

WARNING! This story contains some GRAPHIC scenes depicting interspecies intimacy and some sexual activity between humans and alien species which aren't completely humanoid (such as one species which resembles oversized anthropomorphic otters). The scenes also involve interspecies homosexuality, and these issues, and the effects on post-contact human society are discussed at length.

WARNING: The main character's upbringing has resulted in him being very cynical and rather antagonistic towards most organized religion.

Just over a decade after first contact with the otter-like Chakharans, Alton must face a first contact of his own, as he is tasked to meet with, and “entertain and mingle” with a delegation from a Chakharan corporation at the Wolves' End orbital station.

The Otters at Wolves End

By

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Ver. 3.0

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Alton Skyler Mills felt he was way over his head, when he had accepted the assignment from his boss the day before. Yesterday was his first day on the job at SingulariTech

Systemworks as a customer service rep. Five hours into his first day of training, his boss had called him into his office and asked him if he could be a representative to meet with a group of Lutrian delegates from a corporation which manufactured computer hardware. He had been told that he wouldn't be involved in any of the intense negotiations, or be doing any of the actual wheeling and dealing. Instead, his job would be to “mingle with, and entertain” the Lutrian delegates. Alton knew that the Lutrians, or as they're more properly known as, Chakharan, were a very physically and sexually intimate species. He gripped the car's steering wheel tightly as he tried to control his breathing. He remembered asking his boss to elaborate on the whole, “mingle and entertain” part, resulting in his boss telling him to just be himself. When Alton had tried to press his boss about the whole sexual aspects of Lutrian society, his boss had told him that he was not at liberty to discuss that particular subject. He sighed, unsure of why he agreed to go along with that assignment. Maybe it was the allure of actually meeting another species, or maybe it was just to kiss ass with his new boss for potential future advancement. Alton felt that he really hadn't thought his decision through, and the extreme uneasiness made him break out in a cold sweat.

Ahead of him, stretched a sea of taillights. The vehicles on the roads these days, used almost every conceivable fuel, from gasoline, to electric, to various natural gas and propane engines, to the odd assemblage of fuel cell vehicles. Though most were driven manually, a small but growing percentage of vehicles were autonomous. Alton's electric automobile softly purred, not because of the engine sound, but due to regulations that required automobiles to produce some kind of continuous noise to alert pedestrians. He was on State Route 518 on the way to the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, but feared he would be late. Construction at the airport had caused traffic issues for the past two years, and he saw little sign of it abating. A white boxy snub-winged shuttle-type craft quietly hummed, as it cruised through the gray stormy sky, heading away from the airport, or as they were calling it these days, the transit center. The jets were being phased out, and from what he had heard, even these shuttles would soon be phased out, at least to some degree as the new transportation network was completed. He sighed again. It was an interesting time to be alive, that was for sure. There was alien contact, which was achieved while he was in sixth grade, and a battle fought in orbit involving several hundred ships while he was in eighth grade. Then, in his second year of college, earth, or rather most of earth, since many countries chose to opt out, officially joined the Chakharan Federation. Alton felt that

the tactics used by the Lutrians, though strong-armed to say the least, was brilliant in getting most of the world to Join the Federation. So much change happened just within a decade, and much within the first year or two. Just after contact, debates and legal wrangling occurred in which legal terms such as “human being,” “man,” “woman,” and “person.” had to be updated, which was far more feasible than re-writing every law on the books.

Then, there was yesterday, Alton's first day at his first job. Singulartech Systemworks was a large multinational computer hardware and software manufacturer, which had a long history of acquisitions and takeovers involving many of the mainstays in the computer industry, such as Microsoft, and Cisco, among many others. Singulartech was among a consortium of companies working on a new computer operating system for starships, known as the KalyX Project, which was based on a mixture of various open source operating systems, and proprietary code. Singulartech was attempting to gain an advantage, by seeking the cooperation of several of the Chakharan computer manufacturers. With such cooperation, Singulartech hoped they could get its version of KalyX to run on Chakharan computer hardware, and thus have a major advantage and head start. Currently, there was no earth-built starships beyond the prototype stage.

Alton checked his Nav system. He had the voice turned off, since this particular model sounded too much like the type of female robot who would seem nice and happy to help, whilst preparing to drive a four foot long spike through its victim's chest, before eating the person's brain. Behind him, was the overpass to Interstate 5, and some miles back, was his home in Renton, where he still lived with his overbearing conservative Christian parents. Checking the time, he saw that it was 8:53am, Tuesday, March 15th, 2072. He sighed, as he knew he had to be at the North Satellite Terminal by 9 O'clock. To his right, was an elevated train track atop high concrete columns, which was the old SoundTransit light rail line. To his left, on the other side of the eastbound lanes, was a tract of houses, which would probably gain significant value with the imminent demise of jet aircraft travel. The elevated rail began to snake away towards a large boarding platform, as the traffic continued to sluggishly crawl. Ahead, was the offramp which lead to the airport, as well as another overpass. He nearly cut someone off as he took the next opening into the right-hand lane, where the traffic finally began to thin out, slightly. With a bit of maneuvering on the spaghetti of streets, he finally reached the parking lot while running about ten minutes late. Despite much of the parking areas having been taken over by cranes, backhoes,

and other heavy construction equipment, he was able to quickly find a parking space which wasn't too far away from the terminal.

Alton turned off his vehicle's engine, and the faux engine sound died to silence. Checking the time, he saw that it was 9:20am, so he was definitely running late. He had little to pack, since he was only going to be out for the day. Wallet, check. Phone, check, though he had no idea if the Wolves End orbital station had any mobile phone service or compatible wireless Internet. He opened the glove box and grasped the small black cylinder of pepper spray. He pondered. Job or no job, he wasn't interested in anything sexual with giant otter aliens. After a moment of hesitation, he pocketed the pepper spray. He didn't have one of those translator gizmos that the Lutrians used, but his boss had assured him that all the Lutrians that he would meet there would be equipped with translators. He breathed heavily, then opened the car door and exited. The air was brisk, and a light drizzle begun to spot the pavement and his car's windshield. He closed and locked his car with a click of his remote key, then started towards a sprawling building, parts of which appeared gutted.

"Why me," Alton asked himself. "What would my boss know about me?" He thought aloud. Had he left it slip that he was single? Sexual orientation? Straight. Well, he had to be straight, or his dad would kick him out and disown him. He had played around with both males and females, but had trouble calling himself bisexual because of how conservative and Christian his parents were, despite being atheist himself. "Okay, yes, I am bisexual." he forced himself to mumble. He was just starting on the job, starting training in fact, so maybe they felt that his absence for a day was less critical, then someone with more seniority. Then there was the whole idea of sex, interspecies sex. Was he being put into that position because they didn't want to expose the higher-ups in the company to the potential scandal this could cause. Already, a few politicians, and even an actor, had their careers damaged or destroyed due to allegations of interspecies sexual activity. Most people equated interspecies sexual activity, even with a sentient species like the Chakharans, with bestiality. Several southern states had passed laws which extended their bestiality laws to cover sex even with sapient non-humans. In fact, these states were currently attempting to appeal to the Federation High Court to be allowed to keep such laws, after they were struck down when Earth joined the Federation. Alabama, along with Mississippi and Louisiana had also attempted to file for enclave status, which would allow them to opt out of Federation rule, but this was rejected on the grounds that these states was not a true

sovereign entities, unlike Saudi Arabia, China, the Russian Federation, and many other countries, which were granted enclave status.

A small group of picketers stood outside the doorway, with signs reading, “Alien demons go home,” and “God Hates Aliens.” As Alton walked past them, one of them tried to shove a pamphlet into his hands which he allowed to fall to the ground. The man reached down to grab the pamphlet and attempted to shove it back at Alton.

“Get out of my face,” growled Alton.

“You know,” said the man as he tried to fast-talk his point of selectively using science to make a religious point. “These so-called aliens are not true aliens. We can eat the same food, breathe the same air. They have DNA. They are no more different from us as any other earth creature. That can't be, unless they're really demons sent to drive man away from Jesus Christ.”

“I was raised by your kind,” said Alton. “I don't need your crap.”

“There are even sodomites who are having sex with them.” the man continued to rant. “We, of the Church of the Most Holy Trinity won't stand for this. We won't rest until we drive these abominations from Earth. They're possessing people, they're corrupting our children.”

Alton hurried through the open doorway, as he attempted to ignore the taunts and jeers. Inside, the building appeared to be under major renovation, with equipment everywhere. Scaffolds, construction workers hurrying about, the whine of electric drills, and just general chaos reigned supreme inside the terminal. Most of the lighting appeared to be temporary, on portable pedestals, with cables criss-crossing the floor, creating a potential tripping hazard. To his left, through what used to be a large window and glass doorway, was the dismantled remains of a baggage claim conveyor belt. Ahead, was a disused baggage check-in counter. To his right, stood a large African American security guard who looked like he could easily be a bouncer. Alton removed his wallet, and flashed his ID. “I'm with SingulariTech Systemworks. I know I'm running late. I hope I've not missed my shuttle or...”

The man stepped to a small kiosk, and pressed a button. The screen filled with a list of names, which he slowly ran his finger down. He turned back to Alton and as he spoke, his voice was surprisingly soft and polite. “You're expected. Don't worry, you're not going by shuttle.” then he laughed.

“Ah, what's so funny,” asked Alton.

“They're teleporting you.”

“They're what?” asked Alton. He had never been through a teleport before, and had hoped to avoid it for as long as possible.

“That's why they're tearing up the airport.” said the man. “The airport will be all trains, tubecars, and teleports. In five years, it's going to be like Star Trek.”

“I sorta knew this, but...” Alton trailed off.

“Just follow the signs which read, 'Wolves End Teleport access.' You can't miss it.”

“Okay, thanks,” said Alton. As he started walking towards the gutted X-ray checkpoint, he mumbled, “I wish I could miss it.” The machinery for the checkpoint was mostly gone, with just part of the baggage conveyor belt, and a privacy screen where they used to do strip searches. Beyond, the boarding gates were mostly barricaded, while others were gutted and filled with piles of construction debris. One gate had an eight-foot wide glass disk on the floor. Next to the disk, was some kind of kiosk, though it was still just a hollow shell, with no screen, or computer installed. Further ahead, another “Wolves End” sign pointed into one of the boarding gates. Alton turned and followed the arrow. The former boarding gate had all the seating removed, and was dominated by a eight foot wide, ten foot tall, chain-link cage, with a gate which faced the counter in the back of the room. There were two people sitting behind the counter, occupied with whatever work they were doing at their computer terminals.

A dark haired woman who sat to his left, looked up from her computer screen. “You are with Singulartech?”

“Yes I am,” said Alton with much trepidation, as he slowly walked around the cage, towards the counter. “So how is this going to work?”

“Well,” she said, “I release the gate, and you enter, and I close it. We conduct a thorough scan to make sure you're not carrying any contraband or weapons. Once you're determined to be clean, we call the station, and they bring you up.”

“I meant, like the actual process?” asked Alton, with concern. “Will it hurt? Am I going to get diced into cubes or have my atoms scattered all over the universe?”

“Don't worry,” she chuckled. “It's not like Star Trek. Think of it as an elevator, but the shaft goes through a short span of hyperspace. I mean, you'll still appear to disappear, but I assure you, you'll remain whole.”

“So that means,” said Alton, “I ah, get removed from the universe and...”

She pressed a button, and a short buzzer sounded, then the gate rattled open. “Just get

into the cage,” she said abruptly. “Your group departed 10 minutes ago.”

Alton approached the gate of the cage with increased apprehension. Looking inside, there was a glass disk which occupied most of the floorspace inside the cage. The top of the cage was also chain-link, creating a lattice-like shadowing inside. He cautiously entered the cage, and onto the glass disk. The woman pressed a button causing the harsh buzzer to sound again, and the gate rattled closed. The other person, a youngish man with light brown frizzy hair looked up from his work, and said, “Hold still while I scan you.” Alton obliged, as the man adjusted some controls. A strange red light shone overhead, and several smaller pulsing lights slid along tracks along the corners of the cage. A short buzz sounded. The man looked at his screen, then looked back at Alton and frowned. “Ah, I ask that you remove the mace or pepper spray from your person and place it in the receptacle to your right.”

Alton sighed heavily as his only protection from unwanted sexual advances was being stripped from him. He reached into his pocket, and removed the cylinder of compressed capsaicin, and slowly stepped to the black metal slot on the side of the cage. He pushed the tiny canister through the slot, and heard it clank loudly into a small bin on the other side of the chain link. Alton returned to the middle of the disk and waited.

“Need to rescan you,” said the man. “Hold still.”

Alton waited as the lights pulsed, and within a few moments, they stopped, with no alarm. “Okay, you're clean,” said the man.

The woman spoke into a mouthpiece on a headset. “Alton Mills from SingulariTech is ready for transport.” After a moment, she turned to Alton. “Will be a few moments. They're charging the hyperdrive.”

“So is there like an irate Scotsman on the other side?” asked Alton.

She giggled, then said, “No, no, he's from Philly.” After a moment, she said, “Okay, it's time. Stand still, and you might want to shield your eyes.”

Alton said, “Okay, I guess I'm ready.” He instinctively held his breath as he waited.

“Okay, engage,” she said.

A strange blue-green field formed around him, accompanied by a reverberating hum. A blazing ring of energy formed around him at about chest height, where it widened, before splitting. One of the rings moved upward, and the other moved down towards the floor. He shielded his eyes, as the hum rose in pitch, and the gravity seemed to waver, and ebb. A second

dimmer ring formed and split, and a third, as the room dissolved into the blueish green murk. The rings reversed and began to converge, as gravity began to reassert itself, and the hum began to fall in pitch. A room began to take shape, and the last of the rings merged, and faded, and the hum subsided.

Alton found himself standing on ten foot wide glass disk, inset into an alcove. A similar disk on the ceiling emitted a diffuse glow overhead. The room was brightly lit, with gleaming white walls, like the inside of a hospital or lab. In front of him, was a large, sleek, glossy control console which seemed to be molded to the floor. Behind the console, to Alton's left, sat a rather plain-looking human male. Alton's attention however was directed to the occupant of the seat to his right. A creature who resembled a large lanky humanoid otter, with short fine thick fur, which was such a dark shade of brown, that it almost appeared black. The fur on the creature's neck, and chest was not white or cream, like a typical river otter, but was a deep reddish-brown, almost mahogany. The creature's broad muzzle with its mass of short whiskers, almond shaped dark brown eyes, and smallish rounded ears on the sides of its head, made its appearance seem a bit comical. The creature wore a vest composed of straps, and around its head, was a black headband which held a small round device with a tiny blinking red light on the center of the creature's nearly non-existent forehead.

The man said, "Okay, clear the pad. Got a group in New York who need a lift."

Alton slowly stepped to the edge of the disk, where there was a couple of curved steps which lead down to the floor's level. "Where do I report to?"

The man leaned back in his chair, "You're probably expected in the lounge where everyone else is. Just go through the door, through the mini-museum. The door after that leads to a corridor. Keep in mind, the station is still under construction, so just walk around the construction crews, and don't try to go behind the work screens, unless you don't mind your eyes melting. There are signs which point you to the lounge."

"Okay, got it," said Alton. He looked at the Otter-alien on the other side of the console. "You are a Lutrian, err, Chakharan."

The creature spoke in its own language, but the creature's thoughts entered his brain in a form which allowed him to understand it. This was due to the Mindlink translator that the creature wore. The effect was a bit disconcerting to him, though he had been told that most people stop noticing it within a few minutes to an hour or so of use. "Yes, Human. Welcome

aboard.”

“Thanks,” said Alton. This was the first time he had ever actually talked to a member of another species.

“Now excuse me,” said the Chakharan. “I need to bring the next party aboard.”

Alton nodded at the creature, then headed to the door to the right of the console. The door slid aside with a hiss. The next room was the size of a medium-sized bedroom. The entire right side of the room was occupied by a large inclined granite slab, which somehow didn't appear completely real, and was roped off by a barricade. On the left side of the slab, was a list of about two dozen names, with the caption, “Those brave people who lost their lives in the Chakharan-Zephenidian Engagement.” Some of the names were obviously human, while other names were difficult for him to pronounce, and were possibly Chakharan. A chest-high column with a dial on the top, stood in front of the exhibit. There was a plaque above it, engraved with the words, “Language Selector.” which quickly changed to “Selección de idioma,” before changing to, “Sélectionner la langue.” Alton reached for the dial, and slowly turned it. The text on the plaque melted and reformed, at first into semi-familiar languages, like Spanish, and French, but then eventually became Cyrillic. Alton realized why the slab didn't seem totally real. The granite or faux granite slab was apparently real, but the engravings was some kind of holographic projection on the rock face, which resulted in some weird ghosting, since holograms don't cast shadows.

Alton wanted to stay to check out all the plaques and photos of the battle, but knew he had to make his way to the lounge. Wolves End was an appropriate name for this station, since it was constructed from the wreckage of the Zephenidian fleet and due to the fact that the Zephenidians were a wolf-evolved species. However, all this history would have to wait. He walked to the door on the far side of the room, and it hissed aside.

Stretching far to his left was a wide, brightly-lit corridor. The walls and ceiling were gleaming metal for the most part, except for the numerous areas of incomplete construction which gave the place a patchwork appearance. An arrow-shaped sign with the words, “Wolves End Lounge” was on the wall, pointing the way. Jutting into the corridor was the occasional walled-off enclosure, some with a blue-white flicker glaring from underneath, caused by a worker using welding equipment. He gave the work enclosures a wide berth, as he hurried along. Intersections were infrequent, and each was accompanied with another arrow-sign

pointing the way to the lounge. The patchwork walls gave way to a large section where the latticework of metal beams of where the ships' skeletons were exposed. Conduits ran parallel to the corridor, along with other equipment Alton could not identify. Orange caution tape, and post and rope stanchions had been set up along the exposed section to discourage people from attempting to use the beams as a jungle gym. Further along the corridor, the walls became solid again, but lacked the patchwork appearance.

As the novelty of being on a space station began to wear off, Alton's apprehension began to grow again, and he broke into a cold sweat. He tried to reassure himself. "They're not going to rape me. I'll always have a choice." However, with the number of contracts and deals resting on his actions with the delegates, would he even have a choice? He tried to reassure himself by focusing on what he knew about Chakharan culture. They generally detest any sexual situations which involve coercion, pressure, or power. To them, sex is almost always used purely for the sheer enjoyment, especially between close friends and lovers. He leaned against the wall and growled in frustration through clenched teeth. "Why am I so scared?" Alton pushed himself back up while staring at the wall for a moment, before regaining his composure.

Ahead of him, was another arrow sign, pointing towards a door. His heart was pounding, and he felt almost ready to cry. As he reached the door to the lounge area, he fought to pull himself together again. "I can say no. What's so hard about that?" he asked himself aloud as he tried to reassure himself again. "What's wrong with me?" he mumbled aloud. "Am I afraid I might actually go along with it?" When he was a teenager, he probably would have had sex with just about anything, even a Lutrian, however, thinking about this made him wince, and shudder again. "They're aliens, they probably smell weird, and have strange saliva that I wouldn't even want near me." he mumbled to himself. After a few deep breaths, he pushed himself towards the door, which hissed open.

Beyond, was a flight of stairs which took him down to another doorway, which opened into a promenade of mostly office suites. The brightly lit sign, "Wolves End Lounge" was across from the doorway, and was not hard to miss. "This is it," Alton sighed. He breathed slowly and deeply, trying to alleviate his anxiety with limited success. "Is this my own social anxiety?" Sure, he has had some problems with that, but never this bad. "Okay," he mumbled. "This is it, my moment of truth." Alton pushed his way through the large swinging glass doors of the lounge.

The foyer, and the room beyond, was dark enough, that it took a few moments for his eyes to adjust. A dark shape stood behind a desk, eying him intently. The creature spoke in Chakharan, but the translator band it wore around its head transmitted the meaning to Alton's brain. "Welcome to the Wolves End Lounge. There is a private engagement in the back, so I ask that you not disturb them."

Alton pulled his wallet from his pocket and handed the giant otter his ID. "I'm with SingulariTech."

The creature took Alton's ID, and slid it into a slot on a device on the desk. On the screen, Alton saw his ID appear, though all the text had been replaced by alien writing. After a moment, the creature withdrew the ID and handed it back to him. "Proceed through the public bar to the back room."

"Thanks," said Alton as he returned his ID to his wallet, before pocketing it. The public area of the lounge appeared much like any pub or bar on earth. The room was long and rectangular, with a number of tables, most of which were empty. The bar itself ran along the back wall, with the usual bar stools at regular intervals. Either side of the room had a narrow window or viewport, with the one to his left showing black starry space, while the view to the right was the lightly mottled blues, browns, and whites of earth. A handful of otter-aliens sat at a table, as well as three more who sat at the bar. The bartender was a large bear-like creature, who was currently in a heated conversation with one of the otters who sat on one of the bar stools, with its thick tapered tail hanging nearly half-way to the floor. Alton walked through the room to the end of the bar, then turned left and pushed his way through the door.

This room was about half the size of the main lounge, with a smaller bar to his left. To his right, was a long window which ran the entire length of the room, filled with the blues and whites of earth's eastern Atlantic seaboard. The music playing in the background sounded like some form of bass-heavy techno style dance music which has been the staple of clubs for nearly a century, though, here it was being played at a more conversational volume level. He could see eight tables, several of which were occupied by otter-like Chakharans. Two humans stood around the doorway, chitchatting.

"I heard they're opening a new location on Ak'taeus III." said a young, tall, skinny, blond haired man. "They're probably going to ship a lot of us-." The man stopped in mid sentence and turned towards Alton. "You're the late arrival. Alton Mills, is it, from the Redmond Washington

office?”

“Yeah,” replied Alton. “What's this about shipping who?”

“SingulariTech is building an office in some system the Lutrians call Ak'tae, or Ak'taeus. It's one of a pair of twin stars about forty light years away, that the UFO fanboys used to worship. These otters are basically giving earth a colony they pretty much built up just for the occasion.”

Alton thought about it for a moment. Being that he really didn't have all that much holding him here, except the job, and his religious parents that he wouldn't mind moving far away from, this didn't bother him, much. “Well, I guess I'm game, if that's what they want. Shit, we've not introduced ourselves.”

“I'm Sandford Cotterill from the Manhattan facility.” said the man. “It's Sand-ford, with the extra D in the middle. You can call me Sandy.”

“Okay, hello Sandy.” said Alton. He looked at the other man, who was shorter and not quite so skinny, though still rather slight in build, with dark shoulder length hair. “And you are?”

The man appeared to be, at least, part Asian, though he spoke in a British accent, “I'm Quinlan Sharma from the London office.”

Alton looked around, then asked, “So what are we supposed to do?”

“Just mingle,” said Sandy. “Ah, if you're looking for drinks, and you want to try one of the otters' beverages, the Tugushk is always a safe bet. It's a kinda liqueur made from the nectar of some kind of flowering tree. You might not want to try the N'gronian vision tea though.”

“Why not,” asked Alton.

Quinlan said, “It's hallucinogenic. It's supposedly harmless, though the Chakharans do warn that it's not been fully safety-tested on humans. It contains a tryptamine similar to DMT or psilocybin.”

Sandy said, “The vision tea they serve here is pretty weak, though. I heard its effects is similar to pot. You might see the walls ripple, and you might feel a bit high, but that's about it. Still, not recommended to get blasted on company time.”

“Okay, noted,” said Alton. He glanced around the room and noticed a door near the far left corner. A sign posted next to the door with luminous red lettering, read, “Do not enter unless invited, or do so at your own risk.” Alton asked, “Ah, what's behind that door?”

Sandford giggled. “You really want to know?”

A large bipedal tailless wolf who stood nearly seven feet tall, with a kind of flowing mane of fur hanging from its arms approached. The creature, like the Chakharans, wore a translator headband around its head. The creature spoke, "So the last of the prey arrives. Good! Good!"

"Prey?" asked Alton, nervously. "You're ah, err, you're one of those..."

Sandy said, "Don't mind him, he's kinda a clown. Yes, he's a Zephenidian, but one of the good ones."

"Yes, *chuthnu*," said the Zephenidian. "I fought in the war, well, not for long. I had the luck to get to an escape pod just after half my ship blew up. Yes, I was a coward. I piloted the pod to the nearest Chakharan cruiser while waving my arms frantically at the viewport to get their attention while I screamed through an open com channel like an *ukhach* with its balls on fire."

"So, they took you aboard?" asked Alton.

"No," said the wolf-alien. "Like any good warriors, they ignored me, even after I bounced off their shields about four or five times. I had a great view of my entire fleet being destroyed. I must have been stuck in my pod for well over a day, before the Chakharans finally decided to collect me. Realized I was fighting for the wrong side. But I still love to play."

"Ah, I see," said Alton.

The Wolf looked at Sandford, "San San, glad you made it here. I've not had a chance to properly greet you." The Zephenidian reached down and grabbed the back of Sandford's hair, pulled his head back, then brought his jaws around Sandford's throat. Alton was momentarily startled, and for a moment feared for Sandford's life. But Sandford's face told a different story, as he appeared to be in pure ecstasy, almost melting from the embrace of the wolf's jaws around his throat. When the wolf-alien released Sandy's neck from his jaws, there was no sign of blood or bruising, not even overt indentations, just the wetness from the wolf-alien's saliva. Sandford gave the Zephenidian a playful shove, then patted the creature's shoulder.

Alton averted his gaze and looked down at his feet as he was lost in thought. He felt slightly turned on by how the wolf-alien had greeted Sandford, but tried to stifle that thought as he also felt appalled and frightened by this display. He fought to maintain his mental composure, since he didn't have the luxury of being alone. "I, I'm not sure. I don't know."

"Alton," Sandford said as he rested a hand on Alton's shoulder, "You do understand that many of these species are more, shall we say, physically affectionate with each other. It's not

necessarily sexual, though sexuality tends to be a lot more freely expressed. They're not going to rape you, if that's what you're worried about.”

“I know, it's just that...” Alton trailed off as he continued looking down at his feet, as his heart pounded. “I'm not sure if I can handle this. I mean, they're alien. They probably don't smell right, or taste right. It's ah, it's.”

“Not alien,” said Sandford. “Pseudo-alien. The ancients seeded other planets with earth life, and-”

“I know,” said Alton as he looked back at Sandford. “I wrote a term paper presenting different theories on this in college. But they probably diverged, changed, after all, they had to gain sapience.”

Sandy frowned, then said, “Well, actually you'd be surprised, but I'm not here to convince you. Just have drinks with them, talk about the weather, your upbringing, culture, etc cetera, and you'll be fine.”

Looking around, Alton saw that Quinlan had slipped off to one of the tables and was sitting with the Zephenidian and two of the Lutrians, one of whom had its arm around him.

“And that room?” asked Alton again.

Sandy chuckled. “That is, my friend, the T'chema room.”

“Ah,” said Alton who knew what that term meant. A T'chema was a Chakharan orgy, with activities ranging from merely cuddling, to full on intercourse, with everything in between. “Ah, okay. I'm definitely staying out of that place.”

A webbed, furred, hand grabbed Alton's shoulder, and a Chakharan voice with Mindlinked meaning said, “Come with me, I'd like to talk to you.”

“Alton's first date,” said Sandy as he smirked.

“Shut up,” growled Alton, through clenched teeth, then he turned to the large alien otter who still had his hand on his shoulder. The Lutrian's fur was dark brown, though how dark was difficult to determine in the subdued lighting. Its neck, chest, and abdomen were lighter, appearing almost white, and seemed to fluoresce slightly in the subdued lighting. Alton asked the creature, “Ah, is anything wrong?”

“No,” said the Chakharan, his whiskered muzzle gave the creature a very friendly appearance. There was something else about this creature that Alton, at first, couldn't quite put his finger on. The creature seemed quite a bit older than he was, though the creature's body

seemed to radiate a certain youthfulness. “The point of having you here, is to mingle, not stay in your own little group. Join me. You can bring your friend with you.”

“Okay,” said Alton, as he followed the Chakharan to an unoccupied table, as Sandy followed along.

As they sat down, the Chakharan said, “I’ve already taken the liberty of ordering a round of drinks for us. I couldn’t help overhearing your conversations, though.”

Alton hoped that the Lutrian would sit across the table from him, but instead, he sat in the seat to his right, with Sandy sitting to the left of him. “Don’t worry bud, I’ll protect you,” said Sandford, in a mocking tone.

“I’m concerned,” the Chakharan said as he looked at Alton, then Sandford, then back at Alton. “Do you know who I am?”

Alton said, “Ah, you are, ah, I don’t know. I mean, other than the fact you are a Chakharan.”

“My name is Chrruk Rulf,” said the creature. “I’m on the board of directors of T’carchi Technologies. But before that, I was a renowned linguist and xeno-anthropologist.”

“Ah,” said Alton, as he tried to find relevance to what the Lutrian was saying, but failed. “Err?”

“Your position within SingulariTech?” asked Chrruk.

“Customer Service Rep, for the Redmond office,” said Alton. “Ah, at least I thought I was. Just started the job, and was sent here.”

“And you, San?” asked Chrruk.

“Human Resources for the Manhattan office,” said Sandford. “Been working there for about six months.”

“And the other human you met, is a junior systems’ administrator.” said Chrruk. “Why is it, that none of the ones involved in the negotiations, spend any time mingling with us afterwards. To them, it’s purely business, at least when it comes to us. On your planet, with other humans, they throw parties with lots of food, wine, prostitutes.” The Lutrian was lost in thought for a moment, then said, “And lots of drugs.”

Alton talked without thinking. “Because it could cause a scandal if they were suspected of...” Alton trailed off.

“Such small mindedness,” said the Chakharan. “There is more. I uncovered internal

memos of several of your corporations, including SingulariTech. They've been hiring people from specific demographics, and subcultures, specifically for interacting with other species. Typically, they've been seeking out awkward but intellectual individuals.”

Sandy interjected, “In other words, nerds.”

The otter-alien said, “It's a demographic known to be more open and comfortable with other species, and possibly even are more willing to be sexually expressive to them. And of course, they're mentioned in the memos of covertly seeking individuals within specific subcultures. Animal transformations and cosplay was mentioned specifically.”

Alton thought for a moment as some of the ideas came together in his head. “Were-creatures? Anthropomorphics?”

The Chakharan grunted an affirmative.

Sandford said, “I'm a furry.”

“Oh my god.” Alton was taken aback by what he thought was some kind of joke, though he tried to take it at face value. “This is getting downright weird. I mean, I'm not one myself, but I know about them. I have a couple of friends who are furies. It's not my thing. But, ah, I know some of them would gladly throw themselves through that door. I can't totally believe this.”

“Our heyday was probably around the turn of the century.” said Sandford, then there was a major resurgence about a decade ago, when the Lutrians arrived.”

The Chakharan gently grasped Alton's arm with one hand and stroked it with the other. “If this is unwelcome, let me know.”

Alton's first reaction was to try to jerk away, but it took every ounce of his willpower to resist the urge to pull away. His heart was pounding, and there was a flash of heat over his body. He looked down into his lap. “I'm nervous, ah, scared. I guess I need to get used to things. I mean different cultures and all.” A Chakharan with a tray approached the table, and set down three small stemmed glasses filled with a clear fluid, then headed back to the bar. Alton looked at his glass, picked it up, and gave the contents a slight sniff. It had a slight sweet fruity scent. “What's this?”

“It's Tugushk,” said Chrruk. “Try it. Many humans find it quite palatable.”

Alton took a small sip. It had a slightly fruity nectar-like flavor, though the fruit flavor was not identifiable as any specific fruit that he was familiar with. There was a slight tang and

burn in the aftertaste, due to the alcohol.

The Chakharan continued, “Your company also has a policy prohibiting the discussion of sexual engagements, especially those involving different species.”

Alton said, “Yeah. My boss was super-evasive when I asked about that. I think it may be due to anti-pandering laws, or something.” Alton suddenly realized that the Chakharan had brought his face close to his own face. The otter-alien had his moist nose pressed up against Alton's nose, and was gazing into his eyes. Alton wanted to turn away, but willed himself to hold his ground, and stare back into those dark yet intelligent, almond shaped eyes. Alton didn't know why he was so afraid, and it took every shred of effort to keep himself from recoiling. “You're not going to... Ah, why” stuttered Alton.

“Relax,” said Chrruk. He spoke without actually using his voice, somehow using the Mindlink translator directly, to speak without actual sound. “Don't worry, I'm not trying to seduce you. I know what's going on in your head, from your earlier conversations.”

“What do you mean?” asked Alton. “I'm scared. I, ah, I don't.” There was something strange he noticed. Being nose to nose with this oversized otter, he was catching a bit of the scent of the creature's nose and breath. It was not at all what he expected. The scent was not human, but it was not alien either. There was something vaguely familiar, which, at first, he could not quite place. It was slightly earthy, but clean earthy. Like a basket of freshly dried dates? Like a forest in spring? Like the dog who runs up to greet you when you come home from work?

“I tried this with others of your species who had severe misgivings.” Chrruk said silently. “It seems to help. Many of your species fear the unknown.”

Alton broke contact, and looked down into his lap again, as his mind swam. “Thank you.” He thought for a moment as his brain tried to process what he had experienced. “You, ah, you satisfied my main concern, my main fear.” Alton looked back over the table, before taking his glass and sipping at the slightly viscous alcohol infused nectar. He glanced at Sandy, who was watching him intensely.

Sandford whispered, “I saw it, you were starting to pitch-”

“Shuddup! Goddammit!” cursed Alton, before turning to the Chakharan. “Okay, my biggest worry is dashed upon the rocks of reason. I thought you'd smell weird, like, I don't know, chlorine or ammonia, or something, though I should know better. I guess the only real

objection, is that I have a career, and, ah, and..."

The computer screen flashed in his mind. There, in his bedroom at the age of sixteen, he sat watching a video of a Lutrian reclining on a bed. The creature's hand was working at his sheath, as a pink fleshy tip poked into view, against the creature's mocha-colored belly fur. Alton's hands had unzipped his fly, and he was slowly working his member from his pants. He glanced behind him to make sure his door was closed, though he wished his parents hadn't removed the lock. Satisfied, he continued watching the video as he stroked and caressed his erection. The creature on his screen drooled a string of thick spittle on his hand, before bringing it down around the pink throbbing flesh. This caused a large bead of pre-ejaculate to form on Alton's glans. As he brought his finger down to dab at the juices, something swung his chair around. Staring into the face of his father, Alton screamed, just as the fist smashed the side of his face. As he lay on the floor of his room, blood pouring from his mouth, he heard his dad yelling, "What blasphemy have you brought to this house! I did not waste sixteen years of my life bringing up a sodomite! I will not stand for this, this bestiality!"

Alton sobbed, face-down on the table, as he felt a clawed webbed hand caressing his shoulder. "Human, human, are you okay?"

Alton fought for words. "It, ah... it-, it was my family. They screwed me up."

"That would do it," said Sandford. "Religious upbringing?"

"Yeah," said Alton. "And society seems to frown on this sorta thing. It's the new gay, I guess. But it will change. People will grow to at least accept it in time." He turned to the Chakharan and said, "I, ah, I have, I mean." He stopped as he tried to catch his breath, and tried to calm down. Turning to Sandford, he said, "I was a closet case. Two of my friends were furs, and I had to present myself as a straight laced mundane nerd. Fuck my parents. I'm still living with them, but I don't care if they find out, now. I'll be looking for a new place soon, maybe I'll transfer to that colony."

Sandford asked, "I hope you're okay."

"I was nervous, afraid," Alton sobbed a bit, and tried to brush the tears from his eyes. "I was actually afraid of myself. Afraid that I would actually play, have sex, do things. I've fantasized about them from the time they arrived. Then my dad caught me jerking to Lutrian porn and nearly beat me senseless. Shit, did the Tugushk get me that drunk?"

Sandford laughed. "It's just ethanol, probably about eighty proof, and you've taken

maybe two sips. You're probably just giddy from your brain starting to work. Or maybe otter pheromones.”

Alton looked down into his lap again and thought for a moment. “That's why I was so afraid to come here. Yet I accepted the job in the first place because I had to face my fears.” Alton looked around, then, with some hesitation, reached his hand to the Chakharan's back, and felt the short, but thick, lush fur. “I'm okay.” He turned to Chrruk and smiled. “I'm game. I'm okay with anything. I have no objection with anything you might do, as long as it's fun.”

“I have a few friends who have worked with humans,” said the Chakharan. “I've played with humans, but I can be a bit too intimate and intense for someone who's not used to us.”

“Thanks, I do appreciate your offer, but.” Alton shuddered slightly as his nerves which were still frayed tried to get the better of him. “But I don't want to be coddled to. If I'm going to play, I don't want training wheels. I mean, try me.”

Quinlan, approached the table, flanked by two Chakharans, and was followed by the Zephenidian. “I guess I missed the show?” he asked.

Sandford said, “Yeah, looks like Alton isn't going to be another dud.”

“What?” gasped Quinlan. “Fifteen minutes ago, you looked like you were about to shit your pants.”

Alton turned to Quinlan and nervously laughed. “I faced my past. Now I'm ready to face my future.”

Furred arms grabbed Alton from behind, and the tickling of a heavily whiskered muzzle brushing up against his neck, caused him to jolt. Within seconds however, Alton relaxed, as the Chakharan began to nibble and lick his neck and earlobes, though his heart still raced a bit. Chrruk slowly turned Alton's chair to face him, before lowering his face to look into his eyes again. “You can back out now if you want.”

Alton gazed into the Chakharan's eyes and thought about what to say. When he couldn't think of anything, he nervously leaned forward and gave Chrruk a light kiss on his muzzle, tasting the wet saltiness of the creature's nose and lips.

Chrruk tilted his head, but continued to look into Alton's eyes. “You're still nervous,” said the Chakharan. “It will pass in time. Just try to relax.” Chrruk continued to gaze into Alton's eyes. After a few moments, Chrruk slowly brought his muzzle to Alton's mouth, and licked Alton's lips. With a great deal of effort, Alton opened his mouth to let the otter-alien's

broad tongue slip inside. The Chakharan's tongue was slicker than a human's tongue, and the taste was different, though strangely familiar at the same time. He found it to be erotically pleasant. Alton felt the creature's teeth with his tongue, and they seemed to resemble those of a dog, with smallish incisors in the front, and large canine teeth. The Chakharan slowly withdrew, then looked at everyone who was gathered around the table. "I think it's time we go to the T'chema room. I want this human, but anyone else who wants to join me in ravishing this creature, is welcome."

Alton felt himself blush as he took a very deep breath. "Oh my god, what have I gotten myself into."

Sandford laughed, then said, "One hell of a night. Come on. I hope you don't mind if I join in?"

"Not at all," said Alton, as he tried to suppress the bit of apprehension he still had. "I feel so much better, now. Okay, I admit, I'm a little scared, but I gotta get over this."

Chrruk rose from his chair, and pulled Alton to his feet. The Chakharan was at least a full head taller than Alton was. The creature gently brushed a hand through Alton's hair, and lightly scratched his scalp with his claws. Alton realized that the Chakharan was wearing nothing, but the translator headband, and a belt which held the receiver unit. "Clothing is not allowed. When we enter, just drop your clothing near the door. If you're comfortable enough, I would want to remove my translator, once we enter." The Chakharan brought his muzzle close to Alton's nose and whispered. "We can be like animals."

Alton glanced at Sandford, and asked, "I'm actually on the clock, doing this?" He turned back to Chrruk, and said, "Ah, ah, Thank you. Okay, I'm a little scared still, but. I, I want this."

Chrruk roughly grabbed Alton's mouth in his jaws while holding him in a tight embrace, as he slowly guided him towards the door in the corner. Though startled by the rough play, he quickly calmed, and allowed himself to be led by this alien otter. Alton felt multiple hands from the humans, Chakharans, and even the Zephenidian, pet, rub, and lightly scratch along his back. Someone opened the door for them, though Alton couldn't see who it was because he was busy having Chrruk lightly chew and nibble on his mouth. Once through the door, the Chakharan released his hold on Alton. "No clothing beyond this point. Just disrobe and place your belongings on the seating area at the edge of the room. I'm going to remove my translator, now."

The T'chema room was about the size of the museum area, but had no furniture

whatsoever. The floor was padded, and was covered with what looked and felt like maroon velvet. Around the edge of the room was a raised bench-like seating area, which was also padded and covered in the same velvet. The lighting was subdued as well, though slightly brighter than the lounge. The room was quiet, with no music currently playing. Piles of clothing began to quickly accumulate on the bench area near the doorway. Alton felt exposed and vulnerable as he undressed, and tossed his clothing next to the piles of clothing from the other two humans. He began to shiver as he looked down nervously. “Ah, ah, don't mind me, just ah.”

The Zephenidian walked up to Alton, and gently poked his chest with a clawed finger. “You look a bit more comfortable than when I first met you. That makes me very happy. I hope to see you become even more comfortable as the night wears on.”

“Thanks,” said Alton. “Ah, ah.” Alton noticed that the Zephenidian had lowered his muzzle down to Alton's crotch, and was lapping at his manhood with his tongue, sending a shiver through his body, before rising back up, while licking Alton's belly, chest, chin and face.

“I'm going to remove my translator.” said the wolf-alien. “If I do something that you're not comfortable with, just push me away. I won't be offended.”

“I'm fine,” said Alton, as he tentatively reached for the creature and scratched his chest and belly, feeling the coarse fur which was similar to that of a German shepherd. “Better than fine.”

Moments later, Alton was on the floor in a tight embrace with Chrruk, who was playfully biting his neck, while rubbing his sheath along Alton's thighs. Sandford was seated cross-legged, giving Alton a back massage, with the Zephenidian's head at Sandford's crotch, licking and nibbling frantically. Another Chakharan, a female straddled Alton, while several of the fingers of his right hand were burred deep into the creature's vagina. The third Chakharan was fellating Quinlan, who was trying to maneuver his head towards Alton's crotch. Alton couldn't remember how many times he came that day, but what a day it was.

* * * *

Alton Skyler Mills sat on the edge of the medical bed with his shirt off. A tall slender otter-like creature, who wore a pocket-lined vest, studied some info on a clipboard-sized screen, which he held with his webbed fingers. The creature said, “The lightheadedness from the effects

of the anesthetic will wear off soon.”

“Can I see a mirror?” asked Alton.

“You probably won't look much different,” said the Chakharan. “Not yet, anyhow. Your skin will take a few days to a few weeks to show improvement. And your mane will require months as it's replaced and grows in.”

“So I still look like a fifty year old?” asked Alton.

“It takes about a year for the external appearance to fully change.” said the creature. Maybe longer, depending on the length of your mane and how fast it grows.”

“Okay,” said Alton. “As long as everything works.”

“Your friends are waiting in the lobby,” said the Chakharan. “You've been cleared for release. I'll show you the way.”

“Thanks,” said Alton, as he got to his feet, and put his shirt back on. He began to follow the tall otter into the brightly-lit hallway. It was 2099, and the progress Humans had been making towards accepting of interspecies sex was disappointing to say the least. Sure, there were more people willing to cross the species barrier, and often did so more openly, but it was still a bad state for a politician or a corporate CEO to find himself or herself in. This was something most Humans still equated with bestiality.

Alton was now a manager at the Ak'tae office of SingulariTech Systemworks. The scandals which hit in the late 2070s, ultimately resulted in greater openness when it comes to hiring practices, and most companies gave up on trying to appease Chakharan culture when negotiating business deals. SingulariTech was an exception, though they limited this to its non-earth offices. SingulariTech's version of the KalyX operating system was the most widely used OS on starships, and had even been translated into Chakharan, and thus was gaining some market penetration there, as well.

Then there was the fact that with more starships, came increased colonization. With Humans setting up colonies along the galactic anti-spinward direction, towards Zephenidian space, this began to expose Humans to renewed Zephenidian attacks, as their Hunter Fleet was rebuilt. The first attack since the Chakharan-Zephenidian Engagement, was discovered in 2087, when a freighter which didn't report in, was found scuttled, with only blood and body parts left of the crew, orbiting a planet in the Yozyon system. Since then, there has been an attack or two per year, with a strong likelihood that such attacks would become more frequent.

The lobby at the hospital was bustling with activity. Large windows filled the room with sunlight from Zeta¹ Reticuli. Alton looked at the sea of faces, mostly Chakharan, to see if there was anyone he could recognize. Suddenly Sandford, burst from the crowd. His hair was streaked with gray, from age. “Alton, Alton, there you are.”

Alton waved back and asked, “So how do I look.”

“Hard to say,” said Sandy. “It does take a while for the body to re-assert itself after regen, from what I’ve heard.” Sandy threw his arms around Alton. “It’s been like forever.”

“Yeah, two whole fucking days,” said Alton, “Ah, before I went into regen.”

“But you were in regen for how long?” asked Sandy. “Six long weeks.”

“Keep in mind, I was under anesthesia during the whole thing, though I was hooked to the hospital’s mainframe and got to peruse the vast media library. Watched some old movies and TV shows. Did a few TSI adventures. That kinda thing.”

An Chakharan, and another Human burst out of the crowd.

“Chrruk, and Quinlan!” yelled Alton. Quinlan looked as young as ever, since he went into regen a year before. Same with Chrruk.

Quinlan said, “I can see why you chose to go to this hospital, on Ak’koS, for regen. Beautiful place.”

Alton nodded. “It’s not like it’s that far. 3,800 AU. Hell, it takes almost longer to enter and exit hyperspace, then it takes to actually get here. Besides, I still trust the Lutrians more than I do the Humans, when it comes to regenerative medicine.”

“Makes sense,” said Sandy. “I need to book myself an appointment soon. Think I’ll come here as well.” Sandford looked around at the crowds. “Probably we should think about booking passage back to Ak’tae.”

Chrruk waited for his chance, and roughly pounced Alton, nuzzling and licking his face. “It’s been a while, friend.”

After hugging and giving Chrruk a kiss on the nose, Alton said, “We all need to spend more time together. Hell, we’re on Ak’koS, the entire fucking place is a red light district.”

“Agreed,” said Sandy.

“No arguments there,” said Quinlan.

Chrruk said, “I’ve got quite a few friends here. I’m sure they won’t mind helping me ravish the three of you. Come, let’s have a great time.”