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

Chapter 15. “The Leader”

The Doctor wheeled him through several more hallways until they reached one hallway that had doors on each side. It reminded Troy of the residential section he passed on the other ship. They passed through another automatic door to a room filled with monitors, control boards, and manimals. The room went silent as they turned to watch the chair quietly squeak past them.

They passed through a set of automatic double doors. It opened up to an open room that was slightly larger than the control room. Straight ahead was a sort of throne as if this were a monarchy. Each side of the doors had a manimal with an automatic weapon and heavily armored. They did not look like the savages in the hallway of the other ship. They looked like proper soldiers. Other guards with lesser weapons roamed the room and traded off with the others at posts. The guns were exchanged for the lesser weapons and those guards left the room. It was curious.

Sounds of a woman crying out filled the room. Troy wasn't sure if she was sobbing, screaming, or...moaning. The Doctor turned the chair to the right. Ahead opened up past an archway into a more elaborately decorated bed-chamber. The carpeted portion of the floor extended to the throne and over to the bed of this room. The opposite way appeared to be a dining room. Various gold and silver objects adorned the walls, tables, pedestals, ceiling, and floor of this room. Various draperies lined the walls around the bed - possibly made of silk. Troy was continuously distracted by the sounds of the woman.

Troy's attention was fixed on a snorting noise that was crescendoing like a wild animal was forcing air out of its nose. Twin, white, short-haired felines with matching black ears, feet, and tails were on either side of the bed. They wore various rings, bracelets, and bands made of gold and jewels with little else besides a waist chain holding a sheer cloth that left nothing to the imagination - opposed to their completely bare chests. They were “assisting” a large creature - presumably male based on musculature and size - with pelvic thrusts. He seemed to be holding...

“Oh!” Troy thought, his eyes widening as he looked away.

The large, black-furred male with massive muscles, massive height, a thin tail with a teardrop-shaped hair tip, massive horns that came out from around the temple area and forward to a point, and large, cloven-hooved feet was the source of the snorting. He held the hips of a curvy female with massive breasts, black and white spots, and also appeared bovine. Troy had looked away before he caught specific details.

“What...what’s wrong with these things?” Troy questioned as the image of the bull’s behind flexing and relaxing as he thrust into and mated with the cow stuck in his mind’s eye.

The Doctor softly cleared her throat. Troy assumed she was looking away or holding her eyes shut as well. This didn’t seem like proper decorum of this group’s “leader.”

The female’s screams became louder as the clap of their thighs became louder and more frequent. He grunted, then groaned as he sucked air between his teeth.

“Ah! Fff-uck!” She screamed.

His grunts and groans turned to growls as his pace slowed and his strikes became fiercer. A scream like one hidden in a pillow, a growl of release, and a final clap was all Troy could hear before heaving breaths and moans replaced them. Troy heard purring and cooing and assumed it was safe to look. It wasn’t.

The twins were kneeling before the massive bull and his large, long, light pink penis hovering above his enormous testicles. The one on the right held the bull’s penis at the thickest part near the base and gently pulled towards the taper. A sizable glob of fluid collected and fell from the tip. They fought over it but the one on the left caught it and scraped it off her padded palm to a single finger, then shoved the finger between her spread legs as the other slowly licked the male’s organ.

Troy couldn’t quite comprehend what he was seeing. The cow was still face down and rear up. She was cooing and shuddering as a cloudy liquid dripped from her labia and onto the floor.

The bull turned to look at Troy. His massive chest heaved, his nostrils flared, and his eyes looked heavy as he panted through his muzzle. He blinked a few times. He

stopped breathing and clenched his teeth together. His facial expression went from satisfied to annoyed, then to severely angry. He snapped his fingers and held his arms out. Somebody rushed from the side with what looked like clothing items. The twins grabbed towels from the manimal and began dabbing at the fur of the bull while staring at him like he was irresistible. Everything about this creature was big.

Troy wondered where that massive sex organ went when it was inside the female. There couldn't possibly be enough room inside of her to house this much penis. They had human pelvis' and Troy knew they weren't *that* deep. Troy wondered how it walked or ran with that massive bag of miniature footballs between his legs.

The servant held out a garment. The bull pulled over a tight, black shirt that looked like spandex. Then he grabbed the next garment. This appeared to be underwear. They looked like bikini-style. They had to be custom-made in order to cradle those massive testes. Lastly, the bull pulled on spandex-style shorts. Possibly bicycle shorts. It was creepy that those nearly black eyes never left Troy's.

Those eyes stayed on Troy as the bull turned his head towards the assistant. "Who let them in?" He asked. The voice was very deep and smooth. It reminded Troy of that large person of color from that one movie about a prison inmate on death row.

The cow giggled as she began to stir while the feline assistants cleaned her and the floor. The long-eared assistant whispered something that made the bull dip his hand, rotate it up in a half-circle near the assistant's neck, and come to rest with his muzzle in the air while looking down at Troy. Those eyes turned to the assistant and his head followed. The eyelids of the rabbit slowly peeled back and his eyes began to bulge out of his skull. His head dipped as he stepped back, lowered his eyes, and whispered something.

The bull's nostrils flared and he huffed a breath out of them. His nose returned to rest as his eyes squinted a bit. The cow behind him was laying on the bed watching the show. The bull's muscles bunched up as he slightly dipped. His right hoof swung forward, his torso torqued, and his left fist flew into the rabbit's chest.

"Nah," was the most of "No" the rabbit could scream before a hollow '*thud*' resonated from his chest.

The long-eared creature's face was stuck in a state of shock with its eyes and mouth agape. His hands went up to his chest as he stumbled backward. His surprise turned to panic as his throat clicked in an attempt to resume breathing. The bull straightened up and turned back to Troy. The cow sat up on the foot of the bed. She

was covering her bare chest and her mouth, but her shuddering sold her laughter. The rabbit fell to his knees as the bull walked towards Troy.

“Humans are green now?” The bull asked, his eyes focused on Troy’s.

“We-we-n-n-no,” the Doctor stammered out. “I-I’m not sure what it is at this point. It doesn’t appear t-toxic. It seems quite the opposite. It seems to accelerate healing. It also seemed to have a symbiotic relationship with the blue material we peeled off of him. *That* seemed to act as a sort of exoskeletal...”

She was talking to a moving brick wall. Troy didn’t think one word reached this “Master.”

“Does it speak?” The bull interrupted the Doctor’s verbal dissertation.

“Unknown. The neck was severely damaged and on our way here...I haven’t looked at the scans yet and the module for translation is only incoming translation, not out...so,” the Doctor spilled out quickly.

Troy wasn’t sure why. It could have been nervousness or anxiety. Perhaps it was just the sight of this mountain of a man that was easily seven feet tall and over three hundred pounds of Grade A Angus beef - which made Troy wonder what they ate.

Troy didn’t wonder for very long. Rather, he didn’t need to. The beast reached out and snatched Troy by the neck. He didn’t stop there. He lifted Troy up with ease. The vice-like grip felt more debilitating than the struggle from the examination table on the other ship. Troy could feel this. The grip was slowly getting tighter until he could no longer breathe. His hands instinctively went up to try and pry free, but after a brief struggle he conceded and his arms slumped to his sides.

“Why doesn’t he talk?” The bull asked. The Doctor started to reiterate what she’d just said but was interrupted when he yelled - more like bellowed - “WHY DOESN’T HE BEG FOR HIS LIFE!?”

“Because you’re choking him!” Troy could barely hear.

His face was burning, swelling, and going numb. His ears were starting to ring and shut out any sound as his eyes began to lose focus. The bovine in the background began to move hastily.

It sounded like a door bursting down behind them in the other room. A clamoring could be heard. A feral scream erupted as Troy was set down, but not released. More clamoring before it grew nearly silent. Troy couldn't last much longer without breathing. He was feeling numb and weightless.

"Speak of the devil," the bull calmly stated as his eyes briefly darted beyond Troy. His grip on Troy loosened a bit. "I know *you* can't tell me why you nearly killed three of your own - why he's still alive and I don't just crush his throat right here, right now."

"Sweetheart," a soft voice called. The bull turned a bit. "Let him go." The cow, now wearing a loose-fitting white dress, gently touched the tree trunk of an arm of her lover.

The bull snorted and grumbled. "Fine," he growled quietly.

"Let me handle this one," she said and looked at Troy.

Her eyes were an amber color, her voice was almost motherly, and she had a kind...bovine...face.

The bull drew Troy in close and heaved him back towards the wheeled chair. A short and low growl could be heard as Troy sailed through the air. He was knocked off course and a familiar odor assaulted his nose and tongue as he tried to gasp for air. It was his smelly feline savior. She held him tight as he sat on the floor. He was leaned against her chest, coughing and gasping for air, as she hissed above him.

"You...insubordinate..!" The bull yelled.

"Enough!" The friendly cow yelled, turning not-so-friendly.

Her expression was definitely that of a mother scolding a child. "Go compare gun sizes with your friends. I told you I'd handle this," she chastised, then turned calmer as she looked at Troy.

The bull ignored her and raised his fist above them. The cow took a step forward and placed herself between the bull and Troy. Her demeanor and expression turned downright frightening.

"Do *not* make me pull rank!" Her voice was bold and stern.

The fire in the bull's eyes only intensified, but he unclenched the baseball mitt-sized fist and slowly dropped his hand to his side. Troy was wheezing but glad to be breathing again.

...maybe.

However, he was glad he didn't have to endure the pain of being bludgeoned to death by a walking supply of hamburger for a burger joint. Those eyes that stared through his soul didn't put him at ease by any stretch.

The cow stepped forward, then carefully and gently placed her hands on either side of his large snout. She pulled down on it and kissed the tip, then kissed him on the lips. She released him and they looked at each other. Those fiery eyes flashed over at Troy for a moment before the bull turned and left.

The cow - her expression and mannerisms mimicking that of an overly stereotypical school girl after her first kiss - watched as her lover left the room. She sighed and turned towards Troy.

"You should be dead." She stated bluntly. Her voice was so sweet until you made her angry.

Her blonde hair was just over shoulder-length and wavy. Her fur was white with black spots. She was much shorter than her male counterpart. She had a similar thin tail with a black teardrop tuft at the end. Her massive breasts accentuated a curvy set of hips. She had a bit of a bulge in her stomach area, but she didn't seem obese. Troy had no idea what was considered healthy for a manimal. He was having a harder time trying to think of the actress from the past that she reminded him of. She was very popular around the time television was invented. She was most famous for being a curvy woman and iconic for a snapshot of her standing over a grating with air blowing her dress up.

Troy thought it was her for a moment. He was having a hard time concentrating. Between the lack of oxygen and the smell emanating off of the feline...he felt so confused.

The cow held up her hand with palm down and pointed at them. "And you," she began, turning her attention towards the feline. "You are one more strike from being dropped back off on that dying planet we found you on. I don't care how good of a fighter you are for the cause. I cannot have my people fighting each other." The sparkle in her eyes was gone and her tone was strict. Serious. Like a leader.

“Was this the leader?” Troy thought.

She sure seemed like it. She even shooed away the one Troy *thought* was the leader. She held firm to let that notion sink in. She lowered her hand and seemed to ease up a bit.

“Now,” she said and brought her hands together - curling the fingers over the sides of her palms - and held them just under her enormous breasts. A bit of a smile spread over the lips just under her large, pink nose. “Aren’t you a rare treat?” The smile faded. “I haven’t seen one of you outside of historical texts, picture books, and information discs. I guess it’s only fair that,” she said and spread her hands out with palms up. “Seeing you in a precocious state of undress is almost as indecent as witnessing our...” She brought her hands back under her chest - palms pressed together with her fingers curled over. “Maritals.” She had a bit of a disgusted look on her face. Perhaps irritated.

She walked close and kneeled in front of him. Her eyes scanned his body. Then, they shot up towards the feline. Her eyelids quivered to match her ever-so-slightly curled lip.

Troy saw then that she wasn’t pure white. She was more of a cream color. One of her black spots was on her rear end. Another took up most of her left flank. Another went over her shoulder and down to the top of her right breast. Her muzzle was a good four to six inches wide and just as long - if not longer. It was definitely thicker than the ones the canines had. Her ears were larger than a canine’s as well. They jut from the side of her head and were adorned with various diamonds and gemstones. She didn’t have horns, but her head had a large bump on top that possibly could have. She seemed to be smart. She had to be if she were to be in charge of all these meatheads.

Her eyes returned to Troy. She seemed to have something on her mind.

“While you were on that ship,” she said and paused. Her jaw and lips stayed in the “P” position of speech. Slowly, her jaw moved out and up as her lips turned in and disappeared. She relaxed her mouth, licked her lips, and asked, “Did you happen to see a short, lizard-looking old man with a cane?”

Troy lit up. He remembered that man. Cane! He seemed to be the one in charge of Troy’s...tests. Her eyes seemed to light up with Troy’s. Her expression quickly turned sour.

“What about a shark with big tits, nice ass, great body, and nice as a full-body oil massage?” She asked, her tone serious, yet soft and hopeful.

Troy was confused. He wasn't sure if they were the same person. The leader's face was contorting a bit. She raised her hand and snapped her fingers. A servant came into the room. He was a feline with brown fur with dark brown and light brown spots.

“Yes, ma'am?” He asked as he stood straight and not making eye contact.

“Fetch me one of those communication devices that Arianna was fiddling with.”

“Ma'am,” he said and saluted, then took off out the room hastily.

She looked up at the smelly, destructive savior still holding him. “Leave us.”

The feline growled, then sighed. She pulled him up and placed him in the wheelchair. He'd felt it several times, but he still couldn't wrap his head around just how much power was housed within those anorexically thin arms. She carried him with ease. She really needed to eat more. The thought was scary just how much more strength she could have if she were healthy. She seemed to hug his head before trailing her rough, clawed hands over his shoulders and leaving the room.

The cow was standing and moved towards him. She bent over and placed her hands on the armrests. Troy got more than a closeup of her over-sized mammary glands. Her eyes seemed lasered on his neck. She reached with her left hand to his chin and put pressure under it to raise it up. She pulled her hand away and reached with both hands around his neck. Troy winced. He couldn't help but think he was about to be choked again. She looked at him reassuringly. She pulled on the bandage around his neck, then began to unravel it around his head. She piled it up on the floor next to her, then stared at him again.

Troy could smell her. She smelled like his grandma's closet with the reddish wood lining. Cedar he believed. She even had a chest made of the stuff that she would keep spare blankets and pillows in. He hated how pungent the smell was back then. Now, he found it strangely, alluringly, aromatically arousing.

“Doctor,” she finally said after several moments of staring.

“Ma'am,” the Doctor said as she stepped next to the chair.

“What exactly did you do to repair his neck?”

“Um...well,” the Doctor started. She leaned in and pointed at his neck. “As you can see...”

“Don’t lie to me, Doctor,” the cow said evenly. “It looks bad but I don’t see any of your work here.”

“Well, that’s what I was...”

“And why does it look like a dead carcass moving as if maggots are decomposing it?”

This made Troy worry. Though they weren’t known to kill anything, they did break down rotting material and were used in some situations before proper surgery could be done. He’d seen it done several times, but there was something unnerving about them being on or in him while he was still coherent.

“As I was saying, the green stuff is a sort of biochemical organism. Think of nanomachines but in organic form. They heal the host of their wounds. Look closer at some of his other parts.”

This was even more concerning. Though there was some relief knowing it wasn’t maggots, per se, having an unknown organic microorganism all over him still worried him. What if this would kill him if he...no...she said it “heals” the host. What on...

The cow lifted his arm and looked at the top of his forearm. Troy could make out a faint movement under the green skin. Troy couldn’t help but look at the cow as she peered over his arm. He stole another glance at her ample breasts, then back to her face. Troy could somehow sense it: The respect she commanded, the intelligence she held, and the kindness in her heart. She blinked and reopened her eyes. Her eyes were looking up into Troy’s. He sharply inhaled and glanced away.

“We’re studying a sample of the exodermis - for lack of better description at this time - that came off of him naturally. However, it’s dead. Meaning: Its usefulness is complete. There must be some healed portions somewhere on his body. Perhaps there are layers to it like natural skin. We haven’t analyzed a proper biopsy. Based upon the recent damage to the neck and the amount of activity in the area, it’s assumed that his entire body was once severely damaged. For what purpose or why they would heal him is unknown at this time. Our best guess is...”

"Farming," the Leader stated in a hushed tone. "I figured you didn't do much. I can't see any of your work here. I know you wouldn't...it just looks like it's naturally closed and healing. The wrap is unnecessary at this point. See if you can harvest a live sample from him regardless of his well being. This technology could be a foundation for our survival. If only we..." The cow trailed off and shook her head as she closed her eyes. She opened her eyes and looked over at the Doctor. "What about the blue suit you mentioned? Have you discovered anything about that?"

"Only that we happenstanced the means of removing it. It reacts to his blood or something involving it. We are doing more tests on it now. It does have a liner to it similar to the coating on him. We're not sure if it's related or cosmetic."

The Leader looked back at Troy. "Hmm. DNA-locked armor. Where exactly are you from?"

"The weapon, as well, appears...DNA-locked, as you put it. When we extract a sample, we'll get a blood sample as well. Perhaps we can find a trait in his DNA that the suit and gun recognize or react to. We'll make sure to get plenty of both."

"Good," the Leader said and nodded her head. She stood and looked over Troy once more. "I'll get a room assigned to this one. Once you are finished with him, I'll have him under lockdown with guards stationed outside. Hourly checks of him and the room will be conducted." She looked over to the side and brought her arms under her breasts while holding her right elbow as her right index finger tapped the end of her bottom jaw. "Perhaps I'll assign Luger to him. He's expen...perfect for the job. We will treat the human as a spy until further notice."

"Thankfully, ma'am, he won't physically get far. All tests and early reports indicate his brain is full of misfiring synapses - primarily in the motor cortex. Meaning: He can't walk for extended periods of time, let alone stand that long, he can't operate simple or complex machinery, and if he could talk it would be slurred and barely intelligible. We can't find any reason for that as of now."

"Hmm. Interesting." The Leader looked up from him as quiet footfalls made their way towards the room. "As well as this..."

Troy turned and saw the feline soldier quickly walking into the room carrying a device in his hands. He paused before her and knelt slightly as he extended his hands out towards the cow. She took the device and looked over it. She patted the feline on his head. He started purring before standing and leaving the room. She leaned in as she held out the device.

“I’m going to ask a few questions. Answer me to the best of your ability. If you refuse, you’ll be harvested for science. That bitch will join you. Answer me properly and I’ll think about letting you live.” She leaned in with a blazing look in her eyes. “Are we clear?”

This look terrified Tory.

“Lie..and die. It’s *that* simple. Also, if you ever present yourself to me like this again, I will have it severed and ground up in front of you while you watch until we shove the remains down your fucking throat.”

Troy was more terrified of this woman than any of the other manimals that came before. He hadn’t the foggiest idea of what she was talking about. He *just* heard the doctor say that he was in no condition to...

Troy felt something tapping his...his...?

Troy looked down and was mortified to see the Leader tapping the end of his fully engorged penis with the communicator.

“Do you understand me now?” She asked with an evil grin and let the device fall into his lap.

Troy couldn’t believe what he was seeing. He stared at it. It, like the rest of his body, looked and felt foreign. He willed it to go away and for his hands to work. He finally got his hands to move and to grab the device. It was similar to his communicator. The touch screen, the virtual keyboard, and the layout were very similar. The interface seemed to be a dated version. It could have passed for the first version of a communicator he had when he was young. He tried to quickly tap the screen as fast as he could. He hit the ‘ENTER’ button.

“I’m sorry, mom. My body isn’t on the same page as my Brian,” explained a computerized voice that emanated from the device.

Troy continued to type on the digital keys.

“Arianne may have outdone herself,” the Leader stated with pride. “To decipher a language and program, recovering the device to where it’s operable, and the earpiece that translates in real-time...just phenomenal.” She looked to the assistant that was still recovering from the blow to the chest. “Along with our...*guest’s* accommodations, see to

it that Arianne gets the rest of the day off with special rations and a favor of her choosing - within reason, of course." The Leader turned back to Troy as the computerized voice spoke again.

"I just want to go home. I been holed hostage for an undetermined amount of time. I've had my Brian scrambled with an alternative reality, objects shoved in all places, hooked up to a semen extract, watched them nearly murder a shark lady of their own kind after she seems to help me, lost my mobility and coordinations, watched as they cut off my skin, had my neck claws at, been shot at, had several kinds of beasts try to seduce me, carried like a tag doll, lost myself on an apparent ship that looks like a praying mantis, found all kinds of things from my planet stored and dissected, passed by chambers with my kind including friends filleted open, and finally seemed to have escaped that hell only to enter another. That foul smell feline may have saved me, but I wish she hadn't. I want to die. I had only come to another place where I will be held hostage, experiment on, more tests, more abuse, and I JUST WANT TO GO HOME!!"

Troy could feel his neck tighten as he choked up as the words came from the device. He hoped the words were clear enough to stress his points properly.

The Leader cow straightened up and drew her head back on her neck as she looked at Troy through slit eyes. After a long, quiet moment, she started to lift her arms, then stopped. Her head went back to a neutral position as she brought her arms across her chest under those ridiculously large breasts. Her right hand brushed her left breast enough to make it jiggle as the end of Troy's story was digitally vocalized.

"Winged Savior," she whispered as the rest of Troy's plea rang out in the room.

Her eyes scanned over Troy once more as if seeing him in a new way. She brought up her hand and tapped her lips in thought. She finally opened her eyes. They appeared to be holding back tears.

"Marle is...dead...?" She asked as if a statement.

The Leader looked over to the right as she described Shark Lady perfectly. Troy could only nod in affirmation.

Troy had visions play out in his head. Their kiss. Her words to him that he didn't understand. The way she seemed infatuated with him. How she protected him. Then, the sight of her lifeless body strapped on a birthing table hooked up to machines. Troy felt his own tears well up in his eyes. It still didn't make any sense to him. Possibly she, too, captured a place in his heart.

“Hmm,” she finally hummed. “Manimals,” she said plainly and let her hand drop under her chest to her other arm. “That’s...cute. If not accurate.”

She looked over at Troy. Her eyes were clear and serious again. She hesitated, then turned towards him. She walked past him. The Doctor moved quickly around the chair and directed him in a circle, then they pursued her.

As they moved, Troy saw, what looked like, medical personnel tending to the wounded guards as others followed beside them while they followed their leader. The Leader moved gracefully - her pert rear pressed into the fabric as she stepped and her hips swayed side-to-side. Her teardrop tail poked through the back and was hovering a couple of feet above the floor - the thin rope of fur and flesh swayed back and forth like a pendulum. She walked up a few steps and positioned herself by the plush, wooden chair with elaborate carvings in it. Plush cushions lined the seat, arms, and back in a red velvet-like upholstery. She pressed her dress against her rear and sat upon her throne. She leaned back with her arms atop the armrests. She crossed her right leg over the left.

“What planet are you from?” She finally asked.

“Aquarian Alpha. More commonly called “Earth,” the robotic voice replied.

“What system?”

“Ortega system in the Cornicopus Galaxy.”

Troy was finding the words more and more difficult to punch into the tiny screen. His hands felt like he was puppeteering bratwurst. Hopefully, she didn’t have more questions. He was getting a massive headache from concentrating so hard.

She leaned forward in her throne, then back. “Not familiar with that one. It’s probably the wrong question to ask.” She seemed to think for a moment, then returned to a neutral posture. “What does your planet call you?”

“Troy, your heinous.” Troy looked mortified. “Highness. High. Ness. I am so sorry.”

She seemed unamused, but then snickered and composed herself. “Troy,” she repeated, elongating the word. “I am President Alundra of Earth in the Solar System

within the Milky Way Galaxy.” She waved her hand and rolled her eyes as if being dismissive. “Our predecessors weren’t very imaginative in their naming.”

Troy was finding his blinking taking longer than normal. He was exhausted. His eyelids, shoulders, and head were so heavy. His body was becoming limp.

Alundra leaned forward and rest her forearms on her knee as she clasped her hands together. “Before I bore you too much, Mr. Troy,” she began, sounding irritated. “Know this: We were once like you. Our planet, ecosystem, primary star, and galaxy, even, may be very similar. We come from a planet that was once barren of life, then came dinosaurs, then humans and other creatures. One day, “Manimals,” she said and used the first two fingers on each hand to emphasize the word, “as you call them, were created.” She clasped her hands around her knee. “Does this sound familiar?”

Troy nodded and typed in, “Except that last part. Beast people are fantasy.”

“Beast...people,” Alundra repeated slowly. She seemed offended.

Troy brought his hand up and barely succeeded at placing his hand at his temple and began to massage it. At least he thought he was. It wasn’t helping his throbbing head.

“I’ll let that slide as you seem ignorant of our history. I would have you educate yourself, but Arianne is still decoding documents and devices from our past. Much was lost in our...”

She went silent and seemed to sound choked up with her last words. She cleared her throat.

“Our discussion will have to resume at a later date.”

Troy opened his eyes and watched as she stood.

“I don’t need to be a doctor to tell that you are in need repose.” She looked beyond him. “I need a volunteer.”

“Ma’am!” Came a voice, followed by boots slapping together. It sounded like a higher-pitched male voice.

"Take our guest...Troy...to his room and post there. I will send word to have the Major relieve you in two hours. Doctor Bridgette," she said and looked at the Doctor. "Provide care for Troy until you process his clean bill of health."

Troy heard a quiet grumble. Alundra looked down at Troy.

"Last question I have," she said and trailed off. She brought her right hand up with her palm up and arm straight out. "How or why," she said and moved her hand in and swept the room with it, "The other..."Manimals" want you or why they fight us for you is a mystery to us at the moment. What makes you so special, I wonder? Is it your entire race...or just," she said and brought her hand back to point at him with it, "You?"

She let her hand fall and slap against her thigh. It was a valid question. One he didn't have an answer to. His fingers fumbled across the screen. It was more muscle memory at this point. His eyes could barely focus on the letters. The computerized voice answered for him.

"I Apollo. I Don no. Parsnips we had sum think day knee."

The autocorrect feature wasn't being very kind to his numb-fingered typing.

She slowly walked towards him. "So we're in partial agreement on the "farming" being the case. That doesn't," she said and trailed off in thought. She looked back at him with conviction. "Let me say this, then: While our population dwindles, procreation is strongly encouraged. We don't have space on our ship for moochers."

Troy wasn't sure what that meant. She stopped before him and raised her nose as her eyes looked down on him.

"Find your purpose during your stay here. If you cannot find one within the year, I will find one for you."

Her words were strong. If Troy were more aware, he may have even felt those words.

"Begone!" She exclaimed and pointed to the exit.

Troy could hear boots on the floor come near and he was escorted out of the room.

He wasn't sure what she meant with those words. Perhaps after resting, he would revisit this conversation and plan out a future for himself here. It seemed impossible at the moment. This version of the manimals seemed just as advanced as his planet, if not more so. They *were* in space. For now, though, he was alive and allowed to live. Maybe this was a small victory. Hopefully, it wasn't yet another beginning to a long, painful end.