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WARNING: May contain coarse language, violence, gore or sexual content. Reader discretion is advised.

Chapter 13 - "What Is Happening?"

Troy didn't know what had overcome him. Even as her slightly elongated mouth moved past his, he felt an overwhelming urge to kiss her. A bipedal animal. A monster! Perhaps he was just being hypocritical. She was cute. It brought him back to appreciating the animated animals in the movies. The one caffeinated squirrel. The lion and lioness in the love scene. The sight of that oversexualized mink: Every time he saw her in a towel...

This was more surreal. He was having a hard time with all of this. That fiction was now a reality. Reality still had him in danger. Captive. He had been used and abused. Seduced, even. The line between truth and lies was becoming thinner by the moment.

Her eyes scanned his face, then his chest, and beyond. He felt her press against his pelvis where his hips started. She lowered herself down until she was eye level with his groin. He wasn't sure if he was erect. His skin receptors were still dulled and numb. He didn't want to look down to find out. He still had that strange odor stuck in his nose. Was this a type of pheromone? How was he able to smell it if it were? He had to look.

He rotated his head down. Thankfully, he wasn't. That, or the suit was concealing it. Maybe, even, he had imagined the stirring in his groin. There was a mound there that seemed to be a darker color from the rest of the suit. It had to be the suit that caused the mound. Without his sense of touch and feel, his life would be much more inconvenient.

She was gone - save for the hand poking between his knees motioning for him to follow.

He knelt and followed the hand. It seemed just like a ventilation shaft. Perhaps this was part of the HVAC system. It seemed much larger than he'd ever seen. She was

on her hands and knees with a bit of clearance above her. He had to spread his hand and knees out a little further than her to be able to fit into the duct.

He moved along with her leading the way. He found it hard not to stare at the swaying behind in front of him. The tail was bobbing back and forth in a hypnotic motion as it slithered behind her. Her hemispheres swayed, bunched up, and stretched as she moved.

She stopped suddenly and adjusted to look back at him with panic across her face.

“Zacki Nitcult!” She shouted in a hushed tone.

She looked forward again. He saw a bit of what was going on. Her front half hit the floor of the duct as her hands and forearms pressed against the side walls. Her rear reached high as her tail pushed against the ceiling. Her feet mocked her hands and pressed to the sides. Troy didn’t know what was going on.

Suddenly, he was sliding toward the mouse with a strong gust of wind. He blinked and found it hard to reopen his eyes. He brought a hand up to rub his eyes and supported himself with the other. His hand struck something soft and he heard a muffled “squeak.” The strong gust slowed and he was able to open his eyes again. He tilted forward a bit and really found it hard to see. He could faintly see...

Forget that! This smell...the smell of clean skin, lightly scented fur, and a metallic tinge. That repulsively alluring scent. He closed his eyes and inhaled. He could hear her growl as the rush of wind stopped completely.

The blockage moved. He opened his eyes to see her in a contorted form. Her face was scowling as her hand struck his face. He felt the pain, but not so much the impact. The pain almost instantly subsided. He could see the muscles in her face quiver in a fight between the scowl and a mischievous grin.

“Dalanal,” she hissed and righted herself.

She pulled her tail through her legs and held it as she continued to move. She seemed to be humming.

They moved past a few branches until they reached one that seemed to be more open than the others. She stopped, rolled to her back, and seemed to start climbing the

ceiling. Troy followed suit and rolled over. He could see that there were inset handholds - almost like bars. He wasn't sure why they were there, but he soon found out.

The floor disappeared beneath him. He turned to look where the floor was. It looked like a greenish, slimy-looking mass that resembled a diaphragm from the windpipe of a creature - much like a human's. There was a good-sized gap here. He mimicked her form: Underhand movements, chest close to the ceiling, and her feet fully extended to fit the front of her feet over the bars. Troy tried to use the same technique but found gripping the bars with his feet difficult. He did hear a slight velcro sound as he pulled his feet from the bars.

Troy pulled his hand free from one of the bars. He heard that same velcro-like sound and could see the suit separating from the bars. This was a curiosity he'd have to satiate another time. He just knew that his hands and feet never slipped from the bars. He slowly moved over the pit as he "climbed" this strange ladder.

"Just what is this ship made of?" He thought as he cleared the crevice.

He dropped down and rolled over in time to see her tail drag around a corner to the right. He turned the corner to see her furred feet upright. This must've been the exit. He looked up to see there was about as much room as last time when they had dropped down under the bed. There was also an amazing view of his comrade.

Troy looked at the floor, closed his eyes, and took in a deep breath to negate these disturbing thoughts he was having. He dipped his back and arched it along the corner to move in close to her knees. He placed his arms to either side of her knees and pressed against the back wall. He used his hands to climb the wall and moved his knees forward until he was upright.

He was suddenly shoved against the mouse as a gust pressed against his back. He closed his eyes to keep them from becoming irritated like last time. When the air stopped, he could hear a strange humming. He opened his eyes to find his nose pressed firmly into the undershorts of the mouse. He could faintly feel the heat against his nose - a nose filled with that decadent scent.

Troy pulled away and closed his eyes. He squashed the returning thoughts and feelings he was being subjected to. He pressed his foot to the floor and rose up with some assistance from the mouse. It felt like his face was pressed against something again, but he wasn't quite sure. This lack of feeling was irritating.

He tried to pull away as the strange humming became more drawn out. He couldn't move. It seemed there was some resistance. He opened his eyes to see a very close mouse face. Her eyes were closed and her head was moving slightly. Troy tried to look down. It sure sounded like...yeah...she was kissing him. He could feel a bit of heat growing inside of his mouth.

He felt appalled. Then equal parts hatred and embarrassment. He watched as her eyes slowly opened. The pink flesh around her eyes and that of her nose turned a shade of red.

He changed his thought process. He hoped this was the end of the line with this one. He would send her back to her friends with a good story and, possibly, bragging rights. Plus: Who knows what this suit tastes like? He was still wearing the hood. It seemed to have spread with the saliva of the mouse as her tongue was slithering inside of his mouth. This suit was very strange in its functions.

Her eyes opened wide and she quickly covered her mouth with both hands with a quiet '*squeak*.' Her eyes darted around as the smell of sanitized air replaced the, possible, pheromones. He turned his head up and sniffed. It smelled just like a hospital from his planet. He could hear the hum of machines and the beeps, blips, and boops that further indicated it was an institution of healing. He wondered if she intended to lead him here. He couldn't think of any other rationale. Even if it were guarded, it wouldn't be guarded very well during a time of invasion.

He looked back at her to find her hands still covering her face. Her pink bits were now bright red with, what he assumed was, embarrassment. Her eyes stared at him until his eyes met hers. They darted to the side of the shaft. He assumed that the kissing gesture was just as universal as some other things.

Troy leaned in towards her. She squeaked as he wrapped his arms around her, then held her close and tight for a moment. He could hear her breathing. Her heartbeat. He could smell her. It calmed him down for some reason. He felt glad to have met her and to have received her assistance. He pulled away and placed his hands on her shoulders. He could see her wide eyes scanning his face.

He glanced up at the grate. He would be needing help with it. He reached over and disengaged the hood, pulled it back, and took in another deep breath. This smell was very familiar and felt like he needed to be here. Like it was home.

He looked back down at her. She was looking up. He leaned in. Her head rotated back down until she was looking up at him. It was just in time for him to press his lips

against hers. He wasn't sure if he was applying an appropriate amount of pressure to her tongue with his. He could feel a bit of heat against it. He felt he moved it slowly across hers. He was several moments into the deed when he came to and pulled away. He could feel his heart beating rapidly and the warmth he *could* feel was spreading throughout his body. Other parts of him were paying her just as much attention.

"Why did I do that?" He thought as he looked at her with so many questions about himself. "I don't even like her. That's what kissing...ah screw it!"

Troy pressed his lips against hers again and then pulled away. He pointed up and nodded. He did his best to think of how to thank her but hugged her again to finalize it. He turned away from her and tapped his shoulders. He knelt down and placed his hands, palm up, over his shoulders, then waited. And waited. And...

Finally! She placed her hands in his. He waited. It seemed she needed more direction. He moved his hand from hers to her leg and tapped it, then moved it to his shoulder and back under her hand. He waited. He felt her hand shift and her foot appeared. It moved up and onto his shoulder. He felt his balance waver as he watched her thigh muscle clench. She slowly rose up and he found his balance again with the added weight. He moved his hands to her thighs and held her in place after her second foot found its mark.

He could feel her feet digging into his shoulders. He heard the grating pop open and it sliding to the side. Slowly and quietly. He saw her hock rise. It was silent for a few moments. The hocks lowered and a hand appeared in front of his face. He looked up as best he could. This was another amazing view of his female compan...cohort.

"If I could confirm she was of age and she were human..." he thought as he gazed at her smile and over her female features. He smiled and moved his hands to have his palms upright.

She placed her hands in his and lowered herself to the floor in front of him. He wasn't sure how *he* was going to get up there. In his current state, it would be a chore to pull himself up there. He stood as he pondered this query.

He glanced down at her. She appeared to be sad. She held her hands near her bosom as she fiddled with her fingers. Her hair had fallen over her eye as she looked down. She moved her hand out to the side as if presenting his exit and was waiting for him to leave her. There seemed to be several similarities in body language the two species shared.

Troy caught her hand as she was bringing it back towards her chest. She looked at him in surprise. Troy looked at her for a second, then lifted his hand. He smiled and bent over to kiss the back of her hand. He'd seen that done several times in various movies and animations. Chivalry, he hoped, was also universal.

He moved his hand and used the back of it to move her black hair aside as he looked into her caramel and brown eyes. The lighter brown burst out from the pupil into the brown and was encased in a dark brown circle before the sclera. He didn't have an ear to place it behind per usual as they were large mouse ears atop her head near the sides. He, instead, held his hand to her face as she seemed to press into it with her eyes narrowing.

"She should keep it out of her eyes. They're so pretty," he thought as he darted his eyes between them.

He wasn't sure what he was doing or why. Even the thought was uncharacteristic of his beliefs. They were kids, though. Or young adults. He hoped for the latter. Perhaps they were corrupted by the system and forced to hate and kill those not of their kind. Then again, he wasn't sure what "their kind" was exactly. There were the other animal people that were dead on the ship not wearing suits and used crude weapons.

He shook his thoughts. He had to keep moving. He moved his hand from her face and behind her head. He brought her in for a 'goodbye' kiss. He sighed as he held her there for a moment with his eyes closed. This one had stolen a piece of his heart. Though they may never meet again, he wanted to express his thanks as best he could. In the circumstances - and with how she started it by kissing him - this seemed the best way to do it.

Troy pulled away from the kiss and held her head against his chest in one final embrace. He let her go and moved his hand up to replace the hood. He looked at her sad, yet wanton, face one final time before turning and tried to hop up and grab the ledge. His arms quaked as this simple pull up was a struggle. He then seemed to be moving with ease. It was like his muscles engaged and went full power. More so than he was used to. A gust came up through the duct. He heard her squeak. He moved his head to the side as he pulled himself up into the room. He could see her outstretched arms pushing him up. Her face was twisted and her eyes closed from the blast of air. Her tight clothing was pressed against the underside of her chest bumps until the bottoms peeked out. This view was one of his favorites when searching for "release" material. He would never forget this view.

Troy found his knees pressed into the floor of the room. He looked around. It seemed like an operating room as his nose had suggested. It was brightly lit and seemed to be void of any lifeforms. Troy turned around and looked down into the hole he came from. The mouse was standing there with a pained expression as she looked up at him and was gripping the hem of her shirt tightly. Her lips quivered into a smile. She brought her hand up and moved her hair from her eye, then wiped a tear away that was tapped in her lashes.

Troy wasn't sure what to do now. Signing "thank you" wasn't very productive before. He hadn't realized that his hand did it anyway. He was more surprised when she nodded and mouthed something as she signed it back. He sat there in shock as she blew him a kiss and then disappeared through the duct the way they had come. He tried to comprehend what had just happened. Perhaps she was just copying him without knowing the meaning behind it.

"But then...the last part..."

Troy shook his head and carefully replaced the grating. It seemed to seal around the edge as it sank into place. This technology was fascinating. He didn't have time to admire it. He'd wasted enough time - even if it wasn't a *total* waste. He stood and turned, then fell back against the wall as his vision blurred, his head spun, and his knees buckled. His vision faded to black and he found himself gasping for air. Breathing seemed to be as difficult as standing at the moment. He calmed himself and slowly breathed in, then out. Deep through his nose and quickly out of his mouth. He did this several times with longer intervals between breaths. It also seemed that the pain medication that Horns administered was fading. He could feel it in his fingers, knees, and neck - that feeling like pain spreading from a source like when something disturbs water with the rings spreading out from the point of impact.

He finally felt well enough to walk again. The pain from his joints had subsided to an annoying ache. He still felt a bit woozy as every footfall made it feel as if his eyes, teeth, and brain were absorbing the shock.

He was presumably correct in guessing this was a medical facility. He stood next to a bed or table of sorts. It was like the one he was on in his room but with more of a cushion. There wasn't any equipment around that he could identify. He didn't see any familiar instruments.

Something moved beyond a divider wall - like a privacy screen. Troy pulled up the rifle and slowly made his way around the partition. There was a manimal...thing in a suit lumbering towards a bed. It seemed to have some modifications to its body. The

eyes seemed to have been removed. There was a digital readout on the side of its head like a vitals monitor. Some kind of code was slowly moving up the second half of the screen. Its movements seemed precise and deliberate. It interacted with some equipment next to the bed that had a gray muzzled dog person...beast on it, then moved on.

Troy watched as the gun slipped from his grip and slapped against his inner thigh. Troy moved to see the one on the bed was asleep or similar. He watched Eyeless move to and manipulate the door to open it. It walked through the threshold, turned, then closed the door. Troy watched through the windows as it moved to another room and disappeared. Troy followed suit by opening, walking through, then closing the door behind him. He moved down the hall. It seemed quiet. There were no battles here. There weren't any signs of fighting. He glanced through the window to the room that Eyeless had walked into. It was fiddling with a device next to another bed. It seemed to be another room with a few beds that had elderly looking manimals on the tables like the dog he passed.

Troy moved on. He stopped as he passed another row of windows. This seemed to be some sort of birthing center. Tables with stirrups were on both sides. Along the sides of the rooms were capsules that had monitors next to them with crying, moving objects inside. Troy saw the face of one. It looked hideous. Like a beast that was created for a monster movie. It did not look normal. It looked like the result of decades of inbreeding with how deformed it was. Troy felt compelled to destroy the abomination. He decided it wasn't worth his time. If they were having problems breeding, lack of gene pool was their problem. It made sense as to why there were mostly adults aboard this vessel. Maybe he just hadn't been in a residential wing with children present other than horns' and the 3 girls.

Troy's curiosity was going to get him killed. He pressed on to another row of windows on either side. Other than the few capsules in the other room, these rooms were dark and vacant. Troy glanced over into one room and stopped suddenly. The form on the table in this room looked very...very familiar.

Shark Lady!

Troy quickly averted his gaze. She was on a table that was angled in the back at about forty-five degrees. Her feet were propped up and even with her rear in stirrups and spread out wide. The stirrups were attached to arms that ran directly under her legs and joined at the seat portion of the table. Straps ran under her ample bosom, over her hips, and over her arms and legs to lock her down to the table. Her nipples had, what looked like, milking cups attached to them with hoses that ran to an apparatus that

hummed quietly on the wall. Her belly was distended as if she were pregnant. On the left side of her upper chest was a quarter-shaped node that had a red light that constantly blinked as if mimicking, monitoring, or regulating a heartbeat. It would explain the scar on her chest if it were the latter. She stared ahead through eyes devoid of life with drooped eyelids. A mask with hoses connected to it was attached to her mouth and nose. One looked like a feeding tube and the other a breathing tube. Her lower private bits were covered by the substance that seemed to act as a diaper.

Troy realized that he hadn't needed to relieve himself. Perhaps this was the reason. As if the substance wormed its way inside and broke down the matter and fluid from within. He couldn't explain it otherwise.

The light was brighter here than other places. He noticed that her color was more of a smokey blue rather than the gray he originally thought. Dark gray stripes started on the front of her pelvis and up her side, then disappeared under her arm by the pits. Thin, flat, dark gray fins spouted from her forearms below the elbow and ran along the sides of her calves. He'd seen the one on her back. Her large tail ended in two fins that splayed out to the side with one that stuck up like a rudder in the middle of the other two. There also appeared to be fins around her genitalia. It was hard to see them, but there were slight creases around her "labia" - if that's proper to call it that - that looked like fins. Her forehead above her right eye had a scar that looked like a shallow crater. It looked like it had been burned by an electrical device.

Troy leapt out of his skin when a display stand next to her flashed and sounded an alarm. The light on the chest device blinked more rapidly. Troy had nearly shot the gun at the floor when he noticed that Eyeless was walking past him. Troy brought the gun up and aimed it at the creature as he took a few steps back. His heart raced as Eyeless went about its business.

It appeared male with its size, but any features beyond that were androgynous. Troy's best guess was that this creature was a feline of sorts. It was hard to tell with the body armor and respirator or filter covering the better part of its face.

Eyeless placed nodes on her stomach that were similar to the one on her chest. They began to flash from upper to lower abdomen. It was almost like it was on purpose. The lights then stayed on for some time. Then, the cycle repeated. Eyeless touched its tongue with its finger, then ran it along her vaginal crease. The substance separated from the spot Eyeless marked. Her widening vagina was in full view.

A head.

A neck.

A body.

All...no! *Mostly* human! There were parts of the child that looked like Shark Lady. It even had a tail and dorsal fin. Troy stood there...paralyzed as he watched the birthing. Eyeless pulled the baby...thing...out of the lifeless shark and held it in its hands.

Troy snapped the gun to the left at what was walking in the room. A wiry, old-looking goat or ram male stood just inside the doorway with his hands up shoulder-width apart. He slowly shuffled deeper in the room towards Eyeless. The black, rectangular pupils fixed on the end of Troy's weapon as he passed.

This one had white fur with large horns that came out each side of the top of his forehead, then angled forward, up, and finally back at about forty-five degrees. He had bushy eyebrows that distended from the tea brown eyes. The "hair" was less prevalent on the top of his head and was, instead, mostly fur. He had a beard that resembled one of the brush style mud flaps you see on freight haulers.

Troy had to wonder how he kept his head upright with the sheer size and volume of the horns. They were at least three feet long. Perhaps it was a balance thing because his neck hardly seemed the appropriate size to handle the excess weight for an extended period of time.

The goat man spoke soft and gravely. Troy had no clue what was said. He watched as Eyeless passed off the motionless newborn and went back to its duties elsewhere. The "doctor's" gaze moved between the child and Troy. He took the child and sliced the umbilical cord with a laser-like knife, cleared the child's mouth of mucus, and patted its back.

The child had male genitalia. It wasn't making any noise and was barely squirming. It seemed to have gray, scaly flesh along the sides of its arms, down the sides of its ribs, and ended at the hips. The scaly flesh partially extended onto its back and front. It ran along the back of its shoulders and up the back of the neck up to where the bump of the skull was. The top of its tail had another patch as did its thighs and tops of the feet. The genitalia appeared human with a gray tint. Otherwise, this looked like a Caucasian male human. He was interesting - if not hideous.

Eyeless prepared a table with various instruments as Doctor continued to tap the baby's back. He took the baby to the table, laid him down, and started rubbing and tapping his sternum.

Troy felt dizzy and lightheaded. His eyes rolled up, then snapped back forward. He put the gun over to the side and bent over holding his head. He clenched his eyes shut as his knees wobbled. He thought he was about to pass out from the pain flashing through his skull. He could feel an erratic pulsing in his fingers, then...it was gone. He opened his eyes and found himself on his knees and still holding his hands to his head. His eyes fluttered around like a gnat to someone's face. A piercing noise swelled in volume within his ears causing him to cry out and cringe in pain as he covered his ears.

Several images flashed inside of his mind. One was of Doctor holding a needle. The next image was of a fist flying through the air. A dirty fist. The top of the Doctor's head and horns. Bloody hands around those horns. An echoing, snapping noise. Blood. More blood. A random blunt instrument flew through the air. Doctor's head in those dirty hands. Spinning. Dizziness. The Doctor's horns were lodged in Eyeless' chest. Shark Boy. Shark Lady. Troy in her arms. A hand down her back. Shark Lady's eyes were closed. A needle in her neck. Sound. Light. She looked so peaceful. Door. Hallway. Floor. Ceiling. Door. Hallway. Ceiling, then floor. Repeat. Repeat. Oh look! A kitty tail! Exhaustion. Fire. Loud! Bright light! Bad smell. Gross. Hee hee! The doctor's head looked like a chest plate on eyeless. Like a hood ornament.

More manimals. Guns. Shouting. Smell. Really bad smell. Is that a...butt? Hee hee...she's not...wearing underwear...under...that loin...clo....

Troy attempted to sit up and open his eyes. A surge of pain shot from the base of his skull and wrapped around his brain. His head lifted off the floor for a split second, but he lost the strength. His eyes opened partially. Everything was blurry. His eyes rolled around twice and landed ahead to see metal. His mouth tasted metallic. The light. It was so bright. His breath started to gurgle in his throat. He felt warm. Painless. Weightless. Floating.

Was this the afterlife mentioned in the ancient religions? They were cult-like gatherings ruled by one or more unseen spirits, deities, or Gods that have outrageous stories spelling out rules and guidelines they had to live by. Laws, even, that you must abide by to achieve this...eternally peaceful resting place. Or, you were to be tortured and burned forever. Or was this just...the end? Did the subconscious and conscious fabrication elaborate a looping, alternate reality? Does it ever end? All questions he'd soon receive answers to. The light faded to dark. No light. No sound. No smell.

Nothing.