

Sexpocalypse

Part One

The Bearers

by

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## Table of Contents

[Chapter One: Chaos—the Only Constant](#)

[Chapter Two: God in the Details](#)

[Chapter Three: No Release](#)

[Chapter Four: A Fallen Priest](#)

[Chapter Five: The Serpent's Bride](#)

[Chapter Six: Nothing to Lose](#)

[Chapter Seven: The Table Turns](#)

[Chapter Eight: Blood is Life](#)

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## Chapter One

### *Chaos—the Only Constant*

*Oily smoke poured from the blazing mass of the recently dead. Riddled and putrid with a virus they'd fought since 2034, these piles were the latest to succumb. March 2036 had been a dazzlingly fatal month.*

*Mika Taylor's hazmat suit crinkled like cellophane as she scraped a sleeve across the bulky polyvidreo shield imbedded in the suit's safety helmet. She heard nothing nor smelled the foul odors surrounding the macabre scene. Her focus was on breathing; willing herself to do it slowly. In. Out. In. Out. The hell-hot suit did reek of fear, but Mika was used to that. As smells went, it was at least her own.*

*Breathe. In and out, just like normal people do every day. As if there were any normal people. Maybe there never were.*

*She was all too aware of the dangers. Passing out was not an option. Passing out was death. In. Out.*

*Silence inside the helmet wasn't really silence. There was plenty of conversation going on in Mika's head. Would it be the fowl who got her? Would hummingbirds feast on her eyes and roosters fight for her tender flesh? Or would they claim her and use her before they threw her away as just one more piece of carrion.*

*A quicksilver stab of pain shot through her arm. She staggered backward and tripped. Her last thought before her imminent death was the audible wing beats of a tiny beast with a ruby throat as the toxic air infiltrated the safety of her plastic cocoon.*

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Reality returned and she found herself gasping and disoriented. Fuck me, another

flashback. For a split second, relief almost stole her sanity before reality sank its claws into her soul. She pulled the chain beside her station and sat rigid.

By the time her leader, Charles appeared and asked, “The hallucination returns?” Mika had finally regained most of her composure.

It was rumored that Charles Gallagher had once been a priest. The past had an entirely different meaning now. Mika had only vague recollections of what a priest actually did. Before Hantera16, religion had made a slow and steady retreat in her young world. She understood, historically, what religion had meant, of course. She just had no concept of how a priest would serve any purpose in the world.

Still, he maintained control over the Bearers with a righteous vigilance if that meant anything. Mika had witnessed how quickly he punished Bearers. At times, she wondered if there was a deeper meaning to his efficiency. Her basic knowledge of the paths of most of the traditional religions she had studied had made her aware that each of them spouted sexual rules of all stripes. Maybe, if Charles had been a priest, it could account for his zealous regard for discipline.

Two humans among the minority to completely escape unscathed by the mutations, Charles and Mika dwelled in the tunnels linking their small communities together. She'd thought to ask him about the rumors many times. She wanted to know the world he had known because it was gone. But Charles seemed to want to keep that his own precious memory. There was never a 'right' time to bring it up.

Charles was a bit intimidating. Who could blame him? Monitoring the over-sexed group was what gave the flashbacks that still plagued her long after the many experimental vaccines had been tried on her. The Chamber was dedicated to keeping humans from mutation.

Her own life was so much more in control than it might have been, if no less desperate. The Bearers were survivors, like Mika and Charles and all the rest, but at what cost?

There had been a time when high contamination meant a quick and agonizing death in many places around the globe. Now, the air and food held less contamination but the bodies continued. They simply died slower. No one knew why.

It seemed like fewer people were dying. But that was only because there were fewer people left to die. Suicide was common place. It was easy enough to do just by walking outside. The Chamber refused to allow euthanasia until the final stages. So the mutations continued as the

survivors adapted.

Mika tapped the touchpad on the gravity light nearest her station to brighten things up a bit. It was an extravagance that Charles allowed her after an 'incident'. It seemed to help her regain her concentration and get back to work. She told Charles, “Yeah, I was too close to the fire—the edge—the fucking end again.”

When Mika used the word 'fuck' it always made Charles flinch. She meant it to. “Do you want me to run a test on your chip?” he asked.

Early in 2035, hygiachips had been implanted in the remaining population. When someone perished, the government was able to establish exact time, cause, and whereabouts of death. The information gathered from the 'hygiachips' led to the discovery that the Hantera16 virus was always mutating. Those scientists and computer wizards left alive were having a research field day with the data mine provided by the chips.

Health organizations across the globe had tried everything but the virus spread and mutated until plant life was unusable, and the air was saturated with the stench of unrelenting death. All the information in the world could not unlock the lethal organism's secret prescription for catastrophe on earth.

At first, a small minority were vocal in their belief that it was some sort of vengeful god scenario. Their numbers were already so small in the year 2034 that the last of them were killed or simply became silent.

Chips having already been implanted with all good intentions to track the deadly virus naturally became a source of control. It was horrifying, inevitable and a godsend at the same time. Now, the Chamber controlled the population with those same hygiachips.

And there was a large swath of the populace who desperately needed to be controlled. Mika didn't happen to consider herself one of them. The cocktail of anti-virals and vitamins and whatever else she was being given to keep her steady had their side-effects. It wasn't uncommon. There was a price to pay to protect oneself. It was the price of staying 'normal'

"I think it's fine, Charles." Mika shook her head. “I'll be okay.” As she stood to get her uniform, she asked him, “Have you gotten data from the new algae?”

“It was positive, but E-1 showed slightly lower levels. The mushrooms seem to work but they're very slow.”

E-1 was the sector where the Bearers lived and worked. Mika was their boss. She didn't

mind the work; at least the algae and the mushrooms were trying to live. That was the good part.

The Bearers were the uncomfortable part of the job. Just to start with they were jarring to look at. The pupils of their eyes surrounded their irises. Eyes that were exactly the color of thunderclouds in the center with a jet rim around them that contracted and expanded like a regular pupil.

They also held an eerie sensuality that permeated them even in the controlled state made possible through the hygiachips. Those were the chips Mika was grateful for. In her flashbacks the chips were all gone and the Bearers ruled. That would have been a special kind of hell.

While she dressed, a certain couple was on her mind . . . Eric and Eva. They had been matched and given the last name of Gunther. The remaining human population seemed to attach importance to names. Maybe it made the upside down world seem more normal. She knew full well that every being, including Mika Taylor was really just a number when it really counted.

She turned to Charles and reluctantly asked, “Did you tweak Eric Gunther's hygiachip yet?”

His lip curled as he nodded. "I agree that he's been acting a little bit more 'robust' than we'd like him to be. You should find him a little more manageable now." He busied himself with the computer and then, to her surprise, he said, “I've also tweaked yours, Mika. You've been moaning—or should I say purring—in your sleep. The sound has an unmistakable sensuality to it. That's another reason why I'm going to order a blood test.”

Mika's face reddened. She couldn't remember any dreams that would make her moan in the way Charles implied. Purring. When the chips had been implanted, the government had taken over the population's sexual urges. Mika had the experience before Hantera16. But ever since the chip there had been nothing. No libido. No yearnings. No hands between the legs.

Mika could only nod at Charles now. The issue was out of her control. Charles was within protocol to 'tweak' any chip he wanted to in any of the groups under his direction.

That he felt the need for the tweak was worrying though. What if she'd been so contaminated that she was changing? What if the flashbacks were prescient? There were rumors amongst the Bearers about other groups that were even more contaminated than the Bearers. What if she became one of them?

“Charles, may I ask you something?” Mika's heart pounded hard. Asking questions was always risky. Curious people had a tendency to disappear. At the very least, curiosity could lead

you to more pills, more tests, more of anything that could be done to human lab rats.

“Of course, Mika. You know I will honestly answer anything I can, but you also know that I don’t know all the answers.”

*I also think you lie a little.* “Are there other contaminated groups? And what are they like?”

A sympathetic smile spread over Charles’ face. “I really don’t know, Mika. I think what you actually want to know is if you’re changing. After all, you’re having flashbacks often, then there are the dreams that show up on your monitor and you did have that quarantine period. Am I right?”

With a sigh, Mika nodded. “What will happen to me?”

“Again . . . I don’t know. Please just try not to worry. I’ll run the test and we’ll talk later . . . okay?”

“Thank you, Charles.” Since there was nothing else she could do, Mika went into a separate area and pulled the privacy curtain closed. She quickly donned the uniform and swept the curtain aside again. Charles had already turned to the computer and was furiously tapping away. She watched him for a moment wondering if there was some problem and decided against asking. She grabbed her gravity light and left without questions.

The long tunnel would be inky pitch without the light. She’d only walked a few steps before she grabbed a replacement gravity light from the wall and touched the pad that turned it on. After placing the one she’d taken from her workspace in the sconce, she continued and repeated this process time after time.

Incredibly, the clever scientists who could not begin to conquer a mutating virus had found a way, however inefficient, to create illumination from the earth's magnetic core. It wasn't the most convenient system, but unless the planet literally disintegrated, it was an inexhaustible source of energy.

Ahead of her and behind her was nothing but black. She counted and on number thirteen arrived at the community entrance. As she always did, Mika gathered herself. It took all her strength of will to face them.

Three knocks on the door was all it took for Eva to come through it. She helped Mika into the hazmat suit, which would be shed after the short walk outside. Eva didn’t bother with a suit. She was immune to further mutations. Bearers were immune to many things. Charles and

another section under his control conducted experiments on them, this much everyone knew. What no one knew was exactly what those experiments entailed. It really didn't matter. Life was one experiment after another.

Mika tried to avoid looking Eva in her odd coal-rimmed silver eyes. She knew the Bearers had night vision and colors looked different to them. It was one of the early stage signs of mutation—when the grass appeared fuchsia or the sky turned yellow.

“Ms. Taylor, you had another flashback.” Eva’s voice was seductive and feline. “And I can feel your dreams, you know. I don't need a machine.” Eva's small laugh tinkled against the stone walls of the chamber. Laughter was uncommon in the Bearers, and always sounded forced with a touch of evil.

It was rare that a Bearer addressed her without permission. “That is none of your concern.” Curiosity rose in Mika about the scope of the female's power. She forced herself to ignore it and struggled into the bulky gear. “Please hurry. The light is already dimming.” The next gravity light would be on the other side of 'outside'.

Although she knew Eva could see in the dark, Mika didn't want to see the feral flash of the Bearer's eyes as they shifted from light mode to dark. By the time Eva secured Mika within the suit, there was only a pinpoint of light remaining from the rapidly depleting torch. Mika held back a relieved sigh, careful not to fog the polyvidreo face shield, when Eva at last opened the door to outside.

Mika knew the temperature was unbearable to humans. If she'd chosen to remain outside in the suit for too long, she would have passed out. The earth had not seen rain in eight long months and the temperature ranged between 97-146 degrees. A rat was rolling in the dust and purring like housecats used to do. Unfortunately, the virus had completely wiped out all feline breeds with predictable results. The ecosystem was crawling with vermin.

Mika missed cats and dogs. There had been both in her life in the Before.

She spotted a chipmunk that was as big as a German Shepherd. Without the cats, and with the assistance of Hantera16 all the little rodents rapidly evolved to their true potential. Those cute little chipmunk grins had the power of wolves now.

She remembered chipmunks too. She recalled crying when one of the cats brought a 'prize' home with little stripes and a sweet face. Sometimes she remembered more than other times. It was the pills and the 'adjustments'. In the back of her head she knew that the goal was a

complete blurring of any memory before the shit hit the fan.

The birds were the worst. They didn't change size like the rodents, they just changed. Mika didn't think she would ever get used to seeing carnivorous chickens with fangs that mindlessly attacked anything with meat on their bones. They could swarm like bees, too.

She felt something land on her shoulder and froze.

Eva quickly tried to shoo the hummingbird away but it was persistent. Flitting like a butterfly, the bird flew in front of Mika's shield and hovered. For a second, Mika savored this tiny creature's beauty. Overly large puppy dog eyes begged her to reach out and pet it. Mika yelped when it opened its beak and hissed viciously at her. The iridescence of its feathers flamed in anger. Eva reached out and grabbed it.

The hummingbird went still when Eva brought it to her body. A shiver wracked Mika when the bird tilted its head and rubbed lovingly against The Bearer. All the mutations seemed to have an affinity for each other. It was always odd to see the usually affectionless Bearers stroke creatures that would happily tear Mika to pieces.

The exception was the chickens. They were featherless, hideous, and downright ferocious. Even Eva gave the clucking devils a wide berth. The chickens did the same. Fierce as they were, a swift kick from a seven foot female with the strength of a gorilla could put a powerful hurting on even the toughest yard bird.

Thankfully, Eva didn't let tiny creature linger at her breast. All the hostile creatures outside made Mika nervous and she was growing hotter by the second in the stifling suit. Experiments with cooling devices for the suits had proved way too costly, energy-wise. She could feel sweat slide down her back and through her hair. It wasn't her day for a shower, either, and that meant another twenty-four hours of sticky skin.

She started to go around the female Bearer. Of course Eva was well aware of how uncomfortable Mika was and it seemed she went deliberately slowly just to prolong the suffering. Mika reached around her but the door opened before she could touch the optibox, the door slid open and Eric stood glaring at the pair.

Mika frowned and thought what now!?

The male Bearers all had a fuck-the-system attitude. A few of them had been caught trapping chickens just so they could use their sharp beak to remove the chip. No weapons or sharp instruments were allowed near them. The demon fowl were happy to oblige once their

necks were snapped like twigs and their heads twisted off as easily as picking an apple.

Early on, they'd lost several male Bearers when the creatures had chopped their arms off to rid themselves of the hygiachips that robbed them of their natures. The chips dulled the primitive in them and made the primordial storm inside them simmer instead of boil.

Heightened emotions were prevalent in both genders. The females simply tried to manipulate their way around things whereas the males used brute strength and belligerence. Eva spotted Eric and stood a bit straighter. With a sensual twitch to her hips, she moved toward him.

A bit of alarm and anticipation ran through Mika. She immediately thought: *This one is ovulating. I have to tell Charles.*

The Bearers main purpose was to reproduce. So far, no child had lived for more than three months. Mika hated the process of analyzing the dead babes. She understood the need to study the first generation of mutated children and resigned herself that it had to be done. It was a distasteful part of her job to perform autopsies on infants regardless of their form.

Unable to sustain a food supply without the brute strength of the Bearers, the humans who controlled them would starve. There was not enough energy available for harness to sustain the farms. Survival depended on making more of those who had the physical power to work while controlling them at the same time.

The world had moved on. It had mutated with Hantera16. A new kind of order was in force and Mika had seen what happened when humans tried to revolt. With a few adjustments to the hygiachip, they were reduced to slobbering idiots until their hormones adjusted. After that, they became docile servants that slaved in the kitchen or laundry for the leaders. Or, as in Mika's case, a production supervisor. It was a small consolation that hers was considered a plum assignment.

Mika watched the Bearer couple very closely. Eric smirked at Eva but squared his chest, showing off a body that every female human left on earth would drool over if they hadn't been hormonally lobotomized. To Mika's horror, her own nipples perked at the sight. That wasn't supposed to happen. Maybe Charles didn't tweak hard enough.

She jerked her eyes downward. A wave of dizziness swept over Mika. Her mind screamed, You idiot . . . the heat! But it was the internal heat that was taking over. Mika started to panic.

She stumbled forward until she was behind Eva. Mika didn't expect help from them.

Their emotions were muted. Science had not been able to unmute the kinder, more altruistic feelings that would prompt one being to help another. Knock out aggression, lust and greed and you lose niceness along the way. It was a sacrifice the Chamber was willing to make.

She was shocked when Eric reached around and grabbed her arm.

Her gaze flew to Eric's thundercloud eyes. She didn't like the knowing glint in his gaze or the lop-sided grin on his face. Before she could sort out what his expression meant, he tugged her toward him, which caused Mika to stumble into Eva. The female Bearer took full advantage and fell against Eric.

Mika heard the irritable growl through the hazmat suit. She immediately knew there was going to be trouble. Eva's back hit the floor and Mika was swiftly hauled over the creature's body. Eric's stunningly handsome face pressed against the shield.

"Want out of that hot suit, don't you?" Mika watched in awe as vivid green slowly filled his nimbus eyes. She'd never seen this happen. It was hypnotizing.

"Release her!" Charles snapped from behind them. He was wearing a hazmat suit, too.

Eric did exactly what was commanded, dropping Mika to the ground as if she were a useless carcass that offended him. Eva grunted when Mika's weight toppled onto her.

Mika had never been so relieved to see Charles in her life. He frowned at the couple and sternly said, "Go to Station 5 . . . now."

A sultry smile spread over Eva's face. Eric ignored her and stared at Mika who ripped her gaze from his and looked desperately at Charles. Mika knew she was moments from passing out.

Charles barked at a human who was standing watch, "You! Over here. I need help."

Between the two of them, they rid Mika of the suit, which had now turned into a lethal sauna. They carried her limp form into a shower area and sat her on the floor. The worker attempted to help Charles out of his suit. He told the man, "I'll take it from here. Go back to your post."

She watched the man leave before Charles said to her, "We've got a bit of a glitch in the unit that stores some of our hydriachip files. Yours is in one of the file that's been compromised. It may be a while before I can adjust you again." Charles was breathing hard and his hair, what little there was of it, was plastered to his head when he removed his head gear.

Drained from the heat, Mika weakly nodded and couldn't believe her ears when Charles suggested she might appreciate a shower. Humans were granted three showers a week. Water

was scarce since there had been no rain. Frankly, she had no idea where his largesse came from but was grateful nonetheless.

Charles looked into the optibox and keyed in a bonus shower for her. Optiboxes were everywhere. They were the way you got the 'things' you needed. They were clones to your hygiachip. All so simple.

She barely whispered a thank you before Charles left. A shower was a precious thing to give away.

Pushing the button on the dispensing unit, she waited until the polyvidreo tank filled with purified water. Mika let her ears suck the luxurious sound of running water deep into her mind. She thought of the ocean, of walking ice cold creeks, of a waterfall somewhere. Memories that refused to vanish.

Water had become more than its practical use. For Mika, water poured memories over her body. A shower didn't just wash her skin, it refreshed her soul.

The shower was over too quickly as always and she waited for the liquid on her skin to evaporate for a long time before she picked up the absorption mitt. It was totally against the rules but it was one small rule she broke. You were supposed to dry off as quickly as possible and return the absorption mitt to the water recovery unit.

But Mika loved the sensation of the water cooling her skin. She was willing to break the rules to remember what it felt like to get out of the Ferrell's swimming pool on a hot summer day.

As she pulled on a clean uniform, her thoughts returned to Eric: What was up with that look? Talk about mesmerizing. Did Charles see his eyes too?

Mika rushed back to her office and was relieved to find Charles waiting inside. She immediately said, "Eva is ready to mate. She seems agitated and hostile."

"So is Eric."

His tone was so solemn that Mika asked, "Isn't that good?"

"You would think so but I have to adjust their chips, drop the hormone blockers. When I do that, their urges will be so intense that mating cannot be stopped. The problem is that Eric doesn't seem interested in Eva. The last couple that we forced together didn't end well."

In fact it had ended horribly. The male, forced to mate with a female he found inferior, had killed her once he had spilled himself inside her. It had been a bloody mess.

Mika stared at Charles, trying to digest what he was saying. Adjusting the chips was a simple matter. She didn't personally have access to how to do it, but for Charles, it was routine. "But shouldn't you simply . . ."

"I know protocol, Mika. Right now I'm not sure I have access to their files, either. But that isn't your concern. There are verifications to be made before I can do anything." He turned and looked out over the factory floor where gloved Bearers were adding nutrients to algae that filtered the air in the building and provided vital sustenance. Life itself was tended and groomed by controlled creatures they knew so little about. Even as they, the weak humans, manipulated what were once beings like themselves they understood them not one whit.

"That's not the only issue at hand, you know. His abilities must be reduced. It's the protocol for a male Bearer touching you. There have to be consequences, punishments for infractions. So, that's going to make it difficult for him to impregnate. And Eva will miss this cycle because of this at any rate."

By 'reduce his abilities', Charles really meant that Eric's capability to climax would be reduced. After the bizarre genesis following Hantera16, orgasms had been transformed into currency. For the Bearers, six times per moon was the norm. Misbehave or rebel in any way and that number was shortened.

For humans, it meant little. As a group, their collective sex drives were pretty much nil. Mika found it hard to use up her allotment. She would have gladly traded her time on the pleasure machine for more showers. But that wasn't allowed; nor was leaving precious orgasms unused.

It was believed, though not scientifically proven, that a certain number of orgasms per month contributed to a human's well being. The pleasure machine was designed for maximum results, no matter how suppressed the sexual part of the human might be. Only the completely chemically lobotomized were immune. Those were rare cases, usually psychopaths who were neither mutant nor useful. Others went to the machines, embracing their allotment with varying degrees of indifference.

Mika reminded him, "If he hadn't grabbed me, I would probably be roasting in that suit while clawing at the door right now. It might not be absolutely necessary to punish him."

Charles tilted his head looked at her through squinted eyes. "You don't think Eva would have helped you inside? Protocol dictates female Bearers have that obligation. She knows that

denying you help would mean solitude and zero ability to mate for her. As it is, her simple attitude and deliberate slowness will cost her a cycle.”

Mika had to press her lips together to stop the amused chuckle. Charles never let words like sex, orgasm, climax or any remotely explicit term slip through his lips. "Mate" was as racy as he got. Or sensuous. That's the one he chose for the dream sounds.

Maybe he really was a priest. Should I ask him?

Charles turned, repeated the question, and added, “And why did Eric chose to help you? The bearers are hardly known for their altruism.”

Remembering the glow of his eyes, Mika swallowed hard and shrugged. It was a rare concealment but instead of telling him about Eric's bizarre change, Mika changed the subject. It was worth a shot.

It was well known that Charles was pretty phobic and freaked out about the critters. Not that any human was comfortable with vicious wild life, but his was a special kind of horror. “There's more animal life between the tunnel and the factory entrance than I'm used to seeing. We should probably warn people in case . . .”

Charles turned and stared at her. His voice was soft and slightly alarmed when he asked, “What kind of animals?”

“Um . . . a rat, a chipmunk, and a creepy-ass hummingbird. The thing scared me half to death. I wasn't expecting it to hiss at me. And those eyes are . . .”

Charles was suddenly standing in front of her. “Listen to me closely, Mika. Hummingbirds are attracted to Bearers. They normally don't go near humans. You have to understand that those birds loathe humans. They won't go near us. For it to get close enough for you to see its eyes . . .” His solemn voice trailed off.

Mika's eyes widened. That hadn't been the first encounter with a hummingbird. She'd had no clue that they hated humans. “I thought only chickens hated us.”

“Chickens don't hate us. We're their food supply. They have to eat just like once upon a time we have to eat them. Ironic, huh?” Charles shook his head and frowned, “But that's beside the point. Tell me about this bird.”

Mika explained how it had hovered in front of her polyvidreo shield as if it wanted her to pet it. As she spoke, Charles grew pale. Fear spiraled through Mika, causing her voice to shake, “What!? Is that bad?”

“I just . . . I don’t know. We know so little. I really need to get that system booted. I feel helpless without control.” He stepped back from her and turned away.

More than a little alarmed now, Mika thought of telling him about Eric’s eyes once again but hesitated. Something told her that like everything else in this chaotic world, danger started and ended with the unknown. It could raise suspicion immediately if some helter-skelter incident was unique to her alone. To be different was to be feared. Experiments could be next. More adjustments. Intrusions from a Chamber who already listened to her dreams.

She’d done everything they’d wanted. Some of the tasks still haunted her but she knew they’d been required. When Charles went to the door, Mika quickly asked, “What will be done to Eric?”

“I’m headed to Station 5 now. I’ll tell them to hold both Eva and Eric until I can access their hygiachips.” He took a deep breath before telling Mika, “Why don’t you take the day off. Try to get some rest . . . okay?”

Mika didn’t like the sound of that. It, like the shower, was out of protocol. But Mika had no choice but to be gracious. “Thank you, Charles. Please let me know when you can look at my file and decide how you want to proceed.”

An unbidden paranoia snaked through her. Could her hygiachip have recorded the sight of his eyes? Could it know about the curious and vaguely remembered nipple erection she felt when she looked at him? Could it feel her feelings? Mika certainly didn’t know how deep or far or encompassing the power was. She didn’t even think Charles knew. Only the Chamber knew.

“You know I will, Mika.” Charles said this dismissively and she watched his brow knit as he turned away.

She nodded a nod he never noticed and turned to the door. On her way back across the factory floor, she avoided eye contact with the Bearers. Mika didn’t know whether she’d see the same bizarre look in the others’ eyes. She was too terrified to find out.

As she walked, head down, her mind never left Eric’s mesmerizing gaze and the hypnotic effect it had on her. She wished there was someone she could ask that would keep her information confidential. Unfortunately, privacy was no longer an option. Privacy had gone the way of oceans and priests. Now privacy was a historical concept, not a real thing.

Making her way to the hazmat area, she signaled a Bearer to help her. No words were exchanged while the creature helped her put the suit on. After she’d finished, Mika slipped out

the door with her escort. She was thankful that a human would be there to assist her at the other end. At that moment, being in the company of even a well-controlled female Bearer was uncomfortable.

They carefully made their way back to the tunnel. Mika became slightly more grateful for the Bearer's imposing presence when she noticed that even more animals seemed to be watching, circling boldly around the pair of bipeds. The sweat started its relentless journey down her back. The shower was only a pleasant memory now.

Only able to see directly to her front, she had to turn her body from side to side to see what surprises the landscape might hold. To her horror, a featherless disaster of a chicken was not far away. Its baleful, bleary eyes stared straight at her. Before she turned to run, it bared its teeth and hissed.

Mika screamed but the suit muffled her voice.

The beast found the exposed flesh of the Bearer a far more tempting target than Mika's crinkling hazmat suit. It hit a vital blood vessel and the female's dark, almost black, blood began to spurt from her long leg. The Bearer tumbled and at least four more of the beady-eyed beasts came out of nowhere. They went for her face first.

Mika spun around to find Eric running toward her. He wasn't supposed to be there. Beings were never where they were not supposed to be. It just wasn't done.

A chicken had broken away from the competition for the female Bearer and bore down on Mika. Eric and the bird ran a zig-zag pattern toward her. The fowl seemed to sense the weaker target and was going straight for her.

She tracked Eric's movement in utter confusion. In a trance she watched as he snatched the offensive animal off the ground before it could attack and snapped its neck.

Utterly stunned, Mika could only stare at him. Eric flung the chicken behind him and headed toward her. She stepped backward but he was too fast. He tugged her forward until they were in the tunnels. Mika reached for her communicator but he grabbed her hand.

"You and I, little human." The vivid green was back in his eyes. Mika was sure she'd never seen such a color. It was completely new.

At over seven feet tall to her five-and-a-half foot height, Eric towered over her with a dominating air that made Mika shiver in the suit even though she was now drenched in sweat from both heat and fear.

When the door shut, Eric tore into the hazmat suit with no regard to safety. Mika started to fight him but the minute her headgear was off, she was immersed in a haze of male aroma. Desire slammed into her. Without thinking, she practically climbed him.

Sex between a Bearer male and a human female was forbidden at the highest possible level of protocol. At the moment, the threat of death was the last thing in Mika's thoughts. A haze of raw lust muddled her mind. She hadn't kissed a man since it all began.

When Eric's mouth closed over hers, every muscle in Mika's body went limp. He easily held her to him, gripping her ass in one large hand while the other ripped her shirt off. He pressed her against the cold rock wall of the cave and broke the kiss to move his lips down the jawline to her neck. If Mika had been able to think clearly, she would have known immediately that something was very wrong with both their hygiachips. She wasn't prepared for what Eric did next.

Mika barely noticed when he pulled her back from the wall. She clung to him, legs wrapped around his muscular thighs and finger bunched into his thick dark hair. When a blast of heat hit her back and then surrounded her, she gasped and opened her eyes.

Eric had stepped outside.

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