

The Watcher

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THE WATCHER

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Written by Iam Dreamfire.

**Dedicated to the great masters of imagination who have
swept me away and urged me to dream and to the people that
dare to think out of the box.**



Introduction

The Beginning of the End



In times of desperation their kind is called upon. They rarely answer. Frankly, they never do. Some may say they should and this could even become a conviction but they don't value the opinions of lower orders.

This is what he was born into, under a purple moon that one still evening.

Device was a name given only at the age of ten, after it was altered to give him a stated purpose. He could, as much as anyone could tell, pierce others and see through façades and lies with uncanny accuracy and thus the title was created and the duty was formulated.

Shortly after he was officially appointed "The Watcher" for his planet; answering to no one, answering to no thing or rank. He was given free rein, the trust of his masters, so much so they had let him free to move and act how he saw fit.

He'd engage when he felt it appropriate and mainly go about his chosen duty on intuition and observational skills. One could say it was a calling. The job had never existed until his birth because the skill hadn't been seen so distinctly as a method of attack and with technology advancing, people, it seemed, were harder to control or keep track of.

To be an anomaly amongst literal Gods should have made him feel all-important but he had cravings to uproot rigid systems and wanted to matter more. He wanted to make a difference but couldn't even articulate the boundaries he was trying to traverse.

For the last seventeen years of his existence he had followed the rules as best he could but they weren't dummies, they knew he could predict

moves ahead of the action, unmatched in calm resolve. He had eyes so to speak, that seemed to see aspects of past, present and future and never faltered to follow through, once something had been surmised.

He didn't have friends nor lovers nor acquaintances as he was a tool above all else, a living weapon that was charged with the purpose to keep order in a system that had lasted for millennia.

It was a good system with predictability and durability that lacked only one key factor along its sturdy roadbed, empathy for others and the heart to burden itself with the plight of another. Yes they, the great ones, were a system built on people joined hand in hand; as long as you were one of them.

Thus The Watcher was a necessary commodity in a stone cold time. Someone that could sense the cracking of aplomb and the shattering point of sanity.

The basic positive impact of the system was dubious at best in his mind and it was on it's last legs of order and the people of the Lazeren Quadrant knew that full well, leading to a worship of The Watcher for his singular role, to keep ahead of looming disorder.

He embraced it only wanting to be of service, all the while trying to search out the big escape valve, the one that would unburden all of falsity.

A God among the Gods of power, that themselves didn't know enough to know there were holes in the fabric of their own armour.



Chapter One

Device



Another research tour. Another lift off at a planetary border to explore the vast expanse of the universal inhabitants out there.

To his kin it was a data search but in his mind it was the subject of peeling away layers to expose the raw underbelly of what may come. He was given leeway to explore the depths of cultures, to upload, so to speak, and improve their grasp over the subject of impending insanity and disorder.

The Vision as they called themselves, were his employers, except for their obvious lack of intervention in his activities. They were a lofty crew who had many qualities needed to regiment others but under it all he could smell a type of fear, a hysteria of sorts. They maintained a civil order that would've been envied by any government, even an order of ants.

Oh, they were experienced beyond his young years a hundred times over and could tell tales of the epic undertakings of themselves, the people who dared play God, almost. They were impressive but it often made him chuckle within that they looked to a mere child to do their cultural bidding for them; the anomaly that seemed to be able to sense a crack in the system.

He often wondered as they kept pointing elsewhere to look for the people on the brink of disorder, if they ever wondered about what The Watcher could see about them, too.

He stepped down from the platform with a crack of a smile on his youthful face. It was a fresh location, not just obvious from the new scenery but by the subtle expressions of awe in the eyes of the soldiers on

the ground. They stood saluting a young man so recently having escaped childhood that to look at him caused a mild stir as they tried not to stare in disbelief while their senior officer introduced him.

In Verien language "Device" was given an additional definition to not only honour him but to bolster his authority; they created his name to mean "Watcher of even the watchful." He would have preferred his personal friends to call him by something more intimate, if he had any.

What the members of The Vision likely didn't find in the reports was the personal touch and ease that said "Device" descended upon most out-laying troops.

Defences were up when a superior officer of growing legend hit the ground and he went to work dissolving pent up walls. It was never just a social call but he wanted them to know that he wasn't just a title based on some built up delusion of grandeur.

This particular afternoon he felt rather curious. He had a particular beat but today he was going to draw it out a bit with words this group likely never expected to hear from military lips. He could have just as well done a survey of the area without saying much, but he liked to intimately test people and groups to feel out the cultural habits that bled into them over time on a particular planet, all the while rubbing elbows with the natives.

He could sense a lot from simple exercises as all these members had undergone the same basic training, so could estimate where they varied. Further, by just a short test usually, The Watcher gauged the level of havoc their environment wrought on them through continued exposure.

"I'm Device," he said in a loud but calming voice. "I am sure you are very aware of my role but that's neither here nor there. I'm interested in you and the information you carry."

The men in uniform seemed to lessen their harsh stance while the captain spoke, a wave of soothing balm easing their anticipating minds. He paused until he knew they had finally relaxed enough and let their guard down some.

"I won't lie to you and tell you something that isn't true, however I will withhold some information regarding the outcome on purpose. Your responses will tell me some things that will be helpful, as long as you answer honestly. There are no wrong answers. It is just information."

He then scanned the group of about forty soldiers in front of him and took a moment to look many directly in the eye. He wanted them to know he was not there to make men look away downtrodden. He wanted them to sense he was there for the simple sake of interest and didn't care about what they thought he wanted to hear. He wanted answers and wanted to have an insight into how they operated as a unit. The air that day was still, almost in anticipation of the earth-shattering revelation that was about to come his way.

He nonchalantly started striding easily through the rows of bodies and began, "I am here to separate you out into groups of one kind or another. One group will be given the opportunity to compete to progress up the ranks and the other will be kept here in good condition and care as you have been. You have been out here for half a life, some of you, but your future could change."

On the planet Verien, which ran the Quadrant, the general life span was about two hundred to three hundred years. Some of the officers on the ground at the current location had seen a new generation come into being as they were the guards over the various port holes to their area of galaxy and tended to be the most aged and experienced. They had travelled down from their gateways to meet him, for things they knew not what of. They were given the task of security and though it was a duty steeped in honour, it could be seen some had grown older and a bit weary.

The audience became a bit more attentive. The idea of a change was welcome, he thought.

He had made his way back to the front of the ship so all could easily rest their gaze upon his tall frame. "If you have done things you are not

proud of here on the ground but you feel that it was the best you could do in the circumstances and time limits presented step over to the left.

"Secondly, If you are aware of some things you feel need resolved with your team mates on the ground that you feel are vital to improve the integrity of your crew and life here in the midst of this place then step to the right." He always spoke fast as bullets fired out in rounds and it was short but said with finality. His mouth was always too slow to catch up with his thoughts.

And now the test, as he let the words ring out into the cool morning air. Usually in such a crowd, when he was feeling talkative as he did today and used this survey, it took a moment for the individuals to assess which would be the more noble response that would get them promoted and generally seventy percent opted with calling out their fellows for misdeeds.

In Verien society there was an emphasis from an early age on taking control and being somewhat dominant, so it was no surprise this seemed the more noteworthy choice.

Device stood watching for what started to feel like a crystallized hanging moment of time. Not one of the troops had budged even an inch to sway in one direction or another. There wasn't even a flicker of indecision. As he waited he had a strange feeling cross over his stomach and felt an energy brewing in his core; he hadn't really experienced giving such a choice and seemingly having the request utterly disregarded.

He stood and stared. *They had heard him all right.* Why weren't they moving? Didn't they want to try to become a candidate for a ticket off this remote outpost?

He began to look them over and noticed they were very much braced amongst each other almost reminding him of a troop about to fight as a single unit. Yet there had been no war of recent...

He'd never seen anything like it in his short two years of touring. "Well you have startled me. Sticking together I see..." his smooth voice trailed as he put his hand to his face stroking his chiseled chin as a smile

started to creep up under glinting eyes, unnerving the senior officers who had accompanied him on the ship journey. He heard agitated shuffling from his personal guard to his left who were preparing for something unexpected.

"Permission to speak." It sounded polite but it was an order from his lips that sent a chill through everyone surrounding Device. He glared with a menacing readiness to pounce, steadily inviting any bold response forthcoming.

A shorter bulky man near the front spoke to answer up to his implied question. He read the man and noted he lacked signs of fear and with a clear steady voice the soldier uttered, "Breaking off for some of us to have a proposed opportunity, leaving others behind isn't really how we operate. Maybe some would do it in a heartbeat but we don't necessarily share those values and though this may offend, we feel the offensiveness of letting down ones who have come to depend on us on the ground overshadows the necessity of carrying out this task, sir!"

The commander took in what he said like a sponge to water. Device's mind was quick like a weapon poised in readiness. His face showed neither surprise nor displeasure. He was a tool above all else and he had seen something in this group, a type of empathy to protect each other that wasn't quite the way of the cultural habits on Verien or even the Lazeren Quadrant.

Why else would his planet have such a title as The Watcher? It was a cleansing of sorts seemingly innocuous when one heard the various presentations of such a mindset but Device questioned it, almost daily.

As a child he recalled a hand coming down to snatch him up while he slept and before it could contact him he had intercepted it with his eyes closed. His vision was so strong it was as if he could see through his lids. That was the beginning of the tests and the scrutiny.

His captors took him knowing full well the rumours of his abilities were true from that moment forward. He couldn't resist their strength as a toddler but could readily smell their fear and wonder of the unknown,

even then. It was a race that played ruling class and in many ways, rightfully so, yet he could feel the cowardice seeping through the culture like a blossoming vine egging on hints of revolution.

The superiors of Verien, the ones calling themselves The Vision, knew they needed him as a conduit to the outside, to control unwieldy populaces, yet he found it difficult to see it in such a light. More correctly, he needed them, to explore every nook and cranny across the system. He needed them, exactly right where he had them, with their guard down.

This particular group intrigued him beyond measure. He couldn't compute any fear though they seemed ordinary enough. "I see!" he said strangely cheerily as he turned sharply to walk towards his ship to begin his debrief to Tentacle, the Quadrant's supercomputer. He *did* see something in their midst. They had a secret, they had a distinct lack of mortal hesitation. They had a saviour.

Tentacle, the computer that mirrored data and physical remnants from past explorers was awaiting input as her sparkling fragments throbbed across the space of the hull of the ship with a thirst that seemed insatiable.

Yes, she was a *she*. She was made that way and seemed to enjoy her fame, with dripping persuasion delivering the reality of the facts of data and mortality.

Tentacle seduced and seamlessly coerced male, female and the young of all types of species to give up their information, to feed the universal thirst for knowledge. She was an old spirit that was once hopeful but was now a bit jaded and slightly depraved and used her abilities to run the most complex supercomputer operating in the Lazeren Quadrant.

She was part flesh and machine melded together into a meticulous operating system. Her structuring was completed about seven hundred and fifty years prior when linking atoms and molecules of metal with flesh became a perfected science, inclusive of enhanced structural preservation, made possible through superior molecular physics.

In her presence the air chilled and breath expelled could be seen with the naked eye in even the warmest climate, as she absorbed energy in the vicinity, registering temperature and smell, constantly expanding her database.

She was mildly greedy for all the gory details but this served her masters fine. She didn't use her input for personal ends specifically, she was all too happy to assist and to use her skills to maintain her celebrity status.

"How is the universal whore today? Is she ready to upload?" Device chuckled good-naturedly as he teased her. Nearing the motherboard, the tiny hairs on his smooth skin bristling ever so slightly from the abrupt temperature drop. Most would need special equipment to debrief so as not to go into hypothermic shock but Device wasn't ordinary.

"Enjoying the new territory quite fine, though I must admit a slight surprise that aside from the roaches that were drowned out with a recent flood on the west banks the animal life here seems quite unusually content.

"Apparently someone important has been championing better crop methods and this has lessened the death toll of animal flesh as the main source of nutrient.

"I must hand it to the roaches though, across vast distances and nooks and crannies they just manage to pop up everywhere, rain or shine!" Tentacle laughed at her comment in a congratulatory tone, almost an electronic whine of static with her every utterance.

Though he smiled at her quirky personality, his mind was already rolling ahead into the future. "Do you trust me?" Device looked at her angelic face of almost translucent skin stretched over metal with a cocked eye as he read her intentions.

Though she covered the space with intricate software there were parts of her that almost looked like a real individual of flesh. She was definitely an oddity in the universe. When they'd met two years before while embarking on his first exploration she was very defensive and would only

show her mechanistic aspect. Through continued association he'd gotten her to feel safe enough to perhaps express opinions about the often overwhelming sadness and decay she would upload through her structured framework.

"Yes fine sir, I trust you with my mainframe," she wheezed joyously.

Device began settling himself in his debrief chair. "Today my lovely companion, I will bluff and add falsity into your very fabric to disrupt the flow of information to The Vision. I will not be uploading through mental memory as usual but will manually impart the information and I need you to tab it under "mental presentation transmission."

The computer creaked as she leaned forward towards her captain almost hoping to absorb the whole story before it was told. "I'm intrigued and mildly astonished but do go on," she said as a gap of a grin cracked open, exposing pale luminescent light from within her depths.

She felt privileged that Device saw her not as just another cog in the great march forward of The Vision but as his ally. He knew full well that he was asking something of her she would never do for anyone and that in an instant she could send a transmission to tell of his intended deceit.

"Here it goes. Start entry number 40304." He should have felt a sense of apprehension or a tense quiver for having used his position of trust towards other ends but his instinct told him that he was on the right track, though the full story of what he had encountered and where it would lead had yet to reveal itself to it's fullest extent.

"Arrived on Embarko and was met with no surprises and nothing out of the ordinary." Device paused, choosing his words carefully, "The troops were in good spirits and loyal to Verien. I sensed no dissension.

"I however, through valid intel, have had a report of new information that may have become available on Glog and my men will head there next. Device transmission over and out." It was done.

"Glog?" Tentacle asked.

"Yes Glog. The Vision sends all the wayward individuals there so what better way to misdirect them than to use their own bias against them?"

"Of course, there's something wrong on Glog!" He laughed scoffingly as though discussing the petty games of mere children.

"I wouldn't want to be your enemy," Tentacle retorted, still slightly taken aback by what had just transpired.

Even she couldn't contain her intrigue and anticipation despite the dangers presenting themselves. In this leader before her she sensed a feeling of hope and inspiration.

Device got up and moved with a stride that sliced the air. His resolve could be seen throughout his tall muscular build as his tendons and limbs flexed beneath the special conductivity suit he'd changed into to be in the midst of her for debrief. He oozed a confidence of a young man fearless and unfettered.

Tentacle stared after him, almost a twinge of lustful craving amongst the electrical components that made up most of her. If she was a full individual of flesh that could lead a somewhat regular existence she would have likely called him her first real crush, a mind to match her own it seemed, maybe to even surpass it.

Device, now back in uniform, went into his officer's lounge, where the handful of men that were earlier on the ground with him now snacked, awaiting further instruction.

"That was suspicious." Officer Zed verbally ventured in the direction of his captain.

Without even a pause Device responded. "Nothing odd about it at all. That crew just has a bully they cower to that is holding some type of death or punishment over their heads if they even contemplate leaving his service. I'll be rooting him out and will have a heart to heart and let him know who is *actually* in charge in this Quadrant. Nothing at all out of the ordinary so far that doesn't resolve with a wrist slap."

He really seemed to be getting the hang of this whole espionage gig and wondered why people needed training in this. He sounded deadly convincing.

Zed's face showed telltale signs of flushed relief. The man pondered the concept, stroking his dark handsome face.

Device found it interesting how easily the mind of even a senior officer could be moulded to an altered idea, if it filled a needed vacuum of peace of mind. People would grasp at something similar enough to a real answer if it meant less to deal with and more restful nights.

Device found at an early age what this practice of "sleep" was. Every evening his mother would lie him down and gently pull on his lids to close them. He would rest there supine in the dark until she left and would then solve riddles and puzzles in his mind until the orange sun had brightened from the evening misty purplish hue and sleep was over.

Strange rituals that he seemed to be excluded from, in terms of necessity, gave him an inkling he was different. Sleep, a necessary commodity for cell growth and regeneration, that didn't seem to apply to him.

Without sleep he had grown to six foot three inches, rising slightly above most of his kind. Later his handlers had told him he had what they could only label a rare disease where his cells would uptake triple the oxygen and nutrients and energy, therefore repairing and growing without the needed stasis-like quality of rest.

"Officer Zed I have sent a transmission to the effect that the ship will be heading to Glog. I want you at the helm.

"I have a report of an uprising of sorts and need the most likely candidates apprehended peacefully and brought to me. I will stay on Embarko to further my research."

"Yes sir! What details do we have to go on?" Zed asked.

The other three officers had stopped chewing and Device now had their full attention. They always liked a challenging mission, especially handling dissidents.

"There is a list of leaders that The Vision has issued in Peacekeeping Pronouncement 764377790. Bring the hierarchy amongst them to me, you will find exactly eight of them. Their usual whereabouts are in the most western valley of the Surrenal Mountains."

The men were too excited with their new mission to be appropriately amazed at how he could recall the exact number of a particular issue written however far back. Actually the commander knew that list for a reason beyond his good memory; they were his most intriguing study. As for his senior officers, things that were considered extraordinary to others were normal occurrences to this particular crew.

Once they had been disabused of the idea of Device as some un-touchable commander through his own treatment of them and overall demeanour, they became comfortable with great deeds from a head position within their grasp. His men began prepping their ship for their flight to snag rebels.

When a particular planet, Aleg, was descended upon two years earlier it looked like any other uninhabited area rich in untouched vegetation and ores. A closer survey done revealed that there was a substance that only Device could see, apparently undetectable to the eyes of his men and due to this observation they were able to trace it to its source which was vast and easily witnessed by the naked eye.

The material was a grey black shimmering stream that could contract when heated and expand back to size upon cooling, but on a grand scale. Device had noticed the vein upon an outer volcano wall but as it was in a contracted state from the extreme temperatures, apparently only he could recognize its molecular formation.

They named their find feathian. They had mined it and halfway en route to their freighter spacecraft it had multiplied to approximately ten times its original size with the cooling clime, drowning the transport vehicles below out of sight while crushing the officers within.

Thus a new type of craft was designed where some areas to the outer dimensions were made of feathian, whereas all the inner quarters and flight controls were not.

Through the operation of an advanced computerized heating and cooling system, the size of the overall circumference of the shell would shrink only during such temperatures as created during flight, allowing for enhanced speed and efficiency of space travel or battle when the captain deemed it necessary. When entering various atmospheres, the computer would adjust accordingly to keep the outer rims contracted or not, based on preference.

The rim contained mainly venting and pressure systems built of same said material, thereby no actual internal functions were disturbed, just diminished due to contraction. With the technology of a forced condensed vapour-flow apparatus pumping from within through the would-be restricted venting, the crew could manage in short spurts, usually enough time to finish a dogfight. This served a vital purpose in the case of attack; the ship could literally shrink in diameter almost immediately and escape a hit from a reasonable distance.

Device sent the craft on its mission post-haste. He wanted that group apprehended immediately for reasons unbeknownst to the flight team. Behind him it ascended and with a clap of sound shrunk into urgent feathian mode and vanished into the ether.

He stared ahead at the clearing where a few officers of Embarko lingered on duty in the distance. Device was an impressive figure as he approached, especially in uniform. His suit was a material not unlike metal that was thin and flexible and hugged his frame at the right areas, accenting his broad shoulders. It was a substance that mimicked movement and energy in its fluidity but was of extreme strength. It had a natural cooling system should the body get too hot through adrenalin, battle or the like.

The material tended to have a pale silver type visual when donned by the usual officers of Verien, however when the metal hit the skin of Device it escalated to a shade of light metallic black that screamed a sort of

renewed energy. Early life testing confirmed his core temperature rode at an average of twenty degrees above the norm. The symbology of his uniform, his build and his decorations made him stand out, even on a physical level, as a force to be reckoned with.

He approached swiftly towards two officers who were now standing at attention. Device grinned at them widely with a glint of premonition in forest-reflected eyes, "Take me to your saviour now."



Chapter Two

Her



I'm walking urgently by you so as to not absorb all your hurt as a swell into my senses, which must remain intact for the job ahead. I have work to do but I will try to do my best to bring some type of relief here and hopefully it will wash back over you at some future date. My heart lingers with you after I am gone and for her...

My mind has to push his grief aside as I look at the withered old man grasping tightly to what I can only imagine is his granddaughter. She is unkempt except for her hair which I can tell she has been combing as a pastime with her delicate fingers.

As my feet wear a path through the dirty streets of this urban centre, I feel a looming despair in the atmosphere and I can hear no real noise to speak of, though it is nighttime in this hub of questionable activity.

Death becomes me as I reach out my attention hoping to understand what is happening here. *What is going on?*

As though my thoughts have screamed my curiosity on high, a toothless man of about thirty steps out from a building shadow to persuade me to come inside.

"Lovely creature of enchantment you are definitely not from around here, but this place will surely want to get to know the likes of you. Come on in, your entry fee is on the house." He motions a bow leading his scrawny fingers over smokey air to a badly painted door chipped from sun exposure and repeated banging I estimate.

"Yes, thank you. I would like to be shown around as I am just visiting." My voice is soft and appreciative with feigned innocence of the wonder of a child.

As if he has just won a full family of daughters to ease his midnight cravings the man leaps towards his hole in the wall club with the energy of a cheetah. He does the prescribed four raps with his knuckles and the door opens.

I follow intently into the dark corridor where it is wooden and barren, yet ahead I can feel body heat upcoming with an attendant eerie silence unbecoming of such settings. As I grow near I can pick up bits of conversation and giggles of abandonment.

"Through here," he waves, "we have just what you need."

I am whisked to a bar type setting with dispensers of labeled drugs of choice. The man behind the counter glares at my cleanliness and beauty and I can feel his urge to strangle me, after maybe having his way with me.

"What should I get her?" he lunges curt words at his master of the house.

"She'll have the best we have to offer, Rupine 15 of course! We must match quality with such fine china! Give her only one, she's new and we don't want her heart to stop!" He bursts out in a forced laugh at his own perceived humour while I naively smile, pleasing him even more.

I pretend to take the pill fumbling about like a novice at such wicked games, ever so swiftly letting it drop down my sleeve where I then catch it on it's way out as my arm lowers.

I recall a time as an early teen having trusted a little too much until blindness and ending up being slipped a concoction in a flask of water. Though I managed to separate from my physical form enough to harness much needed motor controls I was well aware of what the liquid in my veins was meant to produce as I felt my system ramping up.

I again reaffirm within myself that I can and must be an actress for my cause. I have to get down amongst and become familiar with the peo-

ple around me to get straight to the underground dirt on what is going on in any given area, without undue time wasted.

The regular folk tend to be happily complacent and my informants are usually people who ask too many questions and fight tooth and nail for survival; the ones who get hit the hardest. Unfortunately my revelations always seem to be found fastest in some of the deepest writhing pits of misery.

I begin cracking a smile on my face like a kid who's just stolen the candies with a satisfied tongue and I decelerate my movements to what almost mimics slow motion. "Ah...I...see..." I coo in dazed elation.

"Ah hah! I knew you'd just love it!" He leads me to a dusty couch, just one of many in the blackened smokey room.

"Come talk," I slur pulling him to sit with me. I slowly sweep the room with my eyes and find various levels of drug stupors in varying stages of activity, from dancing lazily to fornication to passed out slumberers. This is nothing out of the ordinary except for one key aspect, there is not one vibration of background sound, no music playing.

No music! My mind scans for a reason why and I just can't come to terms with it. By now my host is hanging off me muttering some banalities about this and that.

I try to get a question in edgewise, "Where is the music? It would be SO nice if we had some!" I increase the pitch and volume of my voice to one of someone who has too much drug induced adrenalin throbbing through their veins.

The once oily drippy man beside me goes rigid as though electrocuted. I notice even the star crossed lovers in shady corners stop their incompetent lovemaking and are paying closer attention.

Like a startled gazelle the gap-mouthed former gent pops up off our nest and yanks me right back towards the front door I came in from.

"Are you one of them?" he screeches by the time we are back in the foyer of solitude. He becomes a heightening level of hysterical, "Are you

testing me? I run a clean establishment here, by the books! Who reported me? Are my ears bleeding? No ma'am!"

For being all of one hundred and twenty pounds of poisoned skin and bones he can sure sling me towards the exit sign with fervour. He however doesn't count on my quick reflexes and combat skill set which was honed to match my mind.

Before his foggy overexcited self can even get another blink in, my arm has wrapped around behind his and he is swept through the entrance and ends up being the first patron dismissed from the bar this evening. Lucky for the doorman he must be on a washroom break or he would have been locked out too if he'd gotten in my way. I am on the trail of a scent of darkness.

I have my new acquaintance pinned on the ground in no time as he stammers "Wh..who are you? Are you one of them?" His eyes glint a terror of a trapped animal awaiting certain death.

"No! I'm not whatever you think I am but I need you to tell me what you've heard. Talk man!" I put some pressure on his abdomen where my knee has settled in to help him along with his perseverance and focus on the matter at hand.

After a bit of gentle persuasion, being assisted by the weight of my frame he tells me what he's heard and what he's seen with his own eyes. I know it must be true as it sounds low enough to be the signature calling card of The Vision.

Wow that is evil! My thoughts are broiling as I dart back the way I've come, having left my not so willing informant lying outside his venue pondering what the hell has just happened.

Coming up ahead are the old man and the girl again seemingly making the pavement their home. She must only be about ten or eleven years old. I can't help being drawn into their plight, especially knowing the potential situation here on the ground.

As I near I think of her future. As it exists currently, if my source wasn't hallucinating, she may well grow up never knowing or hearing

music or the spirit of rebellion, being shunned into submission away from certain frequencies and sadly, all for her own safety.

I ponder the grave reality of this place, of so many other planets I had come to know of. I stop then and narrow in on the two. They are angled away from my direction and neither are aware of their audience yet. I look at them...how could I leave her behind? I don't know when we can fix this or even where to begin. My dilemma!

Her head shoots sideways as she becomes aware of my presence off to her right; I have a habit of thinking too loud and jolting others abruptly. I half wave to her and smile. She has such a sweet face as her response lights up her heart shaped dusty visage. My burden for approaching entails being engrossed and encumbered with mainly his cobwebs of sullen memories, their murky weight dragging on me more and more but I am already too involved to move on.

“Hello”, I offer softly.

Both of them respond a hello, hers more forthcoming. In gentle conversation I come to learn that in fact he is her grandfather as I'd suspected and that they mainly spend their time on the streets begging and doing little odd jobs to keep afloat.

“Where are you from?” the girl excitedly questions. She continues, “Your hair is of honey and you're like an angel I heard in a story from the old lady down the block.” I can hardly even respond before I'm barraged with the next question and the next.

I squat down so I can be at eye level with her from her seated position and put my hand on her slim shoulder so as to steady her slightly. Children have a fire of life that makes them run ahead of themselves. “Tell you what,” I say, “I'll come back around this way soon and when I do I'll answer all your questions! For now though let's play a game. I want you to imagine all the answers to all the things you want to know about me and be as creative as you want! When I come back we'll compare notes! Ok?” I do however give her a few choice tidbits as food for thought to satisfy her appetite.

The girl jumps up in a burst of energy hopping up and down at the prospect of her new assignment, "Yes I'd really like that! I already have an idea..."

"Ssshhh don't tell me yet, you'll spoil all the fun!" I wink at her and touch the shoulder of her grandfather also as I rise, who now has a slight smile playing over his faded eyes.

I can't seem to escape without her thrilled voice still chattering and trailing after me informing me of her name which she energetically insists she doesn't really like and would happily accept a new one, if someone offered. "Bye and see you again soon Rezrae Devon!" she calls into the night air.

I reply, "And I'll think on your alternate reality name. Deal!" I chuckle as I walk away looking back a few times to wave goodbye to my new little friend and her only surviving relative. I'd be back for her at a better time but for now I have to get busy and get back to my ship, there is a lot to do.



Chapter Three

The Traveller



Device waited. The two soldiers agitatedly assured him they didn't have an inkling what saviour he asked after. He was feeling patient now that his crew were out of his way for a temporary period, though a sense of stirring excitement brewed within.

Two firsts occurred today; he'd just imagined Tentacle as a friend amidst their mutual conspiring, maybe having felt it even and he'd seen unmatched unity amongst soldiers outside of battle.

As for his new found inner sanctum, he hadn't really felt a twinge of intimacy probably since his conditioning began.

When the trials got underway at the age of three he wasn't even sure where he was at emotionally as he was so bottled up already, trying to camouflage his differences. He quickly learned how far his handlers were willing to go to test his waters...thus he held back harder so they would never be entitled to all his capabilities. They would not own him, especially as he sensed the darkness of strangers in their deadened presence.

What these Embarko men in uniform before Device didn't know was the mild outpouring of respect felt for them present from the commander as he witnessed them defending something that perhaps stepped out of the lines.

"I have sent for rebel leaders to be brought here, there is business to be done here and this includes you." Device spoke with disregard to their offered disinformation.

"But...but...business?" said one guard, while beside him his companion stood with mouth now hanging open, eyes wide in astonishment.

"Who is it? I'm not a threat to your ideals." Device's green eyes barrelled forward in front of his deep raspy voice right into the man's skull.

The soldier he spoke to had a sarcastic smirk dance across his face that he couldn't hide even through any fear of retaliation. "Respectfully, how are you not a threat? You *are* The Vision. We may not be anything compared to the likes of you but we sure aren't fools sir! Anything I say *will* be used against me even if nothing exists as you have now decided we are harbouring some saviour! I don't know what you want me to say." The man started slightly shaking from the rush of blood as his nervous system pumped hormones into his body to counteract the perceived threat.

"Look deep into my eyes soldier. Hear me well. Concentrate. I'm your best bet to make it to any better *anywhere*," he said almost devouring the man with his intensity, "you turn your back on me and you're letting your team down, I assure you. I will get the information anyways so let's just speed this up. I know trust is earned but I also know the times we live in and the attendant leap of faith that moves things forward through sheer necessity."

The soldiers' faces visibly changed; they knew he wasn't fibbing, the commander had a way of dripping a reality over others.

The man named Brennon offered up a response after a long pause, resolving that they really had no way out, "She is not a saviour as you call her. She is a traveller is all. She isn't here, left several months ago." The man stood looking as though he was expecting an axe from the heavens to possibly fall upon him, if his frail trust in Device turned out to be misplaced.

Device squinted and looked up towards the sky, "She..." Food for thought. So many conversations to be had, he thought.

He got down to business with Brennon and the man he soon learned was named Leer. After a whirlwind of tidbits of available information given, Device devised a plan in his own mind to have the rebels kept as captives on Embarko until he could find the girl and bring her to the lush

remote uneventful planet that no one paid heed to. He kept his overall plan to himself.

"Lastly," said Device, "what makes this person unique in your eyes?"

Leer, now less dumbfounded by the change of events found courage to also offer up information. "She doesn't think like us and she knows things. Hard to describe..."

Device could tell Leer wasn't on this post for his eloquence or for that matter, intelligence either.

He was appropriately intrigued as he sent a message through long range hand device transmission to his men who were rounding up misfits, that they were to imprison their prize in the rural confines of Embarko until further notice.

As Device made his way back to the clearing where he'd been left a single seater for personal trips, he pondered the stranger and her plight. What was she seeking? The men he'd just left didn't really know much about her end game, just that she brought insight into situations they felt were otherwise beyond comprehension.

Despite having arrived at mere vague answers that didn't reveal much, Device managed to learn of a man of sorts who was known as The Cloaker who lived upon The Fallow Plateau, as they called it. It was located on a rural planet named Agu that didn't have much in the way of technology, yet The Cloaker supposedly was nestled on a very high plateau that could only be accessed by spaceship. Odd contradictions he thought, but obviously the man-creature on Agu had friends in high places and apparently carried insight into the traveller.

As his fingers danced across the screen appended to his flight console he wondered what he would find on his road ahead, what would be waiting. He quickly located the coordinates for Agu and set the small vessel on course.

Laying back and slowing his heart rate to a level barely detectable to any instrument he let his mental computer roam more freely, now with excess energy conserved due to commanded body stasis.

He pondered endless possibilities of who the woman was and her mission.

Perhaps she was a martyr for some far away cause and visited new areas to garner support? Maybe she was a seductress of sorts conning men's minds and telling them fibs through glinting intentions? Device's mind flipped scenarios a mile a minute as he hurled through the dark depths of black space.

Lastly, he surmised that perhaps she was none of the above and it would only be revealed through a meeting. He decided to leave the pondering at that. He rarely felt anticipation of the unknown but could sense it within him; he almost didn't recognize the sensation as it was so scarce to him. He'd have to get used to it for his journey.

A seemingly short while later his ship began slowing in its forward vector with its sensors picking up the planet ahead. Agu had a very thin atmosphere per his monitor briefing and a mild semi-tropical climate with a wispy layer of clouds blanketing the sky as he entered.

The plateau he ventured towards almost screamed to him as he descended. It was a jutting land mass singular amongst hurricanes of air spilling around in various directions spanning several miles at least. The Fallow Plateau was more grand than Device expected, being a near vertical land form with acres of vegetation tens of thousands of feet below, with greenery waving leafy hands in gusts of wind up towards their master.

He steered his ship to the closest centre axis he could judge on the surface, knowing that finding The Cloaker may take a mild trek.

Device was used to the harshest of climes and long distances, having been tested on core temperature thresholds in the heart of Velice, a cruel unending ice cap in space. He was uniquely unafraid of spacial and gravitational challenges. This planet was a mere jaunt to him.

He left his ship and headed in the direction he heard faint echoes of wind as though from hollow areas or caverns, indicating a possible dwelling. It would have not been discernible to regular ears but Device

possessed delving depth perceptions and could literally hear the shape of things.

A distance away Device started to see what appeared to be the mouth of a cave however no mountain existed there. He surmised it must be an opening to a space or tunnel leading downwards into the crust of the land.

He swiftly moved over the grass which became darker as the light diminished, night approaching.

Almost as clearly as he saw a path forward, emerged a figure seemingly out of thin air. The hooded shadow waited poised and unmoving. The Cloaker had a tall frame even from a distance, however Device could tell the structure under the garb was frail physically, being assessed by him due to the wind resistance as it caressed past the body, traversing the molecules in his fabric, shoving forward towards the commander almost 200 feet ahead.

As Device descended upon what appeared to be a character from lore spelled out in the fiction of rural planet dwellers, he saw a fine dark dust sprawl out from below the hood and felt it land on his facial skin.

As The Cloaker began to speak, he recognized the dust emulating his cellular structure sending impulses back to it's master; extended receptors clawing for the arrival's information.

"Forward she pushes...they will land at your mouth. It became clear to me what I saw the moment I sensed another presence on my land, the moment I saw your uniform." The Cloaker had a deep voice that was eerily steady. A smile crept open under a robe of deep reddish black in the falling dark. He moved like a snake craning his wiry neck forward.

"As you mentioned the female, you surely know already what I seek and why I've come to your domain." Device looked intently as he sized up what he could only describe as a warlock of sorts. His penetrating senses felt like they were in a maze of smoke and mirrors being danced about and parried; there was something not quite physical about the body of his host.

"Let's go within and let me satiate your fascination with Rezrae, though I have found mine still mildly unending and I'm afraid you may have a similar fate." The figure cackled as he led the man to a lift that took them down hundreds of feet to his inner dwelling.

This was however no ordinary cave, its walls were made of a dark reflecting type of quartz, beautiful to behold but could slice at an inattentive touch.

They entered an area that had seating with similar walls to the structure itself. There was a single fire that rose up through what could only be a thin air shaft tucked into the ceiling above, sucking the smoke away. The black quartz glinted on all sides of the two as they settled at a spot to begin their exchange.

Device was the first to venture forward.

"Before I ask you for information I must be blunt and inquire about your physical person. I sense a flimsiness that is not common amongst the living. You are not of this world?"

The Cloaker roared with laughter and delight as he nodded admiringly at Device. He seemed overly thrilled to share his tale. "You are not just a set of piercing eyes! No you are not! Many moons ago I escaped from the nether regions of Sector Hybris where I outsmarted their very skilled electronics that kept me shackled there. I must admit some of my earned knowledge has awarded me some very powerful, if sometimes shady friends. But I can be helpful to all camps whether good or otherwise clandestine as I am already of the ilk of the dead, so really have nothing to lose but much material possession and influence to gain! Whatever your motives, I can surely be of assistance. For a humble price of course."

Device stared at the ghost creature who yet had enough dimension to hold up his crimson robes. "Well I must say you are most unique and perhaps should be your own study at another time. I am here as I have been told you know something about the woman that I am seeking to locate. The one you called Rezrae."

"Yes, Rezrae Devon," the creature said as though dangling a carrot for a prize, "but as I mentioned what I know of her tale comes with a fee."

"Name it Cloaker," he said abruptly.

"Ah you grow impatient to visit destiny. Destiny will be waiting for you though, no matter," said The Cloaker with a hauntingly knowing smile through a slightly translucent withered face. "Once you have met fate in the face and you have taken the game to the next level all I ask is that you come back and retrieve me. I grow so bored and lonely here and the world you are entering into will entertain me to no end! I am on vacation from the thrills of sensation but it is calling to me and I must answer soon. I will want a proper body sooner or later, the land of the living so they call it." The warlock paused thoughtfully, "I can also set aside some of my previously stated evil tendencies enough to even be a good bed-mate in battle, if the rewards are sweet enough, which I'm sure they will be!" The old ghost clapped his hands which made a more hollow sound than real flesh. He grinned at Device and waited expectantly.

The commander studied him and felt his conviction. He could sense something true in what was said to him but didn't care to know more at this time, he had to get on the path to meet Rezrae. "If the script as I know it changes, you'll be the first to know. I accept."

The Cloaker leapt up almost too lightly and spun around in enthusiasm. "Let me tell you a tale of a child from former Earthen,

in a galaxy located far towards the outer rim,

let me beguile your attention,

I made a little art,

to capture your heart,

as I've been waiting for the day to spill her woes,

to introduce you to perfection of mind coupled with deepest misery,

oh,

she will keep you on your toes!" The old spirit pranced and danced happily while spinning his rhyme so profoundly that the commander was entranced and following his every stride.

Almost as quickly the shadow collected himself and plunked back down, more business like now, having much to say. "In a world of degraded spirits and somewhat advanced technology on Earthen, Rezrae was born to one Tobormory Devon, a world class scientist of his time. A man leading in his knowledge of the physical world interestingly helped bring an anomaly of greater expanse into their midst. The Earthen species thought they were the centre of the universe and hadn't yet perfected long distance space travel enough to encounter other civilizations, but they were well on their way.

"Her parents would raise a human baby who could hold conversation right out of the womb, who claimed to have been a witness to vast eras past describing details though an infant and could articulate immense understandings." Device leaned in fascinated with the old creature's account.

The Cloaker then became slightly more serious leaning in closer as the flames danced over his features. "If that wasn't odd enough for Earthen folk, it turns out she apparently knew the subject of science and the scope of the material ahead of even Tobormory and claimed it was old knowledge she'd learned and carried forward through various forms and lives."

The commander put a finger to his full lip with a question playing over his eyes and the warlock appropriately paused for his guest. "Why would a child with words and stories create a stir? Unless she was accurate... And how is it she is now here if Earthen is somewhat backward in progression?"

The shadow stood again and began pacing while admiring his deathly visage in the light flickering on long reflective walls. Device noticed the ghost was actually quite vain in some ways, almost in love with himself as he grinned at what form he had available to view. He put the pieces of the puzzle together and realized the advantage of the shiny quartz palace cavern, the old narcissist having company with himself wherever he'd roam within its confines. The fire, seeming odd for this undead in-

habitant, wasn't for warmth which would be obviously unnecessary, but for light to enhance his home's mirrors.

"Funny, she would scoff at your mild skepticism, imposing uniform and all, and tell you your trust in your eyes and facts alone already betrays you," he cheerily announced while spinning around gracefully in elation. "Your initial doubt she isn't what she claims perhaps lead you to surmise that Earthen still *is* and she was possibly catapulted here by her father's divine intervention. Well how does a young girl of less than even full adulthood leave a planet that isn't accustomed to extended space travel with no regular time available to even improve flight technology?"

The commander exhaled and squinted his eyes looking over what he said. He liked this warlock, liked him a lot. He would be back for him if the opportunity arose. He was fascinating and Device saw a sincerity in his directly stated words, whatever advantage they were meant to draw. The ghost was upfront about his twisted intentions from the start and what you saw was surely what you got; whether slicing, good, bad or indifferent. An embroiled spirit with nothing to lose but a lot to gain made for an interesting character.

The warlock went on to answer his poised question. "By the Earthen age of seven she became the youngest scientist in the ranks of the top brass researching space travel. When she came aboard, through her father's influence, they had to create a newly superior top secret classification known only by the sole head of operations and Tobormory himself. She would have otherwise been relegated a lab rat had the establishment and mental doctors known of her abilities and knowledge. They were sickly afraid of the unknown on that hunk of mud."

The robed figure settled back down to a more conservative seated position. "The head deemed the appointment Career Day as chance glimpses of Rezrae even travelling to or near the grounds needed a suitable explanation. If her presence was noted or leaked in any way on site, the explanation was that she was just a child spending time with her father, grieving over the fabricated death of her mother, whom actually

lived comfortably elsewhere. The child would advise him on aspects to improve but eventually had to go on base to take over as there were details and instructions even Tobormory couldn't readily apply, so they had to be smart about it."

"She is brilliant, I see." Device stated flatly.

"That she is but there is apparently more to it but the rest of the story I'm afraid she never told me. The little bit of back story she shared commanded enough of my respect that I felt the urge to give her the information she did seek. She can be quite persuasive. What she intends to do with it is for her to know alone."

Device chuckled, "Her science impressed you and you wanted to help her in awe, I see!"

The ghost's eyes glinted over the firelight as he looked for a long moment into the green orbs of the imposing leader before him. "No, I was sold before she even started her story. At the time she came to see me there were only two others that knew I resided here and they were in high positions nowhere near Earthen or this Quadrant nor even close to these chains of command for that matter.

"When I asked her how she had found me, her answer was most pleasing! She'd retorted if I'd ever thought about whether the alive could speak to the dead without trinkets and gadgets. She ventured further that perhaps not only the dead could speak to the dead. I told her that though I have spoken to the living in person, being that I am quite skilled with energy, use of, that in fact no, I'd never been located by the living, especially from light years away. Needless to say, I assisted her and with no strings attached."

As Device's mind was combing over combinations of equations to put logic into the information, he stood up stretching his tall legs catching his tall figure in glinting wall segments dripping down from the ceiling. "Where do I find her?"

"Well I'll make a guess that you are in luck! You probably won't need to find her. Give or take some travel time, if you don't mind the company

of the likes of an old spectre as myself, I'll bet she's on her way here as we speak. She has a way of getting into my head."

"Hmmm... and what if I mean her harm? Would you happily summon her then too?"

The warlock grinned largely as he again bolted up from his stone chair, "Oh I am not concerned, she's not afraid of things the way most of us are and I count on her to take care of herself just fine."



Chapter Four

Visitation



I need to find a way to come back for Sera somehow, though she'll be expecting an updated name when I pick her up. I quite like what they called her but to Sera it's likely just a sound equated with all the pain and hurt she's grown up with. I need to come back soon as her grandfather is dying, the black patches on his cells I could perceive as energy splotches within him are eating his tissues away and I'd give him a few months at best. It's probably better that in their wretched circumstances he doesn't have some medical diagnosis that he can mull over day and night in turmoil. I could tell from his thoughts he wasn't aware that his days were coming to an end... probably better that way.

It seems every which way I turn, there is just settling for a little better than something worse. Even if there was a way to break some of the moulds that were keeping everyone in line maybe we'd start getting somewhere. Anywhere is better than where we're at.

My trusty little ship is always such a welcome sight. The only reminder of Earthen in the physical world, the only thing I own of value, even ranking higher than my present form. My ship and I, what a tangled marriage we have. If I had worked faster maybe there would be a few of us left but here I am, the one and only Earthen citizen left after she went up in atomic dust, now still looking for some use for all I know.

My safe haven, my home. As I look out of Daffodil's rounded windows into the black of the atmosphere I enter, I again revisit her naming ceremony, replaying the last field of flowers I witnessed before the blast ate up everything I knew of my birthplace. The daffodils smiled and

waved to me as nuclear fire chewed through the molecules of the open compound buildings until they were no more, until there existed nothing but my bubble and I hurling through the endless uninviting depths of space.

I've kept Earthen day count since, as best as possible, and though it occurred approximately eight years prior it seems just imminently in my mind's eye that I screamed out desperately amongst floods of tears dropping down into thin air that the unexpected test had worked and yes, I'd done it and built the ultimate alloy that could withstand nuclear fission. A bittersweet victory having finally accomplished it alone, just a bit too late. I was within her sphered shelter testing internal workings on the day, thus lived to see the miracle.

I can't seem to stop beating myself up for the time wasted in the park, the time spent playing which devoured precious moments so obviously needed later. There were early warnings of imminent threats but as the manpower was so scarce the resources towards a solution were limited and necessarily clandestine, especially with the fear of other realities prevalent through the heights of government. Now all I have is my regrets and my mission to do something to perhaps make it more right than it is. Maybe make it better for the future of some.

As though calling from a distant dream I recognize the old ghost's character through my grey broken thoughts of the past, sending me a flood of fresh mental signals. He had once predicted that he and I would encounter a mutual ally that would have connections to advancements to aid both himself to gain a grown form and who may also one day be of some assistance to myself to ease my many burdens of responsibility.

He is sending swirling forms of energy right into my head and I know he is really excited about his find and it's evident his thought processes are related to his earlier premonition. He keeps sending me ideas regarding a visitor from The Vision which is quite curious, considering they are evil incarnate it seems, insofar as I can tell.

“Well Daffodil,” I voice aloud, “let’s go visit The Cloaker and his new visitor, shall we?”



Chapter Five

Watched



De vice made his way back to his ship to lay down in the back cabin area to think and wait. As he trudged over the cool grass he looked skywards appreciating how the stars twinkled glisteningly in the heavens above. The Fallow Plateau was an astrologist's dream come true when night crept over the land. The air was biting now and it seemed the darkness brought swells of cold currents off some local body of water below.

He did something a bit out of character and strolled around his craft before deciding to go within. He pondered if in fact Rezrae Devon would appear as the old spectre had suspected. He reviewed all the ghost had shared and felt a twinge of something he could only surmise as a touch of happiness at expectation.

Aside from Tentacle, his mechanistic sister-in-arms, he'd never met nor heard of others such as the warlock and friends, seemingly so immensely colourful or full of depth.

He didn't know where these emotions were flooding in from but he found himself looking forward to any upcoming conversation. Usually his approach was one of observe, assess and download to pass on what he'd found. But here, open beneath the black canopy of space he felt an urge to *share* with not even a clue of what it was he wanted to impart.

As he circled the vessel he found himself agitated, not knowing why his thought processes kept wanting to drift into realms of imagination and future possibilities. He liked good plain logic, it served him well. It seemed as the time passed the sensation strengthened and he finally put his hands on the cool hull to ground his energy swell and felt better as

the chilly surface and the vacuum it created sucked away the developing heat from his core. Grounded again. Better.

Entering back to a logical mental plane he decided that if she didn't arrive by the light he would go back and grill his informant for possible locations she may have gone. Device actually burst into laughter echoing through the still night air, looking over his scenario. Alone on a platform in the sky, here he stood waiting for some apparent person that somehow read the thoughts of a dead narcissist. He, the apparent beacon wondering if he even was one. Soon he'd be hanging out by oceans looking for the Water Viper race of Lazeren Quadrant lore too, hoping to catch a glimpse of the stuff of the nightmares of children!

He tired of his outdoor rural experience and went within his craft to wait. In his personal quarters he settled in and sent a transmission to Tentacle to see how she was doing on her trek to Glog accompanying the men anxious for the thrill dissidents always brought.

The hand-held speaker crackled with her familiar electronic wheeze, "Oh sir, we are hurtling through space and scheduled to land as predicted. We encountered floaters but navigated them just fine!" The computer laughed loudly, obviously thrilled to be called up. Floaters, a slang term for meteors which was common parlance amongst the pilots of Verien spaceships, almost sarcastic as their technology was so advanced the only barrier other than direct battle in flying was dodging masses that would make nothing more than a dent really. It was a usual joke amongst crews that novice pilots didn't die but they sure had heart attacks having to face the angry Purchase Officers to account for their tarnished hulls.

It seemed all was moving well in the round up mission for the rebels, again pointing up in his mind the lack of one key element; someone that had the evident unique binding quality to unite such types.

As he finished up his chat with Tentacle he felt the flutter sensation creeping back in and his thoughts began to float free from logic, swirling into various shapes and colours and movements not discernible, yet pleasurable all the same.

He lay there for what seemed many hours and wasn't fully concerned as to the time that had passed, when out of the peace he'd finally drifted into, he felt an atmospheric pressure shift ever so slightly. *She was here.*

He got up in a hurry making his way outside. It was now early morning and there was a dew mist covering the field with flowers jutting up here and there. Far across the expanse he could see a speck of silver which was spherical in shape descending towards the plateau surface, slowing as it approached.

Several minutes passed as the craft navigated its landing. Device waited. He assumed she'd be able to see his ship as it was situated on an unobstructed area, despite the mild distance.

He made his way towards the vessel that she would soon exit from. He wondered what her appearance and attire would be like and what type of impression would be made upon him. He was intrigued by a few things he'd heard, now even more, knowing that she had somehow gotten the message. So many questions he had.

He was about halfway there and saw a figure jump down from an opening and land lightly on the grass. He couldn't see details but could tell her hair was the colour of straw and she wore a black type of space outfit. Once she was on the ground Device noticed she was staying low and crouched and running her hands along the top of the blades growing upwards. Maybe she hadn't seen him or his ship, but it seemed unlikely. He was slightly perplexed as she carried on what appeared to be a surveying of the ground.

He speeded his stride and after a bit came upon Rezrae, who finally had stopped observing the earth below her feet and was looking up at him approaching, a mildly pleased expression on her youthful face. She remained poised in a crouch balanced effortlessly.

She rose as she began talking quietly in perfect Verien dialect, "Don't you agree the presence of flowers indicates that perhaps we haven't lost all yet through paving over manifestations of life with whatever artificial substance we can make? The material surely has its place but isn't the nat-

ural world such a wonder?” She smiled disarmingly and conveyed by all appearances that she was completely relaxed, though she was in the presence of someone she knew nothing of.

“Yes, the battle between the natural and artificial rages on.” Device found it odd to be the second one speaking and the one asked the first question, he was so used to directing the conversations that took place. He studied her person. She had many similar features to the people of Verien but was structurally smaller overall though was on par with the taller of his races’ woman. She looked slim yet strong and agile. Her skin was light with a tint of pigment but for the most part one of the more pale species he’d seen.

“You’ve never seen a human I guess...” her voice trailed away and she looked downwards as though falling into a train of thought. Her previously brightly lit up face dimmed slightly as she seemed to ponder something, though obviously not agitated at all by his study of her features.

“A human. I’ll assume that’s the Earthen species.” He found it fascinating that she seemed quite at ease as he barrelled into her with his perceptions sizing her up, estimating and making comparisons.

“You’re the lucky grand prize winner, you’ve met the last human you’re ever going to see unless interplanetary mating is possible which I have not become an expert on quite yet in my mere eighteen years!” She laughed but there was a twinge of sarcasm in her voice, an aspect of a jaded view he could see.

“Tell me how it is that you are the last of your kind and how you arrived here. The ghost told me some of it and I’m afraid I was left with more questions than answers.”

“Well I must say that’s quite a large request considering I don’t even know anything about you or why you are looking for me. Doesn’t your alien species do usual introductions before learning the trials and tribulations of others? Well...barring the rude introductions of war, obviously.” Her sense of humour was charming and intelligent. She seemed humble and unassuming and it really didn’t match the influence she seemed

to have over some. Rezrae *was* captivating, but a leader? There was nothing stern or galvanizing he could sense. She was almost too casual. What confidence did they find in her? At best she made one feel better somehow.

"My name is Device. My official title is The Watcher. I am associated with The Vision which you have heard of, I'm sure. I have been told your name is Rezrae Devon." As he looked at her she didn't even change expression nor show any surprise at all at what he said.

"Ah! Now I understand some of the frenzied fever thoughts of the old Cloaker! He seemed quite excited at the prospect of skipping childhood and just getting straight to adolescence. He's pretty miserable but wants to make a grand entrance soon." She paused looking at Device while she studied his expression which was still somewhat puzzled. "I'm thinking the ghost has a high confidence in your connections to all sorts of made to order body farms skipping the natural progression, but that's just my hunch." Rezrae smiled and chuckled at the sweetened thought of her very lively, yet dead, acquaintance.

"That's very interesting," he said with a smirk widening, "but we digress. We'll get to him but right now I'd much rather hear about you." His green eyes glowed more than usual as he pinned her with his stare, hitting his point home.

"Ok, ok. I have heard of you Device and your apparent autonomy. Very impressed to be hounded by the likes of you. If I had known your title I'm sure my manners would have been more formal upon our first meeting" she seemed to have a tinge of what appeared a bit jocular but sounded sincere enough. She smiled showing off a glowing pair of white teeth amongst soft pink lips.

She continued, "I must grab something and I'll be back in a moment." Without waiting for his response she turned and disappeared into the entrance to her craft.

Device stood watching, intrigued by the girl's personality and unexpected twists and turns. So personable...so not what he would expect but there *was* something unexplainable about her.

After a short moment she was back and out of the corner of his eye he could see the tendons in her hand slightly strained holding something small that was covered by her closed palm.

She faced him again and with her clenched hand she pointed off to his side, slightly behind him and said, "Look! What's that?"

He felt meticulously directed to turn his head but stay otherwise in place and he did so. There, slightly over his shoulder he could see she had opened her hand and held a written message for him to read. The note said that he should trust her and that he should speak nothing aloud of her message and change out of his uniform when she asked him to and that she would explain later.

He felt compelled to do as she asked, her intentions were strong in his mind and he liked puzzles. He played along, "Yes, I see that. Amazing what you'll find on the Fallow Plateau."

Her face became a mild look of concern and she continued the conversation, "I will tell you my story on one condition. Your title and reputation is a bit overwhelming and I get jumpy and your big fancy Vision uniform just plain makes me nervous. I am a humble human and I feel we aren't on the same terms here. I want to talk to a person, not a uniform. Do you have anything more casual? All that brass just throws me off." She laughed nervously. "I'll brew us some hot liquid and be here waiting."

Device had an inquisitive look in his eyes but he agreed and went to change at his ship. He put on a regular pair of casual pants and a thin black sweater that was part of his off duty wardrobe. He was wondering if she was trying to play a mind game on him. He concluded she counted on him not being all she'd heard about but really couldn't be sure what the end game was, yet.

When he arrived back she had left the entrance to her craft open for him to enter. It was relatively small compared to the large vessels of the

galaxy but comfortable enough for one or two people to stay during long distance travel.

He sat on a small plush couch that he could tell could fold out into a bed. Rezrae sat across from him on a chair with drinks between them to accompany the newest phase of their acquaintance. Her expression was different now, more intent and wiser.

She began with a faraway look, "There was a game once called Chess that you could say often mirrored the odd struggles of life. The King was surrounded by his pawns, or pieces shall we say, who were charged to barrier and protect him and the King depended on the pawns feeling more self-important by their association to said King as to never question the power they were under, to feel so safe under the royal umbrella as to never shed their righteousness, perhaps even seeing a privilege in dying for him."

The young woman he now saw speaking before him seemed completely different than the card he'd just conversed with. He studied her closely and her words were fast and smooth as her thoughts formulated lucidly.

"I will share my story with you this day but not before possibly shedding some light on your own."

Device was taken aback slightly, "If this is some lumping in of myself with what you know of The Vision then save your precious breath within this thin excuse for an atmosphere. I am not them nor do they command me. I am unfettered and answer to myself. On the contrary, they need me."

Without even blinking Rezrae carried on, "The pawns are always clamouring to be the special one representing the power they could wield, so much so, they can become blind to their subservience, almost proud of it." She swept her long pale yellow hair out of her blue green eye and seemed to choose her next words more carefully. "Then... there is an even lower trick designated for the ones that the sick are most afraid of. Saved for those who could engulf them in their own estimation. Tell

someone they are the King when they are just a pawn and like the puppet master watches its doll dance, decides upon and changes their fate as they see fit, or just manipulate till all energy is spent."

He could feel her focusing in on him as the mentioned pawn in her projected story, her thoughts rang loud and clear as she voiced her syllables.

"So you are saying that you, the *great* Rezrae Devon have decided I am a pawn from your grand wealth of knowledge and wisdom," he scoffed. He'd almost had enough of her condescension.

She squinted her eyes into slits and looked down her nose at the commander, not backing down an inch, "Your type, always dealing only in your facts and science and honed perceptions, never wondering what is there perhaps not in the realm of the naked eye."

She plowed into him with her next words, "You my friend are *not* alone. I'm going to venture and say you are not The Watcher but very much the watched. I'm thinking another wears your title proudly. Oh, I know I'm not pompous and didn't impress you much but thought I'd do you a favour with my airy fairy dreamworld and all and let you know I very distinctly could tell I was talking to two individuals when we met. I could *feel* him or her.

"And before you shut me out here's the punch line and you can accept the help or scoff and exit as you wish, no protest on my part," she softened her voice knowing she was saying brutal words, "but I'm sorry to tell you that you are a pawn and are very much being observed minute to minute, I believe through a recording apparatus on your uniform somewhere upfront." Rezrae's demeanour lightened even more, "When you changed out of uniform it confirmed it; I could no longer feel that *other* presence. The great anomaly is someone's toy or experiment or God knows what."

She looked down with a tinge of sadness washing over her, "The depths this group goes to just astounds me and I'm sure I haven't scratched the surface."

Device was stunned and remained silent looking at her human features while pondering. He took in what she said again in his mind's replay. He would have to check into the validity of her claim but it distinctly struck a chord as it would answer one lingering question he'd jostled with in his mind over and over and never fully resolved for himself.

Why would a terrified power hungry group like The Vision give him, an outsider of sorts, something so out of character for them, something to the effect of full autonomy? Especially as his childhood was quite the reverse, being a chaotic mess of tests and prodding?

Time passed as he looked over the idea meanwhile never taking his eyes off her very pleasing face. He started to feel a sense of relief, began to get accustomed to the ever-looming possibility. Could they have played upon his self-importance and won themselves a pawn?

Their technology was so advanced it could have been built right into the suit fibres to blend as just another strand to any observant eye. He couldn't say for certain yet but he knew one thing for sure, he may have become Rezrae Devon's newest fan.



Chapter Six

Hollywand



He is quite beautiful in a male alien sort of way, I have to admit. Very tall with skin that is almost leaning towards a type of faded charcoal black but seeming bright nonetheless. His eyes shine a deep green. Device's features aren't dissimilar to human but are more chiseled, the angles more emphasized, like something we may have drawn in a superhero comic. Maybe a tad bit unappealing due to all that stuffy logic clouding his personality but overall a most intriguing turn of events.

This leader, so inquisitive like a dry sponge thrown into a lake, hungry for answers. It is like he was wound up early and now possesses a drive unrelenting. It would be almost terrifying to be searched out by someone like him but I can sense a goodness lurking that is undeniable.

Upon reiterating his request to have me share more of my story, I oblige, but not after letting him know that he is surely not alone. He could disbelieve me but I know an officer of his intelligence level will investigate further and I'm afraid he'll find the proof. Very sadly, the joke is on him.

He seems to collect himself from whatever my offered intel makes him experience. "I will look into what you've said. Now, tell me how you arrived here from Earthen."

I tell him about my father and how I had been helping him advance technology, especially on the defence front due to looming threats. When I arrive to the part of my tale about Daffodil and why it was I'd survived, I can tell he is startled and I feel it is the exact second time I've

made an impression on him, the first being when he'd inspected the possible truth of my statement that he in fact wasn't the real Watcher.

"You are telling me that your tiny craft here is indestructible to atomic fission?" He leans over to the inside of her hull, raps on her side, looks closely at her surface, "But...how?"

I can tell he's never heard of anything like it. Despite being light years ahead in so many aspects, The Lazeren Quadrant obviously is still subject to an atomic attack just like everyone else. Something that could rip through atoms, a basic building block of matter is no small foe. I've seen it up close and personal.

"I will not even start trying to explain it at this time but I am living proof; Daffodil and myself know what it feels like to be the debris of an atomic blast, except I live to tell about it." I know nothing really of his full plans in seeking me out though I highly suspect he wants to fix things that are wrong with the worlds and in any case he'll likely never even believe how I made the material, even if I told him. I continue, "Perhaps one day I will tell you the secret to being impervious to atomic war on a material level and you will then be the exact second individual to know it, as far as I can tell."

Device is in deep thought, "If in fact this knowledge exists, do you realize discussing this so casually could get you tortured or worse? Do you have any idea what extent the truly corrupt would go to for what you claim to carry?"

I smile at what I believe is my new friend. I think he does possess a heart! "Do not be concerned about me. Those who play only in the physical have no way of coercing someone like myself with their methods, I'm a slippery eel of sorts!"

He looks slightly concerned and I figure what I said just flew right over his head. "You haven't been to Velice, the ice cap born from minds in the depths of hell. They will go to no end to test and find your limits, they have ways of putting you in the deepest freeze while sustaining your functions enough to keep you pushing on, going on sheer survival instincts

to take just another breath. They can make time seem endless." His light eyes darken with brewing hatred. "I could have killed the handlers I was able to get hold of, but then what? You must get within to know what it is you are even dealing with to even know what is there to fight. What I've seen thus far has been unpleasant at best."

It's the first time I have seen resentment in his face when discussing those he's associated with, The Vision. I grow to understand more of him just through his last statement. He has seen such evil, is now a party to it and doesn't have a clear path anywhere.

My body warms as I look him over, someone physically superior and mentally astute growing outraged with what he was seemingly bred for. He is not just aesthetic on the outside but when he really speaks from his depths he actually somewhat astounds me. I sit soaking him in.

He notices but doesn't shift his gaze, just observes my flush. I guess I'm not bad for a human specimen. I wonder what he sees other than a mirror of my face, perhaps my paler skin is sort of hideous to his likely pigmented bronzed woman. Would be a shame. I'm not about to go delving into that head right now.

I break the silence, "Velice may come in very handy someday. This universe works in strange ways and sometimes it gives you what you need on a silver platter. "

Device takes in what I'm saying and I can see he knows I won't explain, so doesn't even bother. He reveals, "I am getting some rebel leaders summoned to Embarko though I haven't formulated anything firmly yet."

I openly laugh at his desperation as I've lived with it for too long myself. "If you are but a pawn as I mentioned earlier, then the likes of rebels with inferior resources and technology are not even dust motes in the estimation of The Vision. Why do you think I've been running around gathering any information I can? The question is how do you get to the jugular of something so exalted they consider the usual chain of life just

some distracting detail they must yet keep oppressed so they can caress their own seats of power and hatred?"

He sees where I'm going with my words. I notice a look of revelation coming over his handsome face, "You mean to say do as I'm doing, become ever more trusted and gather intel until I know enough to dismantle something...anything." He's getting warmer. "Well yes but let me entertain you with a story of Hollywood. Hollywood, planet Earthen, just a speck in the desert but the hub of culture. Do you know who some of the highest paid and most sought out Earthen's were? They were the artists and actors of Hollywood."

I pause, letting my mind drift back to the times I visited those sunlit streets with my father.

"Even the most corrupt could be found enamoured with Hollywood's singular talents and beauties, even if just to use them and drain them of all their potential life. You are already embarking on the plan almost as though by second nature, but now I must also become a consummate actress and take on the ultimate role." I smile at him while his face manifests a mild state of perplexity.

He gets what I'm saying exactly. "They will never ever accept you, no matter how charming or intelligent you are," Device says flatly.

"Oh yes they will. I have something they would do anything for once they see it exists and I can withstand more than you know."

I can tell by the dark dance upon his eyes that he thinks he'll be taking me to meet my makers. I'll have to somehow convince him that I'm the least he should worry about in this great game of evil plotting.

I say very directly with utter aplomb, "Go see if what I told you is true. If it pans out then you are just going to have to trust me. My biggest challenge is having the stomach for what I will be a part of, the rest is secondary. It's one thing to fight them, quite another to join them for the greater long term outcome, come what may. A lot of innocent people will get hurt, they'll be sacrificed like lambs to slaughter of the most vicious

kind and the blood will flow and minds will be played with, but what other option exists?"

I can see him looking at me, yet through me and he knows skilled treachery bleeding into the ranks is a way to dismantle fixed ways otherwise impenetrable. I can hear his thoughts ever so dimly now as I am less impatient and less taken aback by him and he's slightly alarmed; he's just hoping what I say about my ability to stand up to what is to come is even partly true. He is desperate and this is the first way he can see that may generate progress. I sigh, satisfied, as he shifts his weight and arises to go and configure a plan to check the validity of my theory regarding his actual position. I feel we are in for a hell of a ride but what do we really have to lose?



Chapter Seven

Dark



As I feel him move away from me a sense of vacant sadness washes over me. He may have felt a certain warmth towards me but soon I fear he will neither recognize me nor care to associate with me. I know how I can morph. I will become all he questions. I will use this life to give the past greats of Hollywood a run for their money in the name of something that may wipe out a wretched system. I know I'll be tested to turn on him likely as well, and I'll provide the appropriate responses, whatever it takes to strike at the heart of this operation and to convince. When there is nothing to lose you can really play to win.

Come to think of it, I must do *anything* I feel it requires and I'm sure I won't even want to face my own self once I am done becoming the enemy. My heart will ache until I numb it and I will quell it with only the deeply rooted flicker of hope that perhaps with my knowledge and skills I can someday get close to and murder the heart of the devil. It feels almost like the prostitution of a soul, selling oneself to be used, bargaining with one's own ideals in a game where the stakes are just too high. I want to vomit at the prospect of where my tomorrow will take me. If anyone could dangle a carrot I can, I have a shield to nuclear fission. To a madman this would be like winning the lottery, this was the only in to meet the monster.

I think of Device now likely entering his ship and know that once he emerges again he will not know the real me for what may be quite some time. Hopefully he won't omit to recall the sweetly pervasive human he'd once met.

Well here I go. I'm going dark.



Chapter Eight

Stranger Methods



It seemed like hours passed before he exited from the craft that loomed in the distance. She was effortlessly poised and ready, taking in the greenery. Her once feminine frame seemed more structured and rigid.

As he approached the look in his eyes was one of being both concerned and perplexed at what he seemed to now have discovered. Rezrae could tell he'd dug and found something that backed up her suspicions. She could feel a type of disenchantment coming off of him, almost like a sad song on an equally miserable occasion. She saw a twinge of what could be described as humanity in his eyes. She would miss him. And she suspected she would pine for her old self back as well.

Her heart twinged once more deep down, knowing she may possibly lose the chance to ever know him. Her voice broke the breezy silence, "Well now that we have spoken I feel confident that we want the same things, your people and I, that is. I've never been much for brotherly sentiment but I can see a potentially beneficial relationship."

He looked at her and noticed she seemed like a completely different person, someone he'd never even spoken to. It was chilling to witness what seemed like the life draining from her, replaced by fierce ambition. Her deep eyes were in slits barreling into his head as she spoke in rounds, not words.

"As you can see, I'm not back in uniform yet..." his sentence trailed off as he noticed her eyes looking darkly vacant as though she had no clue what he was talking about. Rezrae was nowhere to be found it seemed, just a ruthless spark stood before him.

Her hair shone in the now midday light and her face of innocence contrasted the intense masked hatred that brewed behind her aquamarine pupils. He felt a twinge of loss as he studied her. In that moment he realized the level of desperation of the situation and the follow through she was willing to exert, he could almost hear her thoughts, *do what is necessary at any cost. And let's be done with it.* It was obvious that Rezrae was getting into character, so to speak.

Device went ahead to discuss their next rendezvous point. Per the earlier mention of Hollywand she was somehow to be escorted back in a believable fashion to The Vision, perhaps as a more sinister version of herself. Looking over the situation, he wanted to position her as an ally carrying valuable information. He knew his insistence would pull weight as to her treatment but he never underestimated the reaction that may be levelled at her, out of fear or just sheer malice.

They'd also agreed to have The Cloaker tag along as Rezrae felt he had much to offer and due to their telepathic ways, she'd urged that he would be very useful in helping bolster her intended future position. He had connections that could be a bargaining chip on their own as well.

When Device had heard her plea regarding The Cloaker he couldn't help but get a slight jolt at the notion that they could end up communicating and plotting without any traceable physical connection. He was slightly unnerved by it but put it aside as mildly absurd, though her arrival to the Fallow Plateau did weigh heavily in her favour.

"Before you get into your awaiting uniform I'd like to state my views on your decision to acquire rebels by use of your men," Rezrae referred to his rough plan. Device waited for her to continue, much more receptive to her input than he had been previously.

"I suggest you call your officers back if they haven't yet arrived to extract the dissidents and that we go in their stead. They may be handy later but waltzing in and roughing them up with soldiers from The Vision will kill our chances of gaining true support. Especially now that we have *we* versus just yourself. Men of free will always fight more intelligently than

resentful guns raised to a shaky cause they have felt betrayed by from the outset.”

He looked over her latest suggestion and after a pause nodded, “If I can maneuver this new twist, it may assist me to cover the tracks of the discussion I had with some soldiers on Embarko, which I’m sure has now been noted. Luckily I was in a debrief suit when I discussed some of my intentions with Tentacle, our universal supercomputer, though really she could be called a higher intelligence of sorts.” He smiled slightly thinking of her personality.

Rezrae never missed a beat, “Based on your reputation and the line of work you appear to be in, I’d suggest angling it that you were doing a covert experiment to see how fast loyalty can be swayed and the factors involved.” She raised an eyebrow cynically at her dark insight.

“Be careful Rezrae Devon, you don’t want my mind going dull from all the thinking you are attempting to do for me,” said the commander with a look of pleasant annoyance across his dark features. “I’ll admit that’s a good idea and you seem especially keen in your understanding of the mindset of the masters of The Lazaren Quadrant. I’ll come up with something I’m sure. See you shortly outside.” With that, he swiftly exited the room.

She was used to people giving into her logic so easily she rather enjoyed his push back at her attempts to run the show. She spent some time tidying up and almost as though she was seeing her friend before her with her eyes she became aware of The Cloaker lingering outside the ship.

As she came to the entrance there hovered the spectre with a twinkling look of feigned innocence. “Why hello Miss Rezrae, going somewhere?”

She couldn’t help but adore his crafty ways, ready to service anyone that could give him things he found valuable.

“Your timing is impeccable. Ready for a journey?” she said knowing all too well he was.

The ghost spun around lifting off the ground he was already hovering over, "I'm more than ready and I packed light!" He was jovial and seemed relieved that his future may hold a chance to select a form of his choosing tailor-made to his desires.

"Don't get too excited yet, you play with The Vision and there'll be a price. It may cost you your soul."

The ghoul scoffed at her in good fun and sent her a thought *I think I sold my soul long ago!* With that he spun again doing a victory dance of sorts as his shifty robes flowed in celebration.

Device, back in his ship, pondered how to cover up his falsity with regards to his conversation on Embarko. He didn't know the boundaries these new parameters laid out and what the end game was when it came to his activities but he felt fortunate to have learned the truth. There would be a discrepancy between his interrogation with the officers and what he told Tentacle in his debrief. Though he was relieved the informants were rather vague and unspecific in their knowledge and as he scoured his memory he realized he hadn't said much on his end. He was a man of few words, however usually the right words.

Based on Rezrae's suspicion he'd earlier reached to Tentacle to search for any encrypted or hidden files relating to him and she had in fact found an enormous data base in one of her network's nether regions that resided at headquarters which in fact pointed to recordings of him. She didn't actually crack the code so as to keep their activity under the radar but it was a piece to a larger puzzle it seemed. It didn't frighten him as frankly he knew they were the ones afraid of Device. Why else would someone covertly be watching him?

He'd had enough foresight to stay clear of any potential recording gear before asking her to scour her off site database, in case it panned out. The commander had felt somewhat strangely relieved to pinpoint this ominous form of evil, directed even to him, and strangely it eased his mind a bit that he was in fact a separate entity from his disdainful em-

ployers. He kept telling himself that as he went about his duties but he was beginning to feel more genuine in his conviction.

He had now put his uniform back on and was poised in his next move, "Officer Zed come in," he announced into the handheld apparatus. A crackling came over the speakers and the man on the other end responded, "Yes sir I am here. On schedule for arrival. We're a bit over halfway to Glog." Zed's voice sounded weary but enthusiastic.

"Very good. I'm however redirecting your mission. I have changed my course of action based on new information obtained and a new ally." Device spoke his usual bullet form of persuasion, "It will all make sense later but for now I'm going to have to deny the crew the joy of roughing up rebels."

There was a slight pause on the other end from the officer of the ship hurtling through space, "Of course sir. What would you like us to do now?"

"I'd like you to go back to home base and debrief on our last five stops. However, regarding our landing on Embarko, mark it as in progress as I'm not finished with that one. It may be more than first met the eye. I will meet you on Verien soon." There, now he'd have a new report given that would back up the fact of the odd conversation on the outpost.

He hardly waited for a response before disconnecting. The commander was already planning ahead on how he would approach the rebel leaders on Glog. After running several scenarios through his head, each ending with the forces viewing him as a hostile execution arm of The Vision, he decided that wasn't the next step at all.

For all his ability to predict he never could have imagined a turn of events such as encountering such allies. The irony was almost laughable; nuclear fission, being something apparently beyond control, now a thinly plausible as to a solution. Hopefully this was a new trend of resolving stagnant conditions.

He thought of the red wicked slits for eyes that would barrel into him questioningly when he introduced Rezrae to Serpid, the head of The Vision's inner counsel. Serpid was always directing morbid psychological experiments between species and types of intelligence levels with varying skill sets and he sincerely hoped that Serpid would be more intrigued by the pull towards knowledge of nuclear fission over the human's value as a lab rat.



Chapter Nine

The Beginning Of Liberation



Daffodil's Quest Log Entry 4003

Before today I couldn't even really feel anymore. All I seemed to know was aching numbness of self. Over my countless lives I have not always been just or good but I have always carried my conscience. It was bruised and torn but intact. I had lost the closeness of others, those I cared for. It was my burden to bear alone, until today.

The sensation that someone was on the other end, that in this dismal world of gloom, that I could yet feel myself resting calmly near a pool of quiet serene bays. Bays made up of friends swirling around my head and comforting me. Here in this moment of time, I believe this meeting has not made me weaker through volatile human emotion, but has indeed strengthened my insistence on lasting.

I am not my form but only my resolve.

Love Rez.

She always signed off with that last quote. She thought if perhaps she ever wrote an account of her life she would surely end it with those words she lived by. When she had left the spectre to go to her chambers within the craft it was as if the adrenaline had finally worn off and it hit her as to what had transpired as well as the road ahead.

She re-examined the last several hours spent and saw it was not entirely impulsive at all but yet not planned either. If urged to imagine, she still wouldn't have been able to replicate what this feeling was washing over her in waves. It felt like a type of love, dedication, timidity and bravery poised sharply to thrust forward towards the future.

Her log of predictions and events of note turned into evidence that she had been struck by lightning. Her skin was not charred and her brain was not fried but the voltage hanging fire within her made her feel as though a wire bouncing off the ground live. If her abilities could be used to help ease suffering then this was the vessel... here was a taxing but certain way.

He was *brave* and he could see enough to take the risks necessary to try to defeat the enemy of the natural order of life. She would never forget his courage and his decision to include her on the battlefield, by his side.

She was feeling overwhelmingly loyal to him and could experience it now innately; it couldn't have been wiped out with any force at hand. Her allegiance was complete and it happened seemingly in a blink. When they connected she could no longer pretend this was her own quest; she had stumbled upon an awakening of sorts. An intense brotherhood of the most urgent nature.

The traits others would be startled by within her were the very source of fuel to take her into the next phase. She didn't need to spend copious amounts of time to know her next move nor who her allies were, she trusted her perceptions and acted upon them.

Rezrae stood up and looked at herself in the mirror. Her own eyes staring back at her burned like she'd never seen before. They glowed like the beautifully treacherous sun of Earthen, warm from a distance but searing in close proximity.

She looked at her youthful form and liked what she saw. She very much admired the human form and hoped that one day she could somehow bring children into the world through the vessel of her body. Even a human with partial genes of an Earthen was still more than her race would ever hope to have, as the tally now stood.

Enough of the mental escape, she thought to herself. Time to prepare for her espionage into the ranks of The Vision. She felt invincible and eternal and certainly felt she was no small foe.

After neatening herself up in her room and preparing for her journey she went back outside to see how things had progressed. She saw The Cloaker several hundred yards away apparently enjoying the scenery while he awaited their next move.

Device hadn't emerged yet to her knowledge so she decided to go explore his ship further. She glided smoothly over the lush terrain with reinforced vigour.

His ship was a darkened colour of faded black. She walked along the length of it and ran her hand down the hull. She could ever so minutely see a shift of hue to darker where she contacted the frame before it seemed to adjust back to its original likeness. It had a larger quantity of motion amongst its particles, she deemed, than usual inanimate objects yet wasn't quite alive. Curious.

As though on cue, Device came outside, "You are touching the pure element we have named feathian. It is in its expanded state currently."

"I thought I noticed a shift with the heat of my hand", Rezrae said with a satisfied smile. She was more stern as he was in officer gear but managed to expel a softness that was still unmistakable.

"The fact you could notice that subtlety with such minor external heat applied is actually quite impressive, your vision must be immaculate."

"I have better perception of motion than quality of eyeballs. I wouldn't trade in my orbs however if I depended on those alone I'm afraid I may be lost indeed!"

His brows furrowed mildly as he made sense of her language. He'd never heard ideas like this expressed in regular conversation as though a banal thought one just tossed out. If he could have begun to explain his sight to someone he may have started there...

He chose his next sentence carefully, "If all members of your race were even half as sharp as you appear to be I'm surprised they didn't meet a more positive fate." He felt odd broaching a touchy subject but had concluded in his ship he wouldn't pull punches when it came to how

and what he discussed. She needed to proof up for the venture ahead and where she was going the only person of concern was the one with the upper hand.

Her lit face sunk slightly as her eyes trailed the grass below. “We definitely had some brilliant individuals but our enemies were more organized and powerful. That’s my take on it.” She swept a graceful hand again over the craft and looked at it with fascinated aqua eyes.

“I see,” he said, “that seems to be a dominating issue even far past Earthen.”

She sniffed knowingly, “The one who stands to tell the story depends not on who is right or wrong, but upon who made it out. I know your species wants to survive and I can be of service.” As she looked at him intently he was reminded that they were engrossed in the mission and that they would from here on assume their roles.

They noticed The Cloaker was making his way towards them. “So where are you taking me?” The ghost played dumb knowing the game was on and that he would need to appear much less in tune than he was. He looked at the commander while his robes jostled nervously.

As if to remind them of his authority his voice spoke in no uncertain terms, “I have called off the capture mission to Glog. To defeat internal dissension we have more tools in our arsenal now with the likes of you. We have much information to explore. In fact, in examining this further, I believe that a visit to the planet Verien is in order, headquarters of the Lazeren Quadrant and seat of The Vision.

Rezrae and the ghoul leaned in closer. The Cloaker seemed to be tuned in already though he wasn’t present physically for the conversation earlier about the apparatus. The commander wasn’t easily getting used to the perception of telepathy amongst his companions. Or maybe she’d filled him in while Device was at his vessel. Maybe...

They would set out shortly and Rezrae would be granted an audience upon arrival. In Device’s head he really couldn’t lay out a plan as it was unpredictable as to what reaction would occur. They would have to go

there with the knowledge his companions possessed and see where it led.
It was flimsy but the ghoul and the girl seemed up for it.



Chapter Ten

Serpid



They decided to set course to Verien and convoy, with the commander's ship in lead. The ghost would travel with Rezrae.

As part of preparations for the flight, Device had gotten out of uniform once more and issued them a last warning before lift off. Meeting Serpid, the lead influence within The Vision, would be unpredictable at best. He verified again that she was willing to go, come what may, as once she was in their hands he wouldn't be able to have full control to protect her without exposing any dissonance to the order.

"I can take care of myself. I need you to *please* drop the concern over this, you can't compute at optimum worrying," she said in a sagely voice.

He looked over what she said and felt better for the moment. "I respect that and you are right. My only last advice is do not underestimate Serpid. He is the type of creature that will put a genius, a thug and a lunatic in the same room, leaving them to starve, to see the outcome of who fares best and winds up the victor through means of necessity and cannibalism.

"He's the type fascinated with morbid experiments such as whether brute force wins over intelligence and has no concern for consequences, and that's him on a good day," Device's voice hinted disdain.

The ghoul held himself poised over the ground and tittered nervously, "Perhaps I'll hold out on my custom-made body, yikes! Where in the hell are you taking us?" He looked at Rezrae with a half joking look of terror but in her head she could tell he was a little more disturbed than

he let on. He'd seen a lot but he'd never been to their headquarters, obviously.

The Cloaker ventured a question, "So how does this Serpid take to outsiders? Will we even get past the front door?"

Device paused with a crooked expression on his full dark lips, "As I mentioned, we're on very shaky ground, he likes experimenting with various types of minds and bodies. But, on a more positive note, he also seems open to aliens for the purpose of sex and food or both, so you may find a cozy welcoming."

Rezrae could have sworn he had just cracked a joke. She may have witnessed a small miracle.

The ghost jumped back, his flamboyant moments almost reminding her of a cheeky gay man named Vince she'd befriended in her early space travels.

She laughed, "Don't worry my friend, you don't have enough protein substance in your current form to feed a bird!"

The spook raised his eyebrows in trepidation but couldn't help but crack a grin at her morbid humour.

The commander watched the interchange and a mild outpouring of respect washed over him. It was as though she wasn't phased at all by the info... impressive.

Before they lifted off Rezrae had ascertained a few other key pieces of intel she would need. She wondered if her companions wondered about her very specific questions, seemingly hinting she almost had a plan. So far the plan was to let Device do all the talking.

Based on the answers, their security was interesting to say the least. Once one was in the Chamber, as they dubbed it, with Serpid present, no one could come or go unless the leader transmitted a specific code command only he knew and it wasn't a generally known fact how it was conveyed either.

By the quick description given earlier upon prying, it sounded like a medieval court atmosphere around him, where he either examined the

various offerings from other planets or devised how their race would get ahead, though it seemed they dominated most parts of any equation.

Once she'd lifted off she put the ship onto automatic pilot mode and laid back to relax and tune into whatever she could locate of Serpid. Device had given her the information of distance and co-ordinates for ship navigation but he would have been startled at the extent of it.

Serpid felt *reptilian* she was sure of it. There was nothing ever mentioned regarding this aspect of the ruler but she could sense his skin and temperature from a distance. She kept her attention on him and it appeared he was at rest as nothing much was happening in his vicinity, mental or otherwise.

She concentrated a bit harder trying to enter his mind and as though awoken from a nightmare the air around the serpent vibrated with a hiss of terrified anger. Her spiritual presence had caused an electrical disturbance around him.

The creature's head tilted in the direction from which she focused on him from above his bed and then suddenly and severely came what she felt was a high pitch scream of air as he sent a jolt of electrical energy at her, sending her recoiling and in a flash, snapped back to her body in the ship.

He was somewhat sentient to notice her, she thought. This posed a problem. Evil and extended ability were never a great mix.

She more deeply rested and let her mind drift to ideas of what she imagined Verien to look like architecturally. She recalled science fiction movies in her childhood where Earthens attempted to depict faraway advanced planets. On her route to pinning down Serpid, she'd gotten a vague impression of tall structures but hadn't focused in, wanting to be surprised and delighted.

The planets she had visited of recent were generally rural working colonies under the yolk of another, thus she'd seen a lot of poverty and disease but very little opulence.

She replayed the stated plan mentally again and again adding in new equations of her various responses and scenarios based on the limited info she had. How to get an evil lizard to trust one? Does evil truly trust? She thought not. She'd have to convince him of her value to his twisted causes. She'd have to outsmart him enough to make him fear and respect her and then be of value to him. She wasn't dealing with the types with a warm heart, this was a cold-blooded murderer and sadist with a lot of subjects to play with.

The journey seemed shorter than expected and it was likely due to the company of the ghost. He was low maintenance as he wasn't quite physical but definitely livened up the atmosphere. His sardonic pleas of fear as to what they were getting themselves into, seemed to ease any actual tension as to the mission at hand.

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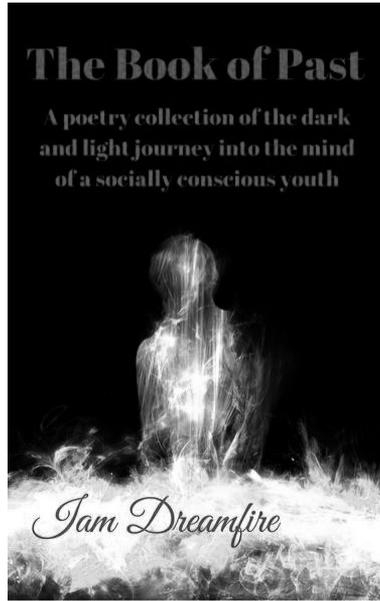
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About the Author

I'm hardcore on human rights and I do what I can to improve society. I enjoy writing as a creative outlet. I throw intimate aspects of myself out there when I share my work and appreciate readers who are willing to do the same to be a part of the journey and perhaps we'll have lived a little more and with a higher level of beauty in our existence.

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