

Conscious Monsters

He had followed the insect a long way. It wasn't his duty to directly hunt down a target, even as a frontline commander this would have better been executed by a better-trained commando, but there was something else in that insect's behaviour, the way it moved, the way it acted. Jonah decided he'd be the one to hunt down that krelan. Krelans had been at war with humans for a very long time, a few decades, they'd strike from the unknown at colonies, take entire colonies down and mysteriously vanish into the darkness again, but now he had a chance to capture a krelan alive, maybe.

After hours of chase the krelan finally stopped, turning around to stare at Jonah. Krelans were scary things, four-legged, large and full of spikes, insect-like beasts, hunters of the dark void. "I got you know..." except Jonah knew there was more to them "Come on, tell me, who are you?"

The bug simply hissed in return, moving sideways slightly, readying for a pounce. Jonah didn't flinch.

"Stop that, i've heard you, back there are the village" Jonah pointed his rifle at it, but there was no intention to shoot.

The krelan hissed at him, but unlike what one would expect, it stood up on it's hind legs, and as it stood it clenched it's foreclaws, the spikes in it's back and arms folding down like a relaxed porcupine "No words, fight me" the voice had a light clicking sound to it, but the speech was impeccable.

"I won't" Jonah kept the gun trained in it "You speak my language, let's talk"

"We are enemies, we hunt you. Hate me, loathe me, fight me." the krelan growled.

"Why?" the more the krelan insisted, the less Jonah wanted to fight "You demand we fight, when we could reason"

"You will-" Jonah interrupted him "SHUT UP! You owe me some respect! For all your people have done! You are not mindless!" he shouted as loud as he could "You invade defenseless outposts, you kill, you kidnap. Yet you ALWAYS hesitate. You keep your fleets at bay, hit only the fringes when you could easily take us all if you wanted!" he moved closer "So why? Why do YOU fight?"

"We hunt your weak, we terrorize your people, we capture your females to use as hosts for our eggs" the krelan looks straight at Jonah's eyes "Why? Why must nature-" Jonah speaks, almost in synch with the krelan "-give monsters a conscience"

Jonah simply drops his rifle to the ground as the krelan closes his eyes, relaxing his stance "We are parasites, we use you as we must. We are enemies. Do not make this harder for us, hate us, for we are monsters"

"Heh... Why do you need us? You'd think with as advanced as you are, you'd have machines for that, you travel the stars with greater ease than we do, you wield foldspace weapons with mastery unlike that which we can"

"Advanced? You think us advanced?" Jonah could feel the amused tone of the krelan's voice "We travel the stars with the gift of our blood, we can control foldspace with our bodies. But we are not advanced, we can scarcely make space-worthy ships, it takes a hundred of us to move a ship. Have you notice we wield as weapons only what our bodies give us?" Jonah was taken aback "Do you know why we hit only your outposts? The fleet you have seen is all we have, our entire species lies in that small fleet, to get in contact with your main host, it would be the end of us all" it walks closer to Jonah "We are not advanced, we are no terror like that which we made you believe we are"

Jonah was surprised, deeply so. That did not match what he knew of their numbers and movements but... That did, actually, weirdly match with certain things. The erratic movements, the way they struck... Another person wouldn't have thought the same, but Jonah couldn't feel anything but pity "Are there not other beasts out there which could be hosts?"

"No, nothing that could sustain us. We have found many beasts, yet most would die along

with the eggs. A small few would die as the eggs hatched, but there were too few to sustain the growth of our people. No, you humans are our only viable choice, your females don't die in the process and can be used again. And the worst, we are influenced by the host, the more we use beasts, the more animal we become... The more animal we become... The less we care for what we do..."

A sudden thought crossed Jonah's mind, he chuckles to himself, any other man would certainly not have a thought as such "If I told you that we have technology which allows the gestation of a child outside the body? Would you believe me?"

"Is that possible? Is that something real?" the krelan was truly surprised, Jonah could see the thoughts forming on it's head, and had to interrupt quickly before they got out of control

"Yes, yes it is. And if I gave it to you, would you leave this place, and find another place in the galaxy, far away from us?"

"If it works... When we prove it works. We will leave"

Diplomacy of Insanity

She looked out at the night sky as she drove the truck, giggling to herself like a schoolgirl "This is going to be awesome" she looked at the mirror to check herself, she had to look presentable.

The truck shook as something impacted the roof, bingo. A loud shrieking noise as the door was ripped aside, a krelan right at her face screaming bloody murder "Hi there" she said simply grinning, weren't she expecting this, she'd probably have panicked, but she knew Jonah too well.

The krelan was reactionless, for a moment it was clear it didn't know what to do, but then it quickly jumped into the ground, screaming at her again "Oh, quit it. Jonah sends me taking a truck with stuff out of a reproduction clinic, hell with illegal Iron Womb technology even, out in the middle of no-goddamn-where, and tells me to run at the first sight of danger" she hops down from the seat, looking at the krelan straight in the eyes "So tell me, did he make a deal with you about this?"

The krelan simply stared at her for a few moments, before standing on his hind legs again, assuming his upright stance "Leave here"

She raises an eyebrow "Lookit here, ladybug, whatever the hell Jonah's deal with you was, I expect you to need this tech. If you need this, you don't have something like this already, which means someone like me, who helped develop it, would be useful. So take me along"

"No"

"You don't have a choice here. If you're not taking me along, i'm doing something stupid so you need to kill me"

"You... You are insane" the krelan was actually scared at this point

"Yes, yes I am. I'm Lauren Woltz" she jumped back in the driver's seat "You have a name?"

Without much choice, the krelan simply slowly walks to the other seat, struggling with the door for a moment, then with the seat. With a loud roar it rips the seat away, tossing it aside and climbing in the space "Krasshen..." it looked at Lauren "Why?"

"Pfft, I swear... No doubt every army out there in the galaxy has GOT to have a dude like Jonah, can't believe he's gunna win this war by hugging his enemies to submission" she grinned to herself, then looking at Krasshen answers "Because i'm curious why you need reproduction tech, and hell i'm curious about how you guys live" she starts up the truck "Now where's your ship at?"

Meet the Queen

This wasn't Lauren's first trip to space, yet, it was certainly her first time doing this. Even though she was no space engineer, even she could see the shoddy quality of the krelan starship, for all intents and purposes it should never have been able to breach atmosphere. Yet, on the sheer

power of Krasshen's natural foldspace abilities, it made it's way to the stars. She noticed as the pilot became more and more tired the farther the ship went, the travel was very long and required Krasshen to rest many times. It was almost as if this ship was a bicycle.

Yet, they still made their way to their carrier "Wait here" Krasshen was very curt, and Lauren felt like there was a good reason for that so she waited. As he left the small ship she could feel the air thinning, and that worried her. After a moment he returns "There is no air between this ship and the airlock, take a deep breath and move fast"

He wasn't lying, the ship dock wasn't pressurized, nor did they have a pressurized path either. Thankfully, Krasshen could move her quickly enough as she was nearly out of breath by the time they made their way to the primary corridor. Taking deep breaths, she felt the taste of the deeply stale air, it was not even properly recycled, this ship would have never been accepted by human standards to begin with. The path Krasshen took her was strange and twisty, and at every step krelians would stare at her. She figured seeing a human following a kralian like this was certainly not a thing that happened with frequency, she noticed some averted their eyes, some were curious but gave them a wide berth as they walked, and also that they all stood in that tamer-looking upright pose within this ship, much unlike the menacing, spiked four-legged stance they always were when they attacked.

In the end, Krasshen took her to a large chamber, wires connected to a strange pod wherein a large krelian, carapace colored crimson instead of brown, easily three meters in height with accompanying bulk and girth, she could *feel* the distortion of the air as the large one used it's foldspace control ability. Lauren figured it was their queen, she couldn't help but grin to herself slightly as Krasshen and the queen started making clicking noises at each other.

"Come with us" Krasshen said, immediately moving towards the back of the chamber. The queen left the pod, going ahead of them, and they made their way to an inner chamber. It seemed to Lauren like a weird type of bedroom, there was a structure she could easily identify as a krelian bed, more fitting for their hard insect body, there were windows out to space and, as Lauren guessed, not a single electronic. By now she was sure they had not yet mastered electronics, yet here they were, in space.

"You are the human who asked to come" the queen's voice was strangely deep, but it managed to speak without having a trace of accent, Lauren was sure she had practiced much the human language "Why work so hard to come with us"

Lauren looked up at the queen "Your friend here was so excited about this fertility tech, the big reason you guys are kidnapping woman is for that very same purpose. You're the first aliens mankind has ever met in space, and hell i'm a pervert. I'm here to help you out with this, and hang around, I guess"

"You are strange... But I am thankful you are here" the queen sat down on the strange bed "Is it true that this technology of yours, the iron womb you say, can gestate a child outside the body?"

"Yep, it can alright. The steel vats simulate perfectly the human womb, down to the hormonal output. I figure if you guys already use humans as you do it shouldn't require too much work to adjust it for your needs"

"I... I am thankful... I will be careful, we will not move until we are sure this technology of yours works but, if it does... We will be forever in debt"

"You know, queenie, I didn't figure you guys would care about this... Hell, looking around it seems like a few of you don't even have courage to look at me. How come all this ended up happening?"

"We were peaceful once. A very, very long time ago we used to be a people that treasured culture and kindness, in our homeworld, the legend says, there used to be another species who lived in symbiosis with us, a long-forgotten beast who were used as hosts for our eggs... Our history is broken, but we know they are no more, we long sought a way around that, but we never could find it."

"The valkran era, huhn... We nearly killed our own species by not caring for our world, an era we called 'valkran era'. Seems like you lost far too much in yours... Actually it might last until now- Yes, no doubt... You are few now, right? Because you have not yet found a species that could be symbiotic to you like that, and you depend on them. Yet now you prey on humans for need, we are your best bet, even if we are much stronger than you can safely engage"

"Yes, but if your technology works... We will be freed of the shackles of nature, to depend on a machine which we can make many, it is better than depend on a people who'd easily kill us"

Lauren grinned to herself, this was certainly the work of a life "Well, then, queenie, time to start working, then. Show me where I can set up the lab, I need gene samples, I need volunteers for examination, let's get this show on the road, time for a revolution!"

Final Goodbye

Jonah looked up towards the sky from his bedroom's window. He had grown used to the telltale streaking in the sky, there was some lag but the signs of battles in the fringes always arrived here in the end. But not now, the sky was empty, filled only with stars. Maybe he did win this war after all. He put his head back on his pillow, gently grasping at the space in front of him, where she used to be, thinking of what he's lost to this fight.

He hadn't been able to sleep well for a long while. He nearly couldn't forgive himself for actually feeling empathy towards the people who took his wife, he felt guilty for allowing his best friend to be taken due to his insane plans.

"I don't drink" he said, sitting down on the couch as he couldn't sleep "I'm on the military so no drugs" he picked up a can of soda, opening it "I haven't slept well for months, but still... Why'd I have a waking nightmare about you, Lauren, instead of my wife?" he spoke to someone, yes. He knew she was there, right behind him. He noticed her reflection in the turned off TV as he sat down, it was Lauren alright, but she wore strange clothes, looked like a weird mockery of laboratory clothes over a type of leather-like suit.

"You do sound sleepy" Lauren replied

Jonah closed his eyes for a moment, and then looked to the side. His front door was closed, looking to the other side he saw the windows closed as well. That smell in the air, that sneeze-inducing smell. Telltale of foldspace technology being used in the presence of oxygen. With a little bit more attention, he could hear the very, very light pitter-patter "Seems like you've made friends"

Lauren walked over and sat on the couch, handing over to him a data disk "They're called Nest Ships, they're only two and they're leaving them behind when they go away. They're all there"

He simply picked up the disk

"They... They are broken, Jonah, but not irreparable. I've visited both ships, they're kept drugged, but those krelians aren't very advanced, it was very archaic..." she looks up "I've changed their treatment, added rikuvain, they're physically well..."

"Rikuvain, the oblivion drug. It causes temporary memory loss, or permanent depending on usage and dose"

"It was horrible, Jonah. The Nest Ships were awful places, not even the krelians liked stepping on them. But they were more than happy to learn of our medicine, make it better. We're all ready now"

"I thought you died that day"

"Nah, that Karsshien guy... I swear to god he's like your brother or something. Couldn't be a kinder soul."

"Poor him, then. Let's see 'If you don't take me along i'll give you a reason to kill me'?"

"You know me well enough, mister"

"Did they take the tech well?"

"Tech needed some adjustments, the Iron Womb didn't account for a few things present in

the eggs, nor the fact that their development depends on the hormonal and emotional state of the 'carrier'. It was an easy adjustment, but necessary. Good thing I was there”

“Guess luck still favors the kind” he had a strange grin “You sound like you're staying with them?”

Lauren picked his hand and put it over her belly. Joshua was still in a state of reverie, believing himself to be dreaming awake, but that action fully brought him to reality. He could feel it's size, he could feel something in there moving “They have their politics too. Many weren't willing to agree with the entire iron womb project. Their queen had swore off having a heir because she didn't feel right abusing our kind either. Having their leader support this is key, but the queen having no heir would have been a terrible idea”

“Did they-”

“Nope, it took me a lot of convincing to get her to agree to this. I don't mind, hell I like this. It's a sign the queen has not forgotten what they are, but is willing to change that, I guess.”

“Heh... I... How'd you do it? Go through all that?”

“Oh, those two were actually pretty kind and sweet, didn't even know what to do with themselves once I started pushing for it”

Joshua suddenly started laughing “Good heavens, Lauren. Hah!” he stopped to laugh a bit more “Of course, the deep-space horrors known to violently rape our women and use them as hosts for their eggs. Who else could make them feel awkward and self-conscious about their sexuality than the biggest pervert and most insane scientist of the entire human race?” he continued laughing for a long time

“Now you make me sound bad. We just won this war with this little action, give me some credit”

“Nope, i'm still going to picture them cowering from you in a corner with you looking like a sexual predator over them” he waited a bit until his laughter subsided “Still, you said those two?”

“Karsshenn, he was the 'father', if you can picture that. Anyways...” she stands up and starts heading towards the window “This is the last time we see ourselves, i'm going with them, getting everything set up. I've... Done what I could, now it's your turn, go rescue them”

“Don't worry” he took a sip of his soda “I will”

Two krelions came out of hiding nearby Lauren, in their upright stance, putting their hands against each other, they started to focus and create a foldspace gate “Nest ship number one, Jonah... That's where she is” and the three of them vanish through the gate as Lauren says her last words.