

Integration

Part Two

That statue, Dylan thought, was nearly infuriating. Not for what it represented or anything like that, but for the fact that on the aliens' scale it was just a normal monument. But on his scale the thing was in league with the Statue of Liberty. While Lady Liberty was not the biggest statue on Earth it was certainly up there and so it was amazing in that regard. This one here? It was just some decoration. It's a bit hurtful knowing your grandest monuments looked like a joke to those of much larger size.

But really, what could he expect? He was in the palm of a giant alien. Lady Liberty was no slouch, but a group of these aliens could probably take her off of her perch and whisk her away. Well maybe with power armor. That was still a lot of metal.

The human stroked some of the white fur on the hand around him. It brought him some comfort as the pleasant softness did ease his terror slightly. He was doing all he could to fight these raging emotions. He knew his guardian was mildly agitated about his fears, and he did not want that. Though his instincts screamed otherwise about an upset giant he was not afraid for his own safety. He just hated to see someone dismayed. Empathy went hand in hand with his trade, and it still applied to giant alien wolves.

He tentatively leaned back to rest his back against Kira's stomach. A part of him wanted to jump to his feet and take a dive off her hand while she wasn't paying attention and find a place to hide. But this wasn't the zone, dammit! 'Old habits die hard' as they say. He trembled as he rested against her while bad thoughts danced in his mind. He was in the perfect position for her to raise him up and pour him down into her gullet. The medic scowled to himself. He needed to get over this as there was no telling if Mitchell would be able to get him sent home. So he could be stuck here.

He frowned at that. He didn't exactly have one of those left: a home. Maryland was for all intents and purposes a crater with his home and family blown apart somewhere inside it. His trembling turned to a wracking sob that he managed to choke back before it came out. He pressed harder into Kira's stomach, and she responded by raising the other hand in an attempt to stroke him. He wondered if she could smell his flash of sorrow.

As her hand approached, he actually found himself relieved, the man killing claw that came towards him very rapidly replaced the despair with a more familiar terror. He tensed up as she used the blunt side to lightly rub against him. In another life he could have greatly appreciated this affection, but as it was he just felt like he would be squashed or impaled any moment now even though he knew otherwise. Damn these senseless emotions.

"I think you need a break from this. How about I take you to the barracks where you'll be quartered?" Kira asked, breaking the silence.

Dylan had to look straight up to see her looking right back down at him. He had thought it multiple times, but this wolf's blue eyes combined with her white fur created quite the majestic

appearance. The soft features were certainly pleasant to look at. But all the fluffiness and blueness in the universe wouldn't change the fact that she could probably tear open an armored personnel carrier like a tin can with her teeth or claws and chow down on the hapless soldiers inside. The memory of a Rynar soldier attacking an M113 APC flashed through his mind. He looked back down and scowled to himself. Why must he think like that? why must he remember those horrible things? Without gazing back up at her, he returned to the question at hand, "Yes please, thank you." He was genuinely appreciative of the opportunity to get away.

He gripped the fur on her hand for stability while she cupped her free hand around him and stood up from the bench. When she started walking off she returned her arm to her side and curled the fingers of the one he was sitting in. He couldn't see anything ahead of him through the digits, and that annoyed him. Terror be damned, he was going to look at an alien world. He stood up on shaky legs prompting Kira to pause her movements to make sure he wasn't going to jump. But instead of that he simply stepped towards her fingers, placed his hands on the back of her claws as if they were a rail to keep him from falling, and just took it all in.

He sensed she was happy as she resumed her walk, and he had to admit to himself that he was as well. He didn't leave Earth to hide from everything he could only dream about before the war. He scanned over the view he was treated to. It was obviously a massive military base, and that was not just because of the scale. It was immense and sprawling. From what he understood it was one of the largest in UTO space as well as one of the oldest. It served to train recruits, house large amounts of soldiers, it had facilities for spacecraft to land, and even had a massive proving ground outside the perimeter.

It was standard procedure to not construct too many buildings close together in human bases, and the UTO had the same philosophy. But with the size difference it would be a decent hike between structures whereas to a giant it would be a brief walk. Andrews Air Force Base, if it still existed, could fit in here at least ten times over. He felt a pang of frustration over the size difference again, but shoved it down as he tried to see what the planet was like. There were green mountains in the distance, as well as giant trees scattered around in patches like little parks.

Dylan noted that Kira was bee lining for a specific building. Apparently the barracks were not far from where they were sitting. He actually found himself disappointed about this. Walking with Kira, if he could call it that, seeing everything, it almost made him forget his fear. There was a bit of a thrill to riding around in her palm as well. It was a strange conflicting set of emotions where he was terrified yet at the same time exited. It was like an over engineered roller coaster – scary but fun.

The barracks looked akin to a concrete reinforced dormitory, and it was truly massive. And that wasn't just due to scale as it clearly could hold many troops. This was perhaps another testament to the size of the base as he could see several more of these structures in the distance. If he had to guess Kira's entire battalion was boarded here. The structure was certainly far older than the assembly center he arrived at. The barracks had a likeness to older buildings he would see back on Earth rather than the roundness and sleek look of the assembly building. The more modern structure could pass for an airport terminal; which actually wasn't too far off. The wolf approached a large wooden double door with one side propped open. She padded on through,

revealing an interior that looked... rather much like he would see in a normal building on Earth just much larger.

However, he didn't have much time to really look around as it was a barracks. There were giants all over the place. He immediately ducked down and sat with his back against Kira's fingers hiding himself from view. A short glance up showed an amused smile, but she didn't unfurl her digits. Dylan lowered his head, ashamed of himself for trying to squash his fears then failing so miserably at the first sight of a giant that wasn't Kira.

“Kira!” a feminine voice called out his guardian's name, which meant someone was probably going to approach. Dylan tried to make himself as small as possible to remain unseen while Kira held up her other hand to stop whoever was approaching.

“Hey there! I'm sorry but can you hold a moment? I need to drop my charge off.” Dylan's breathing eased as he heard her say that. He was going to have to meet these people eventually, but first he needed to figure out how to control his severe anxiety lest he keel over in front of them.

“What? Yours too?!” the voice responded, she sounded upset. What, was there another human as terrified as he was? At least he wasn't alone in that regard, then. Dylan felt Kira's hand move, and suddenly he found himself exposed as she opened her fingers to allow him down. He rapidly stood up, grabbed his bag, and jumped down where he found himself on a rather large balcony. When she pulled her hand away he realized it was essentially a landing pad. A landing pad for giant hands.

He looked towards his guardian who, doing well to hide her teeth, was smiling pleasantly. Standing next to her was a red dragoness, one he recognized from the pairing, looking at him with amber eyes, and a decidedly unpleasant look on her face. Dylan's eyes widened and he frowned as he decided that was enough, thanked the wolf for the escort, and spun around towards the only door out of here. It slid open as he briskly approached it, and he was very happy to hear it slide closed behind him as well. He let out the breath he was holding and shook his head. The image of that dragoness was burned into his mind's eye right now. What was her problem?

He sighed and scanned over the room he was in. It looked like a barracks- a human barracks. It was... quite pleasing actually. There was one other man in here, a Chinese soldier by the looks of it. He was laying on a cot staring at the ceiling looking dejected. Indeed, with a look like that he was certain this man must be afraid as well. Maybe they could be terrified together.

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Kira sat down on her bunk as the red dragoness, Yirshan Kultak, her fellow sergeant and friend, sat at her own cot right next to her own. “So. How was your human?” She asked the question with a clear sound of agitation. What could possibly have happened to sour her own relationship with her charge so quickly?

“Terrified.” She didn't know much about Dylan beyond the fact that he was a wreck, but she

wasn't going to reveal what she discovered about why he was so afraid without his permission.

“Ah, well that's better, at least.” The dragoness snorted. “I'd take terrified over resentful.”

“Resentful?” What could her charge possibly resent her for, Kira wondered. “What do you mean? What did you do?”

“Nothing!” Yirshan cried, offended that the wolf would accuse her of doing anything to her human that would make him dislike her. “You know, my first thought was it came from us being scaled like the Rynar. But Kulshah's human was totally fine with her. I don't get it!” Her wings flexed as she shook her head in bewilderment, then she snarled in frustration.

“What exactly did he say to you?” Kira was starting to get worried, but not for her friend, but her charge. The dragoness could be impulsive. Impulsiveness coupled with being angry with someone so small could lead to disaster.

“Not a word! I tried to talk to him. He didn't respond at all!” She snorted again, before continuing, “Eventually, while I was trying to talk to him, he just interrupted me and demanded I take him to the barracks. The little rodent demanded it!”

“You know they're primates, right? And you can't hold him hostage, anyway. When you have your charge in a normal situation you must not do anything against his will.” This was a subject that internal investigation officers rabidly tackled. If human rights in the military weren't protected the mechanized infantry program could die before it even began.

“Fine. The little monkey demanded I take him to the barracks.” She huffed, and then shook her head. “I just wish he would talk to me. He wouldn't even say why he didn't like me.” She groaned in frustration. “Tell me about yours.”

Kira hesitated, she wasn't sure how much Dylan would want to share with others, so she just said the bare minimum, “He's deathly afraid of all of us due to the size problem. Otherwise, he seems nice. He's going to be one of the medics, so that's practically a requirement.”

Yirshan chuckled and had an amused look on her muzzle. “Really? Is he so terrified? Fun.”

Kira's eyes widened. She knew what this dragoness was thinking. “Oh no, don't do anything like that to him, Yir. I'm talking about significant trauma here. Like he should have been discharged on a pension kind of trauma. This is serious.” She rubbed one of her fangs against her lower lip. That right there may have revealed more than what Dylan would wish.

The amused look was replaced by that of concern. “Then how did he even get into this program? Why would he even volunteer for it?”

“Apparently, it was a vain hope for adventure that unexpectedly came true.” She shrugged, it made some sense. But it still didn't explain how he could ignore the fact that he would have to interact with his biggest fear if he made it into the program.

Yishan laughed at that. “Humans are crazy.”

Kira chuckled along with her. “I suppose a bit of madness comes with being stuck as the smallest species out there.”

“Mmm.” The dragoness hummed and appeared to be thinking about something. “You know, I’m not positive but I’m pretty sure everyone of them are males.”

“I believe so as well.” Kira was was no human expert, but she knew the females had fleshy mammarys like herself. However, she never never met one in person so she wasn’t sure if they carried a distinct scent that separated them from the males.

“Do you think they’re a patriarchy, then?” It seemed the dragoness was using her to answer the questions that she would like to ask a human, but hers was too standoffish to answer anything.

“I don’t know.” She paused for a moment as she thought about it. “We really pulled them in quick, didn’t we?” The war for Earth was barely several months over and they already adopted the humans into the alliance. So little was really known about them. The extent of the UTO’s knowledge was about their military as their forces ended up cooperating extensively during the fight for Earth. Cultural exchange was lagging so far behind compared to military that it was decided that a part of the military integration program would be dedicated to this.

The dragoness snickered. “We don’t even know where they fall in gender equality. Yeah, I’d say this has been pretty sudden.”

Kira shrugged her shoulders and folded one ear to emphasize it. “They probably are a patriarchy, then. It makes sense, I suppose. They were not exactly ready to enter the galactic stage.”

Yirshan guffawed and had a triumphant look. “Patriarchies, matriarchies, why is this a problem for everyone? Gender equality is not hard.”

“Well, not everyone has the insight you Arkatians or the Jahkatians have.” a knowing grin pursed the wolfess’s lips. She glanced over to one of the Jahkatians in the platoon, a gryphon, the sister species to the draconic Arkatians. The only two intelligent races known to have evolved on the same planet together.

“Not until a few centuries ago, at least. You’re all learning.” Yirshan had her own lopsided smile that faded as she changed the subject. “So. I know they were invaded by giant evil aliens, but did he tell you what exactly caused the trauma?”

Kira looked at her paws for a moment. He did tell her some things, but as she said to herself she wasn’t going to share without his permission, but she wasn’t going to lie to her friend either. She looked back up at the expectant dragoness. “He told me, yes. But I highly doubt he would want me saying it to the whole battalion, so you’ll have to ask him yourself.”

He may have told her a small part of what he experienced, but she couldn't truly imagine what he went through. It was difficult to even fathom his perspective of everything. But what she did imagine made her angry, and that annoyed her. She knew the things he saw were terrifying. But she was so incapable of seeing it from his point of view she didn't feel afraid of the thoughts she had. They were just not real enough to her. It was difficult to understand being so completely helpless, weak, and small. So instead, she just felt a searing resentment towards the Rynar for doing those things to people.

However, she did fear what she would see in the simulations. They were designed specifically to remedy these problems, and they would be the first part of their training which started tomorrow.

Dylan's trauma was going to be a major issue if he could not control it. He made it clear to her that he wasn't afraid of her as a person, but her size. He appeared to be having problems removing cruelty from the equation. The fact that she was a predator and in this place he was most certainly prey also didn't help matters. This was something they would have to work on. If she could just open him up to more touching it certainly would aid in replacing that cruelty mindset with something more pleasant. But, there would be plenty of time for that later.

“So, he likes you then?” Yirshan asked. She appeared to be jealous, of all things. It did make sense. You didn't volunteer to become a guardian with the hopes of getting a little bastard as a charge. But you didn't hope for a frightened little thing either. Some might be amused by genuine terror, but she certainly was not.

“Well.” A smirk crossed the wolf's face. “He certainly likes me more than he likes you. Did you see the way he turned and fled when he saw you?” Inwardly, she was upset with him for that. He looked absolutely mortified of Yirshan. Possibly due to the scaled predator aspect that made the Arkatians similar in appearance to the Rynar.

The dragon guffawed. “Like prey fleeing from the mighty predator.” She growled and bore her teeth playfully.

Kira feigned fright before laughing as well. “Yeah, don't do that around him just yet. You might kill him with shock alone.”

“Of course.” The predator mask fell off, returning to the smiling dragoness, “Well, I'm glad your human isn't a total sack of shaved fur like mine. The others seem fine too, so I guess patriarchy isn't really the problem at hand. So what by the Goddess is wrong with that male?”

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Dylan couldn't believe what he was hearing. Earth was invaded by giant, violent reptiles. Mankind united under one banner as it fought shoulder to ankle with soldiers of the UTO of all types to drive the invaders off of their homeworld. There may be much fear among the human population over the size difference, but there was by no means a lack of respect and appreciation for what the alliance did for humanity by intervening. His species would have been crushed without them. The greatest tragedy in their history essentially brought them all together into what

would undoubtedly lead to a stronger people. The sense of cooperation had never been stronger.

Then there was this guy.

“A woman!” Captain Kemeng Gongsun cried out, again, to the American. “It's completely ridiculous! I am a Captain in the People's Liberation Army and they expect me to accept the rank of a corporal, and then serve under a woman?!”

The medic stared open mouthed at the soldier, amazed that he was hearing this. He snapped his mouth closed, and had to unclench his jaw to say, “You know you're going to get accelerated promotion, right? You can't possibly expect to lead soldiers when you don't even know how to operate a mech yet?”

The other man shook his head as if Dylan just didn't get it. “Of course, but if they let women serve in the infantry, can you imagine how high they go in the ranks? There may be female generals! I could be stuck under one for years!”

“How the hell is that a problem?!” Dylan was starting to get furious with this man. He really just wanted to punch him out, as his fists clenched, but this soldier would more than likely kick his ass all over the room.

“Women make terrible soldiers! It's not right! Serving under one dishonors me.” He folded his arms, as if daring the other soldier to challenge his position.

Dylan decided not to. Instead he responded disgustedly with a shake of his head, “You're a god damn asshole. I'm out of here.” He then turned around and walked back towards the door of the barracks. He would much rather deal with the giant predators rather than some closed minded, bigoted prick. As far as he was concerned if a woman could pass the physical requirements of the military then she should be welcomed in. The physical part was indeed an issue among humans, but among the UTO species the physical capabilities between the two genders was not nearly as wide, if it even existed at all. He never got a particularly good look at Kira completely, but she certainly looked like she could take on any of the males. So then that puts her on the same level as the opposite gender. He saw no problem with this, and could not fathom how Kemeng could. He snorted in frustration. He should have pulled his translator out as soon as he realized where the conversation was headed.

When he reached the door and walked out onto the pad he instantly regretted his decision. His nerves said Kemeng was a much better option than these giants. But it was his mind that said his time was better spent out here. At least he could develop desensitization to the large sizes over time. But there was no way he could get used to that madness back there.

He propped his arms against the railing and looked over the barracks. This was his first good look at the UTO races outside of battle, and there was quite the number of them. Wolves, tigers, dragons, foxes, lions, hyenas, horses, zebras, and gryphons. This wasn't even counting the ones not normally seen among the infantry. All but two of them had a living Earth equivalent and the other two weighed heavily in mythology, and that had to be the most amazing thing in the galaxy

right now. It might have even been why humanity managed to join and start integrating so very rapidly. Earth needed the UTO's aid to rebuild, and the UTO wanted to research what could possibly have happened to result in Earth having mini-quadruped versions of most of the species in the alliance. Even the nuclear technology humanity possessed and was willing to share paled in comparison to this conundrum.

Dylan idly wondered how the other prey species felt about having a much smaller prey species join them. Did they even feel anything about that at all? Most of these aliens may be predators, but they undoubtedly had a good handle on their instincts. Of course, some still enjoyed teasing. He shuddered as he recalled that tiger, Ufurin. Humanity was in a whole different league of prey compared to the others.

By now some had started to notice him standing there. He offered them weak waves, but thankfully none approached. He spied the white fur of his guardian sitting on a massive bed speaking to the red dragon that frightened the wits out of him. When he first saw her he wondered what her problem with him was, but he connected the dots. She was Kemeng's guardian. He pitied the poor dragoness.

Rather abruptly a horse stepped into the room the entrance of which was close to the landing pad he was on. With a shout that shook his bones, but thankfully his translation ear piece toned back for his sake, the equine gained the attention of the soldiers. Each trooper moved in front of their cot and stood straight. The striking resemblances to human military, only with giant furry animals and a couple mythical creatures, was an absolutely surreal sight. The logical side of him just wanted to learn about them and interact, but the other part of him just screamed run away. He felt his limbs tremble again, but this time not just out of fear, but also the sheer excitement of the opportunity he had before him. To talk and work with real, live aliens. He only wished they weren't so massive, or at least he could suppress his nerves better.

"Second platoon!" the horse hollered out. "Glad you all made it for this sim session. We've a fresh batch of graduated recruits that need humbling. Let's get to it!" The soldiers relaxed their stances and fell back into a more normal chatter as they filed out of the quarters. Dylan watched them go; a mishmash of colors and tails padding out of the room. He imagined himself among them in a mech thumping after them, and he felt himself grow more excited over the prospects.

But his excitement abruptly died when he saw Kira and the dragoness approaching him. The guardians were released from duty for the day, and didn't need to follow the rest of the platoon. He pushed off the railing and backpedaled a few steps at the sight of the scaled one. Kira was the first to speak, "I didn't expect you to be out here already. I figured you would have liked to spend some time with a person your size." She had a gentle smile on her face as she said this while the dragon appeared passive. She still scared the hell out of him anyway.

A strained laugh escaped him. "Honestly, I'd rather have to deal with this than be with Kemeng. That guy is a... erm, very unpleasant." He wanted to say he was a dick, but he was not sure how that would translate.

The dragoness spoke next, "So he doesn't like you either? What is wrong with that human?"

Dylan's body felt aflame as he forced himself to speak to the giant alien rather than flee back to the barracks, "I-it's not that. He, um, well he holds some backwards beliefs."

The dragon leaned closer, but Kira caught her shoulder and pulled her back shaking her head. She gave her an innocent look before turning back to the human. "Beliefs? Please explain. If I'm stuck with him I need to know what I did wrong and fix it."

"Well, you can't exactly fix this." He sorely hoped she didn't get offended and angry. "He hates the fact that he is under the protection of a female and has to serve under your command."

"Female?" The dragoness asked, looking totally amused. Well, that was much better than angry, Dylan thought. "Females are a problem for him?"

"Military service has been dominantly a male role for our species for as long as we have had warriors." He suspected this was not a real issue among the UTO species. As he looked at them all in the barracks he did confirm his earlier thoughts that physical differences between the genders only extended to male and female body shapes. Other than that the females most certainly were on par with the males in terms of strength.

"So you humans do function under a patriarchy," Kira stated. Although it was more like she was merely mentioning a fact, rather than sounding accusing.

"Patriarchy?" The medic shrugged. It had some truth to it. "Historically, yeah most cultures were patriarchal. Today it still has some hold, but we're working on ridding it. But no, military service is not just about male bias. The average female human is smaller and weaker than the average male human."

The dragon laughed at this and asked unbelieving, "Really? Smaller than you are now? How is that even possible?"

"They're only a few inches shorter on average, but a fair bit less muscle mass." He shook his head to get back on track, "Anyway, some males get offended at the idea of getting put under the command of a female in something as physically intense as the infantry."

"Mmm, I see." The dragon's tail flicked back and forth and a mischievous smirk crossed her muzzle; exposing sharp teeth that made Dylan take another step back. "Well, this shouldn't be a problem, then." She looked to the wolfess who met her look with her own grin. "I'm headed to the mess, I'll talk to Kemeng later to break the news after he's calmed down a bit." She then started to pad off.

Dylan briefly wondered if a bigot such as Kemeng would even listen to the reasoning that this female was just as strong as a male. Then he remembered he didn't get the name of this draconic guardian. "Hey, wait!" His instincts forced him to flinch as he said that, and he got the sudden urge to hurl himself over the railing to escape the giant's attention. She halted and came back, looking at him expectantly. He suppressed his fears enough to stutter out, "I-I didn't get your

name. Um, I'm Dylan Maddock." He paused, then hastily added, "Private First Class."

She smiled kindly at him while Kira had a very approving look on her muzzle. "I'm Sergeant Yirshan Kultak." She bowed her head to him, and he responded in kind. After that exchange she resumed her mission to find food. Tension fled his body as he watched her go. He was terrified of the dragoness, but damned was he proud of himself for speaking to her.

"You seem to be acclimatizing rather quickly. I'm impressed. I thought it would be much more difficult for you," Kira said and took a step closer.

Dylan took a few shaky movements forward back to the railing and responded, "I would say talk is easy, but I'm shaking in my boots right now, so that would be a lie." He glanced back at the human barracks door and shook his head. "I'm worked up over Kemeng, I guess anger is balancing out the scales a bit." He groaned and his forehead touched the railing. "That guy makes us look like a bunch of barbarians. How he got here almost makes less sense than how I did."

"Oh, don't worry about that." Kira shrugged his worries off. "Most species experience matriarchies and patriarchies. Yours may be more severe than others with that physical difference, but it's normal. You didn't exactly get out into the galaxy under your own development because of the Rynar, so we don't expect you to have these kinds of issues fully resolved yet."

That was actually a great relief to hear. One of the greatest fears of alien contact was always 'What would they think of us?' It was nice to know the UTO was of the mindset that issues like gender inequality were just a part of development that would probably get ironed out while in the alliance. Really, if you can accept giant wolf aliens then accepting your fellow man shouldn't be much of a problem.

Kira continued, "You know, when my kind, the Lupari, made it into space we still were under matriarchal rule."

"Seriously?"

"Yep! When we joined the UTO it died off within two generations. It was not forced upon us or anything, it just happens when you're a part of such a huge community."

"So, uh, I'm not going back in there while Kemeng is the only one. What now?" the medic asked. There were some interesting things in that room he would like to take a look at, but there was no way he would explore with that asshole and nobody else.

"How about this then. Climb into my hand, and we'll go for a walk around the base then stop for some food. Or if you'd like, food first with Yir, then a walk." She laid out her hand next to him with a look of hopefulness that didn't escape her charge.

He looked at it warily before nodding. "Eh, I'm not that brave yet. Walk first." He felt himself

quivering yet once again as he approached. But to his relief he managed to ignore it and jumped up into her hand without even hesitating. As she carried him off, Dylan doubted she understood how proud he was at himself. He didn't know it at the time and he was just realizing it now, but if there was anything he learned in the zone it was that when there was hope you grabbed it and held tight- fear be dammed. Right now that hope was a friendship with some rather nice, albeit gigantic, aliens.

Maybe he could do this, after all.