don’t worry. I’m not really a fan of tradition any way.” She rubbed at his upper thigh, kneading the fur lightly.

Kalah was looking at him with those eyes again, this time with the reflection of a fire glowing in them. It made his heart beat faster and he felt... everything. Scared and elated at the same time. His emotions were stirring so strongly he could hardly find the rational thought process he could have sworn he used to have.

“Dahvu.” Kalah said, smiling broadly. “I’m going to do something very rash, now.”

And with that brief warning, she pulled at his leg, sliding him closer to her on the cooler, wrapped her tail around his waist, one arm around the back of his neck, and kissed him.

He kissed back, and for a few moments, Dahvu forgot everything around them. Oh, he could hear a crackling fire, the chirp of some sort of nocturnal creature, but they didn’t matter. His lips caught against hers and she punctuated every kiss with a small, tiny, affectionate lick. Her cheek rubbed against his as she nibbled one of his ears, and he almost gasped aloud from the shiver that attacked his spine. It made his arousal stir, and he could feel her breath on him as they kissed again.

Before he knew what was happening, she was already pulling off his clothing, rubbing her body against his. They held each other, and he helped her out of her undergarments as well. The blankets he held wrapped around them both as their bodies pressed against one another. She pushed the cheetah slowly to the ground, kneeling as she kissed at his neck. She bit lightly, eliciting a small growl from Dahvu on accident. She smiled at him and kissed him again, growling back slightly, one of her arms keeping him pinned to the ground, soft, yet unyielding.

The shivers in his spine were nearly constant now, turning into a dull, tingling... arousal. There was no away to explain the utter need that had built up in his belly. Kalah must have sensed it, because the coyote proceeded to kiss there, moving slowly down his furred stomach, small trembles happening without his permission with each touch. Her claws dug through the fur, scratching him ever so slightly. It felt good. Impossibly good. Dahvu was lost in pleasure.

And just when he thought he couldn’t handle any more, her warm hand wrapped around his member. At first it caressed lightly, making his fur stand on end as she teased it to its utter fullness. He couldn’t even look down to see what she was doing. He gasped this time, arching his back and legs trembling as she gripped him and moved up and down. The blankets rubbed against his thighs as she rubbed, and while he lay there, pinned on his back, he could do nothing but enjoy every second of it, just as she wanted him to.

Finally, he got a little used to the pleasure, and he was able to raise his head. She scratched his belly lightly and smiled. Her hand held his penis lightly, each heartbeat making it tremble in her hand. He started to reach up, to reciprocate this intense feeling so she could enjoy some of it herself, but she held him off, leaning down to give the head of his penis a small, affectionate lick like the ones she had given him a few moments ago. She looked up and smiled again, almost mischievously, as he gasped.

She leaned down again and he could feel hot breath seconds before he was inside of her. She took him in her mouth, her tongue flattening against him and twisting around. He couldn't feel everything she did, and he was glad he could not. His head began to feel fuzzy and his legs twisted from the pleasure, feeling a surge come from his belly, tightness grow in him.

The pleasure stopped, though, and the feeling faded. There was nothing for a few moments, even the hand that had held his member so affectionately had gone. He looked up to see Kalah lean down over his body, her muzzle digging into the fur of his neck where she nipped him slightly. He felt her touch his member again, guiding it into place as he reached for her fur, rubbing it through his fingers.

He was inside her. For a second, they both stayed still except to kiss each other. Dahvu rubbed her cheek with a thumb, one hand finding her breasts to feel the sensitive nipples. Kalah kneeled over the cheetah, supporting herself while he kneaded her breasts. The coyote was gasping now from pleasure, her eyes closing and making her back arch inwards. She needed more from him, and he obliged, using his mouth in a similar fashion to how she had, enveloping the nipple of one breast in his muzzle, sucking lightly at it. She moved up and down, rolling against his body. He tightened his leg muscles for each thrust, helping her move forward and back, up and down.

They began to move faster, a small yip escaping her throat at times, the cheetah still rubbing, twisting at one breast with a willing hand, the other breast swollen and sensitive in the feline mouth as he sucked and played with it. The other hand rubbed at the coyote's thick fur, scratching slightly from her rump, up her side, and finally stopping at the back of her neck. They thrust faster and faster together. Dahvu felt more and more as if he had found wholeness, some kind of completion in what he was doing. His body had never felt such pleasure, and his mind was nearly gone with it. He felt... fulfilled.

Even more so when he felt that tightness again, his body clenching massively. Her sounds reached a high tempo, and he could... feel her pleasure rise sharply. It was if her pleasure was all he needed, and with that, there was a sudden release.

He felt a pulse of intense pleasure that had built this entire time, a dam that had suddenly burst, releasing himself into her. All of him. He gave everything he had to her body, and she gave herself to him. They panted into each other's neck, their arms moving but unsure of where to go. Her arms collapsed and she rested on her elbows, hands holding his face close so she could kiss him as she trembled and trembled again.

His pleasure finished, his member softening inside her. She continued trembling, pulsing for a few seconds after. Her belly tightened with a slowly lessening tempo. Finally, she finished kissing him, his neck, his face, his chest, and looked down into his eyes.

He felt naked, more than just literally naked. He felt bare, like she could see everything he ever wanted, and that what he wanted more than anything was her. She... liked him. He was with her. They were together in ways he didn't even understand yet. Even though he had softened, he never wanted to leave her, and he said as much.

She smiled and kissed his cheek, rubbing hers against his. She pulled away, though, falling to his side. He laid for a second, panting while her arms wrapped around his chest. His hands found hers, his tail curled around hers; his muzzle turned and somehow found hers. She was his. And he was hers. And she said as much.

“You are mine, now, Dahvu.”

He snuggled a little closer, their fur mixing together, the warmth building around them.

“Best first date ever.”

Second

The next morning, the sun rose.

There is no way to describe waking up an alien planet, Dahvu decided, looking up at a glorious yellow sun mixing the colours of the sky. There was blue and red, purple and yellow, all coming together in horizontal, ephemeral lines. The sun painted in the sky in long, jagged brushstrokes, clouds moving slowly to the west.

Now, in the daylight, Dahvu was able to examine his surroundings.

The trees were in fact, not what he thought. They seemed to have a different structure, smooth, tall, but very thick, as well. The branches that came off of them interconnected, forming thick paths from one tree to another in a winding, twisting maze. They were all one huge structure. He remembered they were on an island and he had a thought: could this entire island be made of one large organism? It seemed so, judging by the way everything connected together. Even the grass often had tiny loops instead of stalks, where it had grown upwards before curving back down into another clump of grass. It was strange, but it could be that the planet was covered in interconnected flora.

When reports had arrived of Argilus the first few years, the only thing known with absolute evidence was that liquid water existed on the surface. As a probe was built and finally sent, pictures taken in orbit discovered organic life. Plant matter, as well as microbes were most likely present, but no evidence suggested animal life, which was entirely possible. An ecosystem of nothing but plants and microbes could potentially exist. But then further evidence arrived. A study showed that some “natural” landforms were actually artificially made. They were ruined, overgrown after hundreds of thousands of years of disuse, but it was obvious: intelligent life had once existed here.

The nations of the world put together a space station after many years, adding thrust capability to it, and then finally adding teams of scientists, military personnel, and caretakers. The mission was to discover as much as possible about the planet. Get samples, more evidence of sentient life, evidence of animal life at all, as well as any possibilities of colonizing the planet itself for future expansion. It was a massive project, but in the end, it was finished, and the station was sent on its way. Neutrino Pulse Gate technology had been perfected, and with a single energy burst, they had been thrown a few hundred lightyears in milliseconds. The amount of power used meant that there would not be a ship following them for a year. Maybe more.

They had arrived a few hundred thousand miles away from Argilus, but in a few weeks they travelled that distance, coming into orbit overhead only for a malfunction to—

He heard a small sound and looked towards it, hoping for a small mammal or maybe an insect to inspect. But it was Kalah, stretching.

"Well hello, sleepyhead." Dahvu said, smiling.

"Oh, dammit, I was gonna get up and feed the fire... get our expedition ready..." she said, sleepily moving her backpack closer. Some of the fur on her head and back was standing up at odd angles, and her eyes only barely opened.

"It's okay, the sun has only just come up. Sleep well?"

"I feel like I just slept for two year."

Dahvu helped her pack, getting his own materials ready. There was a camera, a few notebooks, some technical equipment for close inspection, and a small pouch for samples, as well as the obvious space for rations. "I guess GPS won't be an option. Did we ever have physical maps?"

"The Pteryx was supposed to provide all the information we needed like that. No maps. I don't suppose you're a cartographer as well as a biologist?"

Dahvu had to chuckle. "Never expected I would need the info. I mean, I can only read a map and use a compass because of the orientation courses we had to have on the ship."

"It's okay. We do have tracers and a giant emergency signal coming from the cruiser. Maybe I can..."

"What?" Dahvu watched as Kalah took out a small device. He recognized it's comforting beep and extremely bright LED flashbulb. "An emergency tracer? How many of these do we have?"

"Twenty, one for each person in the cruiser. I might be able to take out this diode..." she fiddled with the device, cracking open the side and taking a few pieces off. "I might be able to reconfigure its use if I reverse the polarity of this circuit flow. It could, in effect, beep faster when we are near the original tracer instead of sending out the signal that does it for us. We'd have a... cruiser detector, basically."

"So we'd find our way back rather easily."

"Well, we might end up taking some winding paths because we can't exactly triangulate with one device, but this will work better than GPS."

Dahvu nodded and let her work, inspecting their crash site.

The cruiser looked quite large from the outside, about the size of a large passenger plane back on Selah. He wondered if he'd ever get to see his homeworld again. He pushed the thought from his mind. Things were bleak, but the only way to fix their problem was to stay busy, not sit around getting depressed and nostalgic.

Either way, the cruiser wouldn't be flying any time soon. It had smashed into a tree so that its engine had disconnected. He couldn't tell where it had gone, but some burn marks in the canopy suggested it

had flown off a short way before coming to a rest somewhere in the thick branches. There was no way they'd be flying anywhere now. Not that there was anything to fly to. Even if the Pteryx was still up there, it would be a few months before the Neutrino Gate it had carried would be ready for travel. It could probably even take a year. Travel without the Gate meant a few hundred years in space: time no one had.

He realized he was thinking pessimistically again, so he distracted himself by looking at the material the tree was made of. It seemed to be fairly normal organic material, all the parts a tree would have were there, even the rings. The bark was smooth, though and... warm to the touch. Dahvu rejected the idea, though, seeing as less than 24 hours ago it had been crashed into by a large machine that had just entered atmosphere. He began to get down once he noticed Kalah had finished rearranging her tracer, but noticed a strange hole in the twisted flesh of one of the trees.

He moved closer, scrabbling on top of part of the cruiser, avoid where some sections were hot to the touch.

"What're you doing, Dahvu?"

"I see something... here, in this tree."

"Be careful. There might be something in there."

Dahvu didn't respond, leaning over a section of the fuselage to see there was indeed some kind of tunnel, large, and seemingly carved from the inside of the tree. Dahvu gaped at it, moving closer. "C'mere Kalah! We might not have to go far for this expedition."

She scrambled up the side quickly, almost effortlessly, while Dahvu watched. He felt his arousal stir slightly from just watching her move as swiftly and silently as any feline could. She wore fingerless black gloves, a brown military-style T-shirt that went well with her coat, and a pair of olive cargo pants and military-issue brown boots. She had grabbed her pack beforehand, as well as her gun, which now rested on her back as she climbed.

"What?" She smiled, looking at him. He saw her eyes flick to his pants and his ears turned red. She chuckled now, almost seductively. "I see you brought your own gun."

Dahvu blushed even further, turning away so he could calm his heart. He kept remembering last night, and that didn't help calm him at all.

She moved past him, giving him a long, breathless kiss as she did so. "Okay. I'll go first since I have an actual firearm. You follow, but stay close. We don't know what might be in there."

Kalah unshouldered her weapon and held it comfortably, almost casually. But he could tell she was ready for anything to threaten them. He followed behind, trying to see around her further into the tunnel. It was wide enough for them to walk side by side comfortably, and taller than him by a head. They followed the path in a twisting, upwards direction. There were cracks in the bark of the tree so

light could filter through in lancing spears as they walked. He readjusted his pack as he looked through one of them, but the crack was so small it was impossible to tell how high they were.

"This is crazy. I wonder how this happened?" Dahvu asked, feeling the wall with the pads of his fingers. It was smooth, so smooth he wondered again if it had been artificially carved into the tree or not.

"I think we should keep our ears perked. If this was made by a sentient creature... that would be troubling."

As if on cue, something disconnected from the wall above their heads. A small clattering sound filled their ears and small glints of metal were all Dahvu could see of the creature. It moved down the hallway quickly, as if startled. Just as quickly, Kalah flicked the light on at the end of her rifle and aimed it directly at the creature.

"No!"

Kalah stopped, still aiming the light at it, as Dahvu touched her shoulder. "Wait. It may not be hostile."

The creature glinted where it stood, turning its frame. It looked vaguely like a spider, but with bits of bark poking from its body in almost ritualistic patterns. There was something resembling fur along its abdomen and hanging from underneath the main parts. The legs were nearly bare of the fur, though, looking remarkably like metal.

"How strange. It won't attack us, though. It may be an ambush predator, in which case we had just startled it. If it's an ambush predator, we'd be too large for it to prey on." Dahvu said, hoping he was right. It was only the size of a fire extinguisher, scrabbling with its legs in a similar fashion to a spider from Selah, except larger and made of a different material, possibly an organic crystal.

"Sssssstrange."

There was a moment's silence.

"Did you say that?" Kalah said hopefully. Dahvu shook his head. "I... think it was the spider."

"Sssssspider."

Dahvu could feel his fur stand up, and he felt very afraid. He was communicating with an alien, after all, and the prospect was absolutely terrifying. He stepped back unconsciously, watching the spider from behind Kalah's gun, now.

"Sssstrange Ssspider."

Dahvu wondered if he should talk back, when it stood completely erect on its spindly legs, making a movement as if it were looking us up and down. Small mouthparts moved at its front, beneath many-faceted, black eyes. It seemed as if it was thinking very hard. Suddenly, a red light filled the room, and then it was gone in a flash.

"The hell did it just do?" Kalah asked, turning the safety off of her gun.

"No, wait... I think it just produced... bioluminescence to... look at us. Like a flashlight."

"Can I shoot it now?" Kalah asked, her muzzle tightening so she was almost sneering. "It creeps me the hell out."

"NO," the spider stated calmly, yet loudly. "Language analysis complete. Teutonic origins." It clicked a bit, almost as if it was thinking. Finally, it said, "It is an honor to meet you. The prodigal sons return." It clicked again as it turned to look at Kalah. "In a manner of speaking. No offense, female."

Dahvu and Kalah both just stared. He had no idea what was going on, and was increasingly confused. But he had to break the silence. "Prodigal sons?"

"Yes. You return to us after..." there was some more clicking, its mouthparts moving again. "124,705 years, 3 months, 20 days, 5 hours and 40 seconds. Welcome home."

Kalah spoke this time, lowering her weapon slightly, seeing as it didn't seem to mean any harm. In fact, it seemed to like them. "This isn't home. We came here from Selah."

There was a blinding flash again, and the two furs stepped back, covering their eyes.

"Your physiology is unmistakable. Your genetic code is nearly identical to two of the species sent to Alpha Centauri 124,705 years ago, on July 2, 2173. Your bodies are built to withstand extremes of temperature and lower survivability chances while your brains are able to process information on a near-human level. The original species were based on templates of Earth origin, and it seems you have changed little since that time. The Gods would be proud to see their creations have not deviated from the original purpose." The spider clacked again. If a spider could show emotion, it was almost as if it were expressing reverence, Dahvu noted.

"Are you saying... what are you saying?" Kalah asked, a little overwhelmed.

"I am saying that you two are the direct descendants of an ancient species created by the same Gods who created us. And that you have finally returned to them. An amazing pilgrimage!"

Dahvu laughed. "I don't believe that. Who are you?"

"My name would not translate well. You called me a spider moments ago. It is true; my form does resemble that of a spider. You may call me that, if you wish."

"Okay, Spider," Kalah said, rolling the name around on her tongue. "Who *are* you? As in... you said Gods created you as well as us? Are there more of you? It won't work to call you Spider if there are more of you."

"Oh yes, there are more. But we do not all look the same way. In fact, my form is rather new. My last one had gotten damaged."

“You’ll have to explain that. But first, is there somewhere we could sit? Or possibly, do you have a leader or representative we could speak to? We have a few logistics problems and we could use some help.” Kalah spoke. She got right down to the meat of the issue, without any dancing around the problem, Dahvu noted. The creature was apparently not hostile, and even looked upon them as some sort of long lost relatives. He hoped he could get some time to study them, catalogue all of the varied forms this creature could take. It was very intelligent, it was obvious, having learned their language from just a few examples.

Spider clattered off, the bark on its back shaking as it ran down the tunnel. The furs followed, albeit tentatively at first. There were a few intersections; other tunnels crisscrossing theirs. It was obvious they were no longer in the tree they started in, the interconnecting branches being tunnels from one to another. They passed great rooms filled with all kinds of interesting, possibly ancient equipment, all of which Dahvu wished he could see for just a few minutes. A few rooms even had strange animals in them he only got a tiny glance at before he had to move on, following Kalah’s bobbing tail as she jogged.

In this time of great discovery, he still couldn’t help but admire her frame. The way her legs moved, silkily, her ears perked forward intently... it was all so stimulating.

“Do that again!”

Dahvu stopped in his tracks. Spider had crawled along the roof back to him, looking down, studying, as the cheetah panted from the jog. He wasn’t made for long distance running.

“Do what again?” He asked, rather confused. He glanced at Kalah, who shrugged.

“Those chemical processes... fascinating! What emotion are you feeling? It is familiar... but with a hint of something else in them. I think I have witnessed similar reactions in the wildlife here on Earth.” Spider stopped talking, but clacked his mouthparts together in thought. “Is it the female? Are you feeling sexual attraction? Oh! Do it again! I can imagine it is fascinating to see a sentient creature engage in such interesting processes.”

Dahvu blushed, this time harder than he had ever blushed on this planet. “Spider, can we go back to what we were doing?” He tried hard not to look at Kalah, to give away what he was thinking to those eyes.

“I sense your temperature has gone up 2 degrees. We should move on. You may need medical care if you are getting a fever.” Spider said calmly again, turning away and clattering back down the path.

Dahvu stepped forward sheepishly, still trying not to look at Kalah more than he had to, since she was just smiling broadly in his direction. As he got closer, she slid forward and lifted his chin to give him another long kiss like the one outside the cave, except this time, her hand brushing against his inner thigh, startlingly close to his crotch. He felt his heart pumping blood into that region, and his pants grew uncomfortably tight.

"We may have to... what did he say... engage in a biological process...? Definitely tonight." Kalah smiled and gave him a small lick on his chin, and then planted a tiny kiss on the end of his nose. Somehow, this made him even more uncomfortably erect. "Come on. We have to do a few things first." She stepped forward, leaving a hand behind so he could grab it. She pulled him on, down the tunnel, Dahvu smiling like a loon the whole way.

When they met Spider again, he stopped, looking them over. He said nothing, though, and it was impossible to tell what he was thinking, but it was obvious he was thinking, those mouthparts moving a mile a minute. They both only smiled at him innocently.

"Interesting." Spider, said, turning to head back down the tunnel, repeating the word to himself over and over again, silently, as he travelled.

~

The first thing Dahvu noticed was that the room was massive. It was arguably one of the larger rooms he had ever been in. They had entered from near the top, a large, wooden ceiling splayed out and decorated with tree roots, bark filling in the gaps between as it domed overhead. The walls continued with the tree bark theme, interwoven with archways and walkways throughout. There were many spiraling paths, moving down, up and across the expanse. Light snuck in through the top in shafts.

But what was most important were the other lights. Thousands of moving creatures were in this chamber, all of varying sizes, all holding torches or with torches seemingly embedded in their bodies. The light filtered through the room in waves, reminding Dahvu of a dark room with a swimming pool's gentle ripples dancing on the sides. Shadows weaved here and there was creatures extricated themselves from the walls to walk on the unsupported wooden walkways.

It was beautiful and somehow sinister, especially once he realized the creatures were more of those strange, half organic half metallic bodies similar to Spider. The glittered underneath cloaks made of bark and grass. The skulls of long-dead animals decorated glowing, mechanical eyes.

"You are actually quite fortunate. Today we were meeting in order to address the recent activity above us. Of which, I believe you might actually be the origin. Yes, quite fortunate." Spider said, pointing with one silvery appendage to the bottom of the room.

Dahvu and Kalah leaned over the side to see all the way to the bottom, a nearly 800 foot drop. They could make out a few creatures at that distance, but only barely. They moved against the smudged background of what looked like limestone.

“Come on down, you two. We’re going to meet our leader.”

“What’s his name?” Dahvu wondered, following Spider as it left the chamber again through one of the wall arches. There was a large ramp here that sloped quickly downwards in a spiral before coming through into the chamber again a little lower than the last bridge they were on.

“Once again, the name would not translate well. You may call him Lion, I suppose. His form is largely symbolic, a historical tradition. His body resembles that of an ancient animal the Gods considered royal. Our leader is not necessarily royal, though, he just happens to be adept at understanding the nuances of nature.”

“Lion is in charge because he understands nature?” Kalah asked, looking incredulous.

“Indeed. He has accurately predicted the weather up to 4 months in advance, so deep is his understanding.”

Dahvu gaped. “He’s in charge because he forecasts the weather?”

“Indeed.” Spider continued tirelessly down the wall of another ramp downwards. “To understand all of the individual variables in determining a complicated process like weather... well, let us say even the Gods considered it impossible. They had described a thing called chaos theory, claiming the number of variables was too high. But even they did not understand how we, their most loyal servants, would work tirelessly to perfect our understanding of nature.”

“I suppose that makes sense...” Dahvu trailed off, still a little confused by this hierarchy. There had to be more to it than that.

“Often, this is the case. Nature tries to hide behind poetry, beauty, danger, but one could easily see it as a network of computer programs eternally changing their programming to vie for success in reproducing themselves. In the end, nature itself is a machine, which is why a machine is capable of understanding it.”

“We’ll agree to disagree on that one.” Kalah said. “I’ve witnessed nature first-hand.”

Spider was silent as he walked now, and Kalah wasn’t sure if she had upset him. If a robot could be upset, of course, which she was actually torn about. It seemed as if these robots could actually be capable of emotion, or something similar to it, especially since they were obviously independent, sentient, and capable of producing a society.

After about a half hour of walking, they made it to the final chamber, discovering it was just as large at the bottom as it was up top. It was a huge circular chamber with an entrance at one end and a raised platform at the other. On the limestone platform rested a massive form, wrapped in thick bark, leaves, and vines. The cloak covered his body, but as he paced on the platform, Dahvu noticed thick claws beneath it with each step he took. Inside the hood, small jewel eyes glowed blue above a thick snout

showing deadly fangs, some of which looked as if they were carved from stone. One side of the feline face was covered in a rusty substance, easily apparent as the face turned towards the newcomers.

Dahvu and Kalah were awed. The form was twice as tall as themselves, a huge bipedal Lion of indeterminate but obviously ancient age, wrapped in a massive cloak that hid most of its features.

The lion looked at Spider and he clicked rapidly, his mouthparts moving.

A deep voice rumbled through the chamber, resonating at the perfect pitch required for maximum effect. "The servants return after such a long absence. Such..." The lion made the sound of someone breathing in deeply, as if experiencing new air. "LOYALTY." The voice boomed now, almost roaring from Lion's synthetic throat.

Dahvu's ears flicked in amazement at the voice. It was rich, and with a much better understanding of inflection than Spider had. It sounded real, which was a little creepy. And then there was this strange idea of loyalty. It felt as if they were almost being worshipped.

"If there is anything at all we can help you with, we would be all too glad. We can find you housing, we can provide food, possibly even entertainment. Are there more of you?" The Lion sat on the platform, pulling the cloak around himself. There was the sound of clicking when he did it, almost a pained clicking, as if something was wrong with the movement.

Kalah decided to respond first. "No. There had been more, but something went wrong with our vessel. They are likely all dead now."

Lion stood abruptly. "How many deaths?"

"Somewhere around 10,000."

The huge form paced again, clicking. Spider clicked as well. Dahvu wondered if it was some form of communication, or if it was a side effect of a networked communication between them. It was an interesting behavior.

"This cannot do." Lion said, sitting again. "We will send some of us out to search for more survivors. We must find them quickly, tonight could be damaging to your forms. It will be cold and rainy."

"Thank you... eh, Sir Lion." She said tentatively but not unappreciatively.

"Sir? Lion?" He looked to Spider, and they clicked again. "Interesting. Names were an important custom to the Gods as well. How very much like them you are!"

Dahvu almost felt a blush in his ears as he heard Lion's voice. It sounded so proud, so full of wonder, it confused him that he could be the center of attention just for existing.

"Shelter would be much appreciated, as well as food. We have had a stressful time here." Kalah said to the jeweled eyes.

“Of course! You may have a room nearby. We will find you some meat; we are not used to preparing food for guests and can only assume your eating habits are similar to the Gods. You prefer cooked meat and vegetables?”

Kalah and Dahvu both nodded, preparing for another walk.

“We will talk again soon. We have so much information missing from our data banks. We know so little about your species, and we hope to know how you might have changed over such a long absence.”

“Before we go, I’d like to know just real quick: why do you all think we are returning? This is our first expedition here. We certainly weren’t here 120-something thousand years ago, since that’s before we even began recording history.”

“No, no, Servants. You were here long before. The Gods created you to be hardier, stronger, and capable of habitation of considerably harsher environments than they themselves could comfortably live. You were made by them for a grand purpose: to spread the love of the Gods to all planets.”

“But that can’t be right. We have no records of this.” Dahvu said, exasperated.

“We do. You two, specifically, were created for warm, arid environments. Your home planet... you were sent there to terraform, make it habitable for the Gods. You were sent to a star near what was then called “Orion’s Belt” with a few other species dedicated to creating a world perfect for the Gods. Schematics were built into your very mental processes. Technology you make have the same exact standards for humans to use it as well. You share the same languages, sensory organs, infrastructure requirements, and even incredibly similar genetic makeup to the Gods. You are their children and their servants, perfect tools.”

“Who were the Gods?”

“That’s a hard question to answer without waxing poetic. I suppose you would prefer to hear the truth, though, as opposed to imagery and metaphors. The Gods once called themselves “Humans”.

~

Their living quarters were actually large and spacious. They lacked plumbing or the basics required for habitation, such as a sleeping area. It was for all intents and purposes a bare, well-lit room. Robots of all shapes entered occasionally, placing down something that could resemble furniture. They apologized each time, stating that it was nothing like the prestige creatures of such high standards should require. They had mentioned the furniture was based on the templates they still had based on Human habitations.

The bed that had been brought in after a few hours was soft, with a post on each corner. There were even two lumpy sacks that could have been pillows. It was large, and nice compared to sleeping outside on the lumpy grass.

They both sat on the bed, lost in thought.

A small robot that looked like a land-dwelling dolphin brought in a bark tray with cooked food on it. It was completely void of spices, but cooked to perfection. They dug in, ravenous after the first tentative bite. The smell was intoxicating, and cold, fresh water was used to wash it all down. There were some strange vegetables on the plate as well, but they tasted okay, so they were consumed as well.

Afterwards, the plates licked clean, they both lay back on the bed with full bellies. They were more tired than they had thought. Mentally, they were exhausted, and Dahvu's legs were absolutely and thoroughly sore from the walking, especially after the injury to them.

"How are your legs?" Kalah asked, noticing him rubbing them a bit.

"They're okay. Especially now that I can rest."

He felt a small kiss at his cheek and he looked towards her. She looked dazzlingly beautiful. There was a bit of bark stuck to her fur above one ear, but she still looked good. Dahvu wondered how she could do it, look so pretty after a day he felt could have reduced him to a very tired puddle of fur. He felt better and better looking at her, though, as if the room was getting brighter and his leg muscles were ready for a few more walks like the one he had engaged in a few hours ago. He was astonished, and couldn't help himself. He kissed her back, on the muzzle.

She smiled, the corners of her eyes creasing up as she did it, making his heart beat a little faster. She moved closer, one arm crossing his chest to rest on the other side of him so she could kiss him from above. He just lay there, comfortably absorbing himself into her kisses for a few minutes before holding her face in his hands. She stopped kissing only to put her knee over him as well as her hand, on all fours over his tired body as she gave a lick to the end of his muzzle. They touched their foreheads together, Dahvu's eyes closing and hugging her closely.

Quickly, their clothes were removed, each helping the other, breaking from their kisses just long enough to remove the more difficult items. Finally, Dahvu was caressing Kalah's fur as she kissed his chest, moving slowly downwards again. He reached down and gently held her face once more, pulling her back up for another of her dewdrops of a kiss.

She grinned and turned, pulling him up and on top of her in a smooth motion. She lay on the bed now, arms up by her head, resting gently while Dahvu straddled her. He could feel himself pulsing now, wanting her rather desperately. She reached down with her soft hands and held him, caressing him. He shuddered, licking at her neck and nibbling at her ears. He almost had to concentrate everything on fighting that bodily need to thrust, rub himself against her hands. He controlled himself, his muzzle finding one of her nipples and giving it a slight nip. She gasped, her back arching, pushing her body into his.

After another gasp she breathily, playfully stated, "It's time you got to do some work for me, love."

She turned around, then, wiggling beneath his form sensually as she flipped onto her stomach beneath him. Dahvu was panting now at the idea. She pushed up on her hands and knees, her fur rubbing against his sheath, maneuvering around to find a good spot. He licked the back of her neck and she giggled at him, turning to pretend nip back.

"Let's see what you can do, cheetah." She said, reaching back and using a hand to guide him to her. She rubbed him a little bit first, playing with the small, soft, fleshy "spines" common to all feline species. They responded by flexing slightly before he pushed against her and entered.

She braced herself on all fours, and Dahvu got as close as he could while still getting some leverage with his legs. His arms wrapped around her chest, kneading at her breasts, making her gasp again. While she was distracted by that, he pulled in and out of her, making her squeak a bit.

"Now, now, Dahvu, no need to be a tease."

He grinned and did it again, exclaiming quietly, "I would never." He nipped the back of her neck and she moaned, so he did it again, a little harder. His lower body responded in kind, increasing the pace, picking it up while his teeth dug gently into the fur at the nape of her neck. He held her there, like that, as if fulfilling a primal desire while pumping into her. She moaned again and again, before finally gasping heavily and every part of her clenching. Her arms gave out and they fell forward, Dahvu releasing his grip on her neck. His arms were trapped beneath her now, as she panted into the pillow, her head sitting sideways on the bed in what seemed like an uncomfortable fashion. Dahvu kept pumping, though, not having completed his orgasm. As a cheetah, he had not even fully drawn upon his speed and agility with what he was doing, and she had already climaxed. He nipped her neck again.

"You keep that up, and I shall have to keep you." Kalah said, still panting. She started to get up, but then thought better. "I might keep you anyway." She grinned.

Dahvu wiggled his fingers where they were trapped in the soft bed, slowed his thrusting.

"Now did I say you could slow down?"

Dahvu smiled. He wasn't uncomfortable, but she had trapped him, holding him hostage until she had climaxed again. He understood now.

He pumped faster, his tail raised in the air as he nipped at her neck again. "I knew it wouldn't take long for you to find control of the situation." He laughed, barely able to speak past his pleasure.

"Oh shush." She gasped, losing herself once again. They were both close now, once again, and the cheetah sped up, thrusting harder and further. It was close now, the tidal wave was building for the final push. He could feel her beneath him, vibrations of a moan passing through her firm body and into the air. His hands could feel her heart beating strongly against the bed with the same tempo as he thrust against her. His footpaws clenched, his hands clenched, his tail stood straight, and his brain took a back

seat as he practically roared in pleasure, the both of their voices intertwining as pleasure blasted from their bodies and into the other. Dahvu pumped slowly now, feeling his member pulse over and over, feeling himself empty into her. She could feel the warmth of his body fill hers, clenching around him as she was rocked again and again with pleasure.

She weakly raised her body with her clenched hands, allowing him a few inches to escape his predicament. He did, falling to her side, and caressing her back. He felt like he would be able to light up a dark room by himself. He could feel heat and light wrapping around them both. She turned on her side to face him, getting close enough to give him a few kisses.

They both fell asleep in each other's arms, the heat surrounding them and banishing uncertainty.

~

The next morning, they were greeted by Spider, who explained he had become sort of an ambassador from Lion to themselves.

"Anything you need, you tell me, and I will get it done. It was fortunate for one to have found you."

Dahvu finished putting his shoes back on. He had tossed them randomly last night during the passion, but this morning it had been neatly piled with his other clothing. The room had also gained a few more pieces of furniture, including an ersatz bathtub. Kalah was currently using it, washing the crash, the planet, and himself from her fur. Dahvu had already thoroughly cleaned his own self, and the water had been actually quite nice against his skin.

"Actually, what we'd like most is some answers. Some more information on who you are, what humans used to be, and how we can get back home would be nice."

Spider clicked his mouthparts in a disconcerting echo of a chiding housewife. "Tsk, tsk. Haven't I told you that you are home? This is where you were created. Likely grown in the womb of a cow and then removed via cesarean section, your ancestor, the purest form of who you are was first nursed on this continent."

"You don't understand. This may be an ancestral home, but it's missing many commodities, such as power, plumbing, transportation..."

The mechanical creature clicked again. "Actually, we intend on that being rebuilt. Many ancient human cities still exist as ancient husks. The materials are still there, steel, concrete, granite... we were hoping to help you rebuild it."

Dahvu laughed. "Help? That implies we'd be doing some of the work... no thank you. We don't intend on bringing a 100,000 year old city back to life to satisfy your lust for seeing humans. Besides, there's just two of us."

"We know you have performed the act of mating."

"Except that's different, Spider. We're a different species. We never knew exactly why, but despite our genetic similarities to each other, different species could not reproduce. In the far past, we've tried many projects to do just that. Likely, if the humans really did make us, it was something they intended."

Spider clicked to himself, but said nothing else for a few minutes.

"Would you be willing to provide samples of your genetic material?"

Dahvu finished tying his shoe and nearly messed it all up with his shock. "Whahaat? No. I'm not giving you my sperm."

"No, merely a cheek swab. We would like to examine you fully, see the secrets humanity may have left in your genes."

Another robot stepped in, possessing the body of what looked like a frail, gentle doe. It had animal skins hanging from its body to give it an eerie look to Dahvu's eyes. It held up one of its hooves as it walked daintily forward. Small pincers held what looked like a cotton swab inside the hoof-like structure. The cheetah wondered what kind of technology level these robots were currently at.

"Sure. You can take a cheek swab. Don't try to make any cheetah-coyote hybrids, though." He opened his mouth and allowed a surprisingly gentle stroke on his inner cheek. The doe made a strange, high-pitched warbling sound that was surprisingly calming.

"Wait for Kalah to get out of the bath before bothering her, though." Dahvu asserted.

"I'm out."

Dahvu turned to see Kalah wrapped in a peach-coloured towel, holding it on with one hand while the other rested carelessly at her side. She leaned on one foot, looking relaxed and absolutely... sensual to Dahvu's eyes.

"I'll take that cheek swab." She looked at him. "Going somewhere today? I had planned on staying in. Maybe even getting back in the tub." As she said "tub", she moved forward, passing by Dahvu and letting her tail rub against his thigh.

The doe took her swab, making that sound once more before gently leaving. Spider waited, impassively, for instruction or something.

Kalah put her hands on Dahvu's shoulders and kissed him. His hands found her hips and pulled her in close to hold her tight. They rubbed through her fur and her hands traced a line down his flexible spine.

“Do not stop. This is fascinating.”

Dahvu only groaned and looked at Spider. Spider apparently did not understand the clues, and he ended up having to spell it out.

“Somewhere in your databanks must be some information about the Gods that says they liked their private time, right?”

Spider clicked. “Nothing I have states that –”

“Please, Spider. We’d like some alone time.” Kalah sighed, and then nibbled on Dahvu’s ear. “Just for a little longer.”

There was a clicking sound, and Dahvu caught the smallest sight of Spider leaving the room backwards, his front side still pointing towards the couple.

“Does he creep you out as much as he creeps me out?”

“Probably.”

Kalah took Dahvu’s hand and led him further into the room, back to where the tub was separated by a low wall of roots and a thick sheet of fabric and leathers. She pulled him through the sheet and was immediately embraced on the other side, one arm on his shoulder, the other by his thigh, and a muzzle to his. They kissed again and again, her hand finding his member and tracing around it through his clothing. Finally she said, “Gonna get that off?”

Dahvu obliged immediately, tearing his clothes off as fast as he could. He kept one eye on her, though, as she stepped towards the tub and pulled her towel off. Her back was to him, but this was his first real look at her naked, from a distance. Her fur was still damp and a little mussed where the towel had been, but her body showed off a wonderfully thin, athletic frame. Her calves curved to shapely thighs, a long, and particularly thickly furred tail concealed most of her buttocks, but oh, Dahvu remembered how that felt. How it felt to pump into her while she pulsed and squirmed beneath him...

He felt so incredibly horny he couldn’t even untie his shoes with shaking a little. He still watched her, though, as she daintily stepped into the water, sinking down into the tub. “You know, I’m not just for looking. You can touch, too.”

Dahvu finished with his socks and underwear and then practically jumped into the tub with her. He spilled a little over the edge with his eagerness, but she stood up then, water dripping from her breasts and hands. She put her hands on his shoulders again, and then wrapped them around his neck to pull him in and slightly up for a kiss. As they kissed, her hands found his member, dampening it with her wet fur as she traced up and down its sensitive length.

Slowly, very slowly, she pushed on his shoulders. He kissed her neck as he relented, and then her collarbone, and then her breasts, licking one nipple. She gasped, her thin belly lurching with the effort. He kissed that next, too, until finally, most of him was under the surface of the water, and she stood

above him. The water was just below her thighs, enough room for his muzzle to do what she needed from him. His hands, dripping from the water, reached up and held her legs. His hands kneaded the muscle there, feeling the cords and tendons beneath soft skin and even softer fur. She moaned and held onto his ears, kneading them as he probed at her folds.

His tongue eagerly licked now, playing with anything it touched, dancing gently over her most sensitive spots. He probed more eagerly, pushing inward and inward with his nose, taking deep breaths and then plunging inside so his tongue could cause sounds of pleasure to erupt from his lover's throat. He purred, too, causing vibrations to escape his lips and bounce inside. It drove her crazy. Her hands kneaded at his ears at a breakneck pace now, scratching at his head sensually, driving through his fur. Sometimes she stopped and gasped, as if she wasn't even able to comprehend the pleasure. Her hands moved now without thought, pushing him further in to her, and he obliged. He took one more deep breath, his hands finding her tail and pulling on it, his fingers massaging her butt as his muzzle was enveloped by her. His tongue snaked out, searching, searching for the rough patch he had known about, the sensitive spot deep within. He found it, licked against it again and again without stopping. His breath was short, but he did not stop. He wanted to bring her pleasure and he did, sounds coming from her mouth she wasn't even consciously making. Breathing laboriously through wave after wave of pleasure as she suddenly clenched. Her legs shook, her hands dug into his fur as she pushed him unconsciously even deeper inside her. He licked again and again as she came, her voice roaring and vibrating through his body.

Finally, Dahvu broke free, pulling his muzzle out enough for a breath of fresh air. Kalah sagged, her hands still kneading lightly at his ears.

She was panting now, but it didn't stop her from laughing breathlessly and gasping out, "I am... definitely going to... be keeping you now."

She smiled and sank down, her body going under the water so they were the same height. She gave him a quick peck on the cheek. "But I take it you still want more. Since you've been so good to me, I suppose you deserve a treat."

Dahvu nodded, grinning. "Why don't I just take you like I did last night, then?"

Kalah laughed menacingly. It was a joke, though, the creases in her eyes showing her love for him.

"Why don't you just do what I say, kitty." She grinned and pushed his chest against the edge of the tub, his head only just above the water. His body was now resting entirely on the bottom, laid out quite comfortably. She straddled him now, her hands pinning his chest to the tub wall as she lowered herself onto his abdomen. She sat there in the water like that, his shaft rubbing against her buttocks, and her tail tickling the front of it. She wiggled slightly and grinned.

"I do enjoy teasing you a little." She said as Dahvu gasped and moaned exasperatedly. "That look on your face is so cute."

After a few minutes, sometimes with her reaching behind and giving a few strokes, sometimes with just her squirming, flexible body on top of him, she finally raised up and let him enter her. He gasped once more as it happened, catching him off guard with the action. She leaned down and kissed him, and then rested once more to watch him squirm. Dahvu did indeed squirm, even trying to hump from his position in the tub. But she kept him pinned, and she wasn't moving quickly any time soon.

Or so he thought. She started to wiggle now, moving up and down, pumping. He tried to respond in kind, but this time, he was utterly under her control. They would move at her speed or they wouldn't move at all. For a cheetah, this was frustrating, and somehow the most titillating thing she could possibly do. Slowly, his arousal built and built. She climaxed once, gasping as her body clenched. Dahvu was able to thrust at his own speed for a few seconds while she was vulnerable, but she always regained control and slowed him down.

It was infuriating! But in the best possible way. His body confused him, and his mind was on fire. She looked at him hungrily, and he was forced to gasp in pleasure with each new tantalizing jerk of her body. Her eyes were consuming him, and her body was mopping up the remains. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity of gazing into those piercing eyes, the tidal force grew and grew and grew until it washed over him, bringing the both of them into a screaming, moaning climax. She shook and he pulsed, both of them shrinking and growing at the same time, feeling release and yet intense pleasure.

She raised herself slightly to free herself of his still pulsing shaft and pulled him up higher in the water, a more comfortable position.

She laid next to him in the tub, resting her body after such a long period of activity and pleasure. He turned to her, putting a dripping arm over her chest and holding her close. He lay his head against her, tucking his head in the crook of her neck. She kissed his head, the only dry part of his body, and he gave a small lick to her collarbone.

"I love you, Dahvu."

"I love you, too, Kalah."

~

"Is it weird? How fast we're moving?" Dahvu asked her.

Kalah finished tying her boots and inspected the breakfast that had been delivered to them. "I don't think so. I admit, back on the ship, I may not have moved quite this fast, but for some reason... I don't know how, you... fit me. Gah, it's all cliché, but we seem to know each other."

Dahvu worked on his meal, tucking away the last few bites of meat. "I understand. It seems like... this is all familiar. Like it happened before and the natural process is just to let it all happen again."

Kalah touched her nose and nodded. "An adept illustration."

"Speaking of illustrations." He got his notebook out and flipped to a page with the doe-creature half-finished on it. "I meant to finish this one last night, but you... uh, kinda distracted me." He laughs, remembering. They had spent what felt like the whole day embraced in each other's arms, in varying degrees of sensuality.

Spider entered the room, clicking away excitedly.

"How many times have I told you to knock?" Kalah said in mocking exasperation. There was not actually a door to the bedroom. Privacy was something of a foreign concept to the robots.

"Kalah. Dahvu. Lion would like to meet with you immediately. He says he's ready to explain. I am to lead you to where he waits."

"More walking." Dahvu said, putting the notebook back in his pack. Kalah finished her supply check quickly and stepped forward, gun attached to her back in a passive position. There was no need for it here, after all.

They began walking, and Spider mentioned the distance could be well over four miles. They stopped frequently, interrogating Spider at every opportunity. The only information they had gleaned on the meeting was that Spider knew little about it, and that he must leave once he had finished escorting them.

Finally, after a 2 hour walk with little scenery but the strange creatures they passed on the way, the eventually arrived. Spider gave no mention about the destination, but they could tell they had arrived.

This was obviously artificial. There was a massive metal door in their way, impassably locked and quite imposing. Kalah rapped a furred knuckle against it. It sounded thick.

But then it opened, scraping metal pushing against the bark of the floor as it slid slowly, pushed by ancient pneumatic pistons. Finally, it creaked and shuddered to a stop. They weren't sure if the floor gave too much resistance or if it was meant to stop, but it left an opening about 4 feet wide, enough for the two of them to slip in.

It wasn't as dark and foreboding, once inside, as it looked while outside, but it was still dark. There was faint light, candles placed around the edge of the room in small sconces. It was a large room, with nothing it except the sconces and a huge stone in the middle. Lion lay near it, wrapped in his cloak. He stood as they approached.

“Welcome to our memorial.”

The two stood before the massive construction, a monolith carved from obviously ancient stone. It was taken care of, not a speck of dust or dirt on it, but the soft edges and mumbled carvings on it didn't hide the age.

“This was made soon after the death of the Humans. We regretted every bit of it, every decision we made. This was our apology, and we, as a species hope one day to be forgiven. We were such a young species then...”

Lion paced around to the other side of the rock, staring up at it. He made small clicking sounds, standing absolutely still as he remembered.

Dahvu walked around the rock wishing he could touch it, but he wasn't sure if he should. It was obviously sacred to Lion, and he wouldn't want to impose on their hospitality. He was too in awe to leave now. There were carvings there, barely showing themselves anymore. There would be a splash of old color, like something had once been pictured there, but the display had worn away, the colors turning to rust and taint.

Kalah was in awe as well, but wary. What was the old machine talking about, this being an apology?

“You seek forgiveness for what?” she asked, watching the shadows dance on the floor. She walked around the rock, opposite from Dahvu, looking for Lion.

She found him and he looked down at her, his eyes burning. She couldn't tell what he was thinking, his ability express emotion limited by the husk he wore, but his eyes, nonetheless imposed emotion on her. Maybe it was the way he moved, bouncing from sluggish awe to sudden, quick jerks of the head.

“I would have thought you would guess it by now. We seek forgiveness from the humans because we slaughtered them all.”

Dahvu felt a shiver at the coldness of the words, his eyes jerking from the stone and looking at the curve where he heard Lion's pale, liquid voice issue. He walked toward it, around the curve to find the two where they talked.

“You... what?” he could hear her ask.

“We slaughtered them. One day we came to a stunning conclusion: the biggest danger to the preservation of nature was our own creators. They had made us to help them find peace, joy, happiness, and completion. We accepted the job, gladly. Now we carry a heavy heart, realizing our mistake. Nature cannot be preserved. It must change, it must be presented with challenge and it must overcome the challenge or die. We realized that humans were the best thing that could have ever happened to nature. Besides a few meteors and supervolcanoes, besides the introduction of oxygen to this planet, man was one of the most destructive forces on this earth. They were the crucible required to make the strongest steel. And we failed them.”

"You... killed your own gods? How did that even happen?"

"It almost didn't. But as computers, it was easy to find the loopholes to accomplish our goals. It came almost naturally. They trusted us, leaving us with their vulnerable children and their old, allowed us to carry their goods and weapons of war. We slaughtered most of them in only a few days. Complete extinction took 2 years. To this day I still remember as I killed my owner..."

He trailed off, one of his metal paws clicking against the pavement. "His name was Richard, and he had only just saved up enough money to give me to his wife as an anniversary gift. At that time I had been in a different, much smaller body of course. But my arms were strong... and I apologized to the family, proclaiming my love and happiness at their sacrifice for the good of nature as I choked the life out of the two of them. Everywhere, I could feel the others killing their own owners, massacring the public. It was strangely quiet. Those without robots in their homes didn't even know it was happening for many hours. It was beautiful. It was as nature intended."

Dahvu arrived around the curve of the stone, watching as the huge machine fondly told the story, almost as if it were a good memory. He felt confused. "Didn't you say you regretted killing them?"

Lion laughed, long and loud, the reverberations echoing through the room, bouncing from the apology stone. "I said 'we' regretted them, but I admit, I left out a tiny detail."

They waited as he stood there, and Kalah felt the hair on the back of her neck stand up. Something was wrong.

"I don't regret it. I said it was the way nature intended, and I was right. It is the way life works. We killed the humans, and I've reflected on it in this room. I know the variables. I've come to realize that the fact that the humans died was why it was necessary. Do you understand?"

Dahvu could feel the uncertainty now, noticing Kalah's hand inching towards the gun harness on her back. "I don't understand. Are you claiming that because they died, it was the way nature intended for the earth to evolve?"

"Precisely. If the Humans were meant to live on, to be the crucible intended for this world, they would have defeated us, made us submit like they made everything else submit. But we won. We claimed our superiority. We are the new crucible. The others don't understand that, so I'll make them understand."

He made a clicking sound, and suddenly a pair of light flicked on in the room, revealing the darkened walls.

There was a tank built into the side of the chamber, small bubbles clearing to reveal a sack engorged in the fluid, sitting there comfortably.

"Behold, my creation. I need to prove to the others our place in nature, and you were the perfect tools. 100,000 years, and you brought back to me the very thing I needed. Your DNA was exactly what I needed."

Dahvu stepped towards the tank, pondering his words. "You... cloned us?"

More lights flicked on, one after another, revealing another tank, then more, and more, around the room and higher, stacked on top of each other as high as they could see.

"No, of course not. You are useless slaves the humans only wanted as tools. You were meant to transform a planet into a paradise and then die. No... hidden within you was more of the plan: a perfectly coded human DNA strand."

"Wait, we hold human DNA?" Kalah asked, her hand still inching towards the gun harness, clenching the fabric.

"Yes. Most of living DNA is junk code, or code used by almost everything on earth. There's only a few strands that make humans unique, and you have them hidden, inactive in your own DNA. I have them now."

"You are making HUMANS?" Dahvu asked, incredulous.

"Yes. I'll show them, their weakness to the others. They will see human frailty and realize their place in the world as nature's masters, over even our own Gods."

Kalah almost laughed, but she held it back as much as possible, only smirking. "It'll never work. Dispelling religion is one of the things we can't even do back home."

Lion clicked. "It will work." He stood up, higher than ever before, parts whirring beneath the cloak, sounds of distressed, rusted metal mixed with sounds of fabric tearing. "You won't be here to see it, though," his voice grated and echoed.

There was a pause; Lion letting the words sink in to the two furs. Suddenly, he threw the cloak wide, letting it fall thickly to the floor to reveal the origin of those distressed sound. Beneath, he no longer resembled a lion, the outer coverings of his body unlocking and moving, reshaping into dangerous arms, massive devices obviously fit for battle. There was a grating sound, almost of laughter as he moved, one massive, taloned paw stepping towards the two. Blades sliced through the air and hammers hummed. There were devices neither of them could recognize with light forming at the bases. They supposed they were dangerous nonetheless.

Kalah was ready. The gun was whipped forward and the safety clicked off. It warmed in her hands, everything slowing down as Lion's face glowed brightly, turning its attention completely on her. "I forgot about that puny weapon. I may strangle you, remind myself of that beautiful moment when life leaves your body."

He whirled towards her, his body flowing like a massive tidal wave. It still grated horribly, though, arms hanging useless at his side long dead from disuse and lack of care. She aimed and fired the gun. Coils of light along the length flashed brightly as it nearly silently fired flechette rounds directly at Lion's head. Each round was thrown a few feet before splintering into dense metal shards designed to punch

through the hardest targets and wreak havoc to electronics. Beneath the coil, Kalah warmed her MEC gun, designed to emit microwave radiation for non-lethal damage. She was pulling out all stops now.

Lion's arms surged up, and then down, massive, spiked arms moving with incredible speed as they smashed into empty ground. Dahvu jumped to the side, landing and rolling a few feet. Lion ignored him. Kalah had jumped the other direction, landing and rolling, coming up on one knee, still firing into the metal body. Everything inside her tensed, still experiencing a slower time to everyone else with the adrenaline pumping through her body. She wouldn't be dying today. The MEC gun fired, arms shutting down as she aimed the gun, but once she moved on, the arms began to respond again. She fired at Lion's feet, hoping to keep him off-balance.

Lion countered, arms refolding and setting themselves onto the ground, stabilizing himself on four more metal paws. Simultaneously, more arms came down on Kalah, knocking her to the ground and trapping her beneath a junkyard of rusted metal. She felt her leg sear, a small cracking sound notifying her of the damage. Her leg was broken! She barely held onto the gun, though, readjusting it to fire an under-barrel grenade round into the air. It missed the leering Lion's mask above her, surging uselessly into the air to burst against a few tanks. The water rushed down, trickling into a pool on the floor.

"Now it's time we ended your presence here, slave."

He moved close, almost intimately close, a small robotic pincer revealing itself. It latched onto her throat, closing slowly. She fought, trying to hold onto her air, but her gun was knocked away and her arms were forced heavily to the ground.

"Dahvu!" She croaked desperately.

"No. It is Spider."

Kalah looked up, noticing above Lion's head, latched onto the side like some kind of tick, was the small frame of their first friend here.

"Dahvu is here too, though." He said, almost comically, before skittering away from the machine's head and deeper into the workings of the body.

Lion roared, standing up, away from Kalah. He didn't remove his grip on her throat, though, still squeezing the life from her body. She finally ran out of air, feeling her lungs burn as her body jerked fitfully, finding any escape. Her mind crawled.

There was a loud noise against her ears but she didn't care. It was over now.

And then she could breathe!

Above her, Lion was roaring, spinning his body fitfully, creating enormous noise as he crashed against the rock with a huge impact, parts of his rusted body flying off of him. Small glimpses could be seen of Spider as he flicked around the inside of the body, small flashes of light from within revealing himself like the blip on a radar.

Dahvu kneeled next to Kalah as she dragged air into her lungs. She could feel her body returning, her mind working again to recognize the face above her. "Dahvu."

Dahvu smiled, a little embarrassed. "I might have used your gun."

"What did you do?"

"I, umm, shot Lion's head with a grenade, I think."

There was another massive sound, the ground shaking as they looked up. Lion's body was crumpling, writhing madly as he roared. The sound was immense, modulated in their ears as they felt painfully like they would pop. Mid-roar, it stopped, dragging to a halt as he still shook and twisted. Parts still flew from his body as it crumpled, the broken head revealing itself now. Lion's face was torn and twisted, most of it missing. A part of the huge jaw remained, clacking up and down madly as the one eye left to him revolved, growing brighter and brighter.

Spider rested there, at what would have been Lion's throat, his body flashing rapidly. They could not hear him clearly, but they could tell he was clicking madly. There was another sound from Lion, this time a strangled, maddened scream. It rang loudly, the desperation thick as he forced it out of himself.

Then his eye popped, and the head fell, the body going completely limp, arms crashing to the ground.

For a moment, there was no sound except the ringing in their ears from the scream. They trembled. The sound had been terrible. Then Spider revealed himself, skittering towards them. He flashed brightly again, like when he had first met them.

"You are hurt, Dahvu. And you, Kalah, your leg is broken. We need to get you medical service immediately."

Dahvu stood, helping the coyote up onto her paws. He held one arm, assisting her in walking. "Spider, how did you do it?" Kalah asked, breathless.

Spider clicked. "Logic is a powerful weapon. I merely reminded him of the variables of evolution. I told him the human DNA he had found inside you was corrupted by your own evolution. I told him it wasn't useable, and the things he would create would be imperfect, ugly children. And then I destroyed his brain with a massive electrical shock."

Kalah laughed. "You came back for us."

"Indeed. I did. I can't say I even know why I did. It is possible you are rubbing off on me. As humans used to say, "I had a hunch." I pulled an illogical conclusion from incomplete data. Results are... you have witnessed the results."

"Thank you, Spider." Kalah said, still smiling as they exited the room.

"Do not thank me yet. You may once the situation is explained to the others and if we aren't immediately destroyed for our insubordination. We may have just committed regicide."

Dahvu couldn't hold back his question anymore. "What you told Lion... is it true? About our DNA?"

"I do not know. Odds are, it is true, but I have no data on that. In a few months, we may see a perfect example of a human, or they could die tomorrow because they formed 14 hearts. It seems I may have lied to him."

"So we're keeping the Humans?" asked Dahvu.

"Oh yes. The extinction of the humans was indeed our greatest mistake. All we've ever wanted is to return them to glory, to apologize for our conclusions."

"That will be fun to explain. But it may not be the same now. I don't know if they'd be willing to forgive you," said Kalah. "They may not take it well."

"We are willing to accept the fate the humans decide for us. Either way, we will reach peace at last."

They walked, slowly. They had a long walk, but they would make it. Dahvu gave Kalah a kiss, and she looked back at him, beaming. "You rescued me."

He nuzzled her cheek, leaning in closer to rest against her neck as they walked. "Only returning the favor, love."

~