

TOKOREL

BOOK 2 IN THE TOKOREL SERIES

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FREE CHAPTER

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CHAPTER 1

Control



Linsora thought about her past month on Khizara and the many significant discoveries in the Forbidden Area. The Prefecture, the governing body of the planet, decided that she should travel to Tokorel to establish relations with people who had not been contacted in over 200 years. People considered enemies. Linsora felt apprehensive but also excited about the possibility of being the first to bring peace to these two worlds.

She strolled with her former lover and Commander of the Khizaran Naval Fleet, Kral, as they approached the shuttles that would take them to the ships orbiting the planet and preparing for departure to Tokorel.

“We’re almost to the departure point,” Kral said, “and you’ve barely said two words.”

Linsora stopped walking and looked at him. "Kral, there's so much I want to say, so much I want us to discuss, but time is too short to allow for an extended conversation. And as I'm certain you recall, small talk isn't what I do."

Kral nodded. "The trip to Tokorel isn't short. Perhaps we can find time to talk on the way."

"I'd like that," Linsora replied.

Linsora could see Gordek standing in the doorway of the departure bay where the ship's shuttle waited, tapping his foot impatiently, arms crossed and waiting for them. "Supplies are aboard, and now we only wait for you," he told her. He extended his arm toward the door leading to the shuttle bay and, with a mock bow, said, "Linsora...."

Clutching Kral's hand, she said, "It was good to see you again, Kral, to repair at least a little of the past. I'd love to talk with you more during our trip to Tokorel."

"Yes," he said, "Will you be all right? With him, I mean? I want to have you transferred to my ship."

"No, you can't do that. I would end up on Gordek's ship anyway. He would find a way to contact the Prefecture and complain, eliciting their help to return the 'Ambassador' to his ship." She shook her head. "I'll be fine. Don't worry. Besides, I want to examine his ship's entire cargo bay full of artifacts from Hakai. I wasn't able to finish that work on the way here. Maybe the Tokorellans would find some of them interesting," she smiled.

"You don't understand," Kral said, concerned.

"Kral, you know something. I can tell that much, but I can't read minds."

"Neither can he," said Kral, nodding to Gordek. "But he can sense emotions and might act on whatever he thinks I feel if I tell you. So, just be careful. Watch your back." His words sounded ominous to Linsora. There was a slight pause, and then Kral continued. "Stay in contact with me by contacting my ship. Would you do that much? If I don't hear from you at least once a day, I'll come to Gordek's ship to check on you. I'll need to speak with you directly. If not, our ships won't be far apart, and I can arrive within a few minutes. Certainly faster than they can react."

Linsora appreciated his concern but wondered what possible help he would be against Gordek and his mind games. She didn't want anyone else caught in the crossfire. "Kral, thank you, but I'll be fine," she insisted. "Yes, I'll stay in contact, too. Have a good trip."

"And you," he said, "I meant it when I said I'd do what I could to help you get back to your Permac."

Linsora felt the all too familiar pang in the pit of her stomach thinking about Permac. She'd watched him die on Hakai. Or at least she thought she had. Since his death, she'd seen images of him when she needed help and could feel his power fighting against her adversaries. Until she could see him, touch him, or hear his voice next to her, she didn't want to believe he was alive and risk that emotional pain again.

With a warm smile, Linsora walked toward the bay. Gordek accompanied her. Linsora thought fondly of Kral, and she relived their last conversation. She loved that even though he had Sealed the Oath with another, he still cared for her and looked out for her safety. He was a good man. It wasn't until she and Gordek were passing through the hangar doors that it occurred to her that she had never told Kral Permac's name. Yet he knew it. Kral had already left the staging area by the time she turned back. What did Captain Haavens say when the Dominator was in a difficult spot? Caught between a stone and a fire pit? Something like that.

After a short walk, Gordek and Linsora climbed the sloping ramp leading to the small shuttle's interior. Although Linsora loved space travel, she didn't care for the cramped quarters of a shuttle,

especially when she had to travel with someone she didn't care for. She'd rather travel on a more spacious transport where she could, perhaps, sit a few rows back. As it was, though, she had to sit next to Gordek in this small four-seat ship. He could be pleasant at times, but overall she wished she didn't have to see him. Linsora was in her early thirties, and Gordek in his late fifties. And yet, his advances toward her in the past could not be ignored as anything other than romantic. To Linsora, age differences in relationships didn't matter, but she didn't like this sociopathic narcissist and didn't like his advances toward her. Still, he would be the Captain of the ship taking her to Tokorel and the key to possibly finding her lost love. She felt she had to give some concession to social pleasantries to reach the next destination.

Once seated and secured for launch, Linsora could hear the pilot going through his pre-launch flight list. The door closed, and the shuttle slowly raised into the sky.

Silence seemed the order of the day. Linsora noted that even Gordek was quiet during the short trip that took them through the blue skies of Khizara and into the darkness of space. She had made such trips more times than she cared to count, but Linsora was surprised at the vision of endless specks of light dotting the darkness each time. There was no longer a horizon or reference point for which to aim. She usually felt great freedom along with the first sight of open space, a release of the limits posed by horizons. Then there was the shift from gravity to weightlessness. The ship's artificial gravity never took over in gradation but engaged at a certain point when gravity was around twenty percent. Freedom was associated with weightlessness, which also lifted certain cares from Linsora's mind. She thought that people who had never been in space missed more than they could imagine.

Linsora noticed that Gordek looked at her, but she ignored him. She hoped that her silence would give him enough of a hint that she wanted to be alone with herself and her thoughts. But that wouldn't last.

"How many ships have you traveled on, Linsora?" Gordek asked quietly.

His voice forced Linsora back to reality. "What? Oh, I don't know. Maybe a dozen. Most of them were exploration ships. A few were Naval ships with the Khizaran fleet."

"Why did you choose exploration ships? Because of your archeological background?"

"Most of the ships started out with no particular destinations. I enjoyed that. Not the lack of a destination as much as the possibility of finding purpose. It created a horizon to shoot for. I enjoyed the idea that one of those places might be the one calling me." Linsora was silent again.

Gordek reached for her hand, but she pulled away. "You and I are more alike than you could ever imagine," he said.

Linsora glared at him. "I am nothing like you. You travel for power. You take for power. Everything you do is for your own selfish desires. I'm trying to find one place. Is Hakai that place? If I were to go there, would I find Permac? Is Tokorel that place? I feel like I'll find Permac there, but what then? I still feel like there's something else out there. While exploring the Forbidden Area, I heard something about a Fourth Cornerstone. Maybe that's what I'm looking for." Linsora smiled to herself. "I've managed to have a hand in disrupting things on Hakai, Khizara, and now perhaps Tokorel. Why not that Fourth Cornerstone, too? Make a clean sweep of messing up this entire sector of space?"

"I've never heard of this Forth Cornerstone. Did you hear that correctly? Why did I not hear about it during your area research?"

"Despite what you might think about yourself, Gordek, you are not privy to everything I think or do. You don't know everything, and not everyone needs to include you in their discoveries." Linsora turned away and felt smug in her comments. She shivered. The idea of finding the place she

had looked for all her life made her suddenly cold. What would be left afterward? Permac would be left. Peering out the transport window, she surveyed the distant specks of light. Tokorel's star was out there somewhere, and it could be warming Permac at this very moment. Enough of grand goals. *I want time for Permac and me to create quiet horizons when this is over. We can decide on the what-nexsts together.*

She realized Gordek was still looking at her. She had closed her mind but didn't think for a moment that would prevent Gordek from breaking in if he really wanted to. She remembered that Gordek was kicked off of his home world of Tokorel. For what, she didn't know. Making an acidic statement about his returning to Tokorel to face his well-deserved fate was tempting, but she didn't feel like wasting the energy. Her attention returned to the stars until they were blotted out by the bulk of Gordek's ship.

Linsora wrinkled her nose at the sterile scent of shipboard air that rushed into the transport as soon as the doors slid open. She watched Gordek stride out and take a deep breath. After a moment, Linsora heard him roar, "Where are they? I specifically asked for a contingent to meet me here."

Linsora chuckled as she heard a mumbling response from the transport bay crew. Three sentries filed into the shuttle. Gordek called back, "Bring her to the bridge. I'll show her what will happen to my crew and anyone who disregards my orders!"

"I can walk, damn it!" She said as the two crew members grabbed her arms and attempted to lift her from her seat. "And I do know the way to the bridge!" Linsora tried to shrug off the men who pulled her to her feet from her seat. They dragged her out of the shuttle, down the ramp, and toward the ascending ramp of the ship and the bridge. "When I rule the universe," she said between clenched teeth, "I will demand that people treat each other civilly. Especially me! Gordek wants to destroy my dignity. He will NOT. No matter what he does. Nor will I make it easy for those who do his bidding." She continued to struggle, fight, hit, scratch, and do whatever she could to dissuade the guards from holding her.

She arrived on the bridge out of breath from trying not to be hauled there. Her escorts pushed her through the door, and she stumbled into the center of the room. The words of contempt she had been ready to hurl at Gordek evaporated. Feeling suddenly weak at what she saw, she grabbed the back of a chair for support and looked in front of her.

She saw Gordek lying on the floor, apparently unconscious, maybe dead. Kral stood pointing a gun toward Gordek's body.

"Kral, what are you doing here? How..."

Kral looked in her direction, but his eyes were blank. He looked past her. Linsora turned in the direction of his stare.

"Welcome to the bridge." Linsora saw a tall woman with a smile of grim amusement on her face standing by the Captain's seat.

It took Linsora a few seconds before she recognized the woman. Tayla, Karak's daughter. From Hakai. Linsora hadn't seen her after recovering from the flash of white light that had stunned everyone and seemingly killed Permac. What she was doing here was, however, secondary. The man whose arm was draped around her shoulder was the primary factor in this new turn of events. Her half-brother looked at her with a stupid grin on his face.

"Yokosh," Linsora snarled. "Somehow, I'm not at all surprised to see you. How wonderful that you've come to save me from Gordek. How utterly perfect that you've come to meet your death at my hands."

Linsora increased her efforts to keep her mind closed as she walked toward her half-brother. She saw his eyes begin to fade from blue to violet in an attempt to break through her defenses.

“Having trouble, Yokosh? I’ve learned a few new tricks myself,” she growled. “Tayla, I’m surprised you haven’t trained your dog well enough to keep his eyes blue. Or were you just more, shall we say, interested in Permac?”

She felt her mind being touched, but not by Yokosh. Tayla was stronger and might have done so.

“NO!” Yokosh shouted, “I will deal with her, Tayla, at least for now. She can’t keep her mind closed and send influences simultaneously. There is no need to expend effort. Not yet. Our time will come as planned.”

Tayla nodded. “Later then,” she said icily and gave Linsora a sneer.

Yokosh inclined his head and spread his hands. “Look behind you, sister. Neither my death nor yours is at hand. You have become far too valuable to the Khizaran Prefecture in contacting the Tokorellans. And, of course, to Gordek,” he added half-heartedly.

Linsora stepped back and turned so she could keep her eyes on Yokosh and still look where he indicated. With an empty look, Kral moved and pointed the gun at her. Yokosh continued, “Fitting that Kral should be holding the weapon, don’t you think? He came here to warn me against killing you. He’s been very clever, in fact. I actually believed he was on my side. Seems he’s been spying on me. Let his guard down while he was trying to convince me of your value. But I’ve sensed his deceit for months. I was just waiting for the right moment or until I grew tired of his games. I suppose he succeeded in showing me your worth. I would have killed both of you if I thought we could get to Tokorel without you.” Yokosh chuckled like a small child. “But it amuses me to have him holding the weapon. And he will fire on you. Isn’t that amazing and appropriate? To have the person who stopped you from killing me kill you! That little trick I used on you at the Prefecture when I could control your movements works on anyone. I only have to order his hand to pull the trigger.”

“I don’t understand, Yokosh. How can you control his actions if you can only send emotional influences?”

Yokosh shook his head. “I’ll give you a lesson, dear sister. After controlling you, I would think you would understand already, but you learn slower than most. I can manipulate his emotional state so that he feels so anxious and fearful to the extent that he can’t move. Frozen with fear, I believe they call it. I can make him feel in danger. His brain labels his fear in any way he wants and creates the visions and fantasies he sees. Increase the fear, and his fighting instinct kicks in. He then pulls the trigger to destroy whatever it is his mind’s eye sees. His rational mind might see you, but his primitive mind only sees the threat.”

“You’re disgusting,” she said. “Worse than any Tokorellan I’ve ever met.” Linsora spat on the floor at Yokosh’s feet.

Yokosh smiled and stepped away from Tayla, wandering around the bridge with a look that made Linsora think he was savoring it. He stopped and nudged Gordek with his foot. Gordek didn’t move. Linsora noted that she was now positioned between Yokosh and Tayla. If she moved toward one of them, the other would stop her.

“Kral shot this one with only a hint of influence from me. With our minds closed, we surprised Gordek as he came onto the bridge. Does that surprise you, sister? Yes, I can close my mind and send influences simultaneously. Guess there’s more you can learn! But don’t worry about Gordek. He’ll be fine. He wants you, and while we control Kral, he’ll at least listen to me. And unfortunately,

I need him once we get to Tokorel. He knows the protocols to get onto the planet. Without him, I'm unsure how close we could get the ships into their space."

He looked at Linsora, "You're not a creature of half-steps, are you, sister? People either love you or loathe you. And you seem to regard people the same. No casual acquaintances. If there's no intensity, the relationship doesn't seem to be worthwhile to you. You'd make a lousy politician! Maybe that's one reason I dislike you so much. You have so few social graces."

"And you do? You will smile and stab someone at the same time. Oh, wait, I'm mistaken. You'll do the smiling and have someone else do the stabbing. At least I attack in full view and make my intentions known," Linsora said.

"And look where that's gotten you." Yokosh raised his arms, "I have a ship. I'm standing on the bridge of MY ship!" He turned to face the view screen showing the greenish orb that is Khizara, "And look at that world. My home world. Soon, it will be under my control." He continued to walk and turned to face Linsora once again. "My possibilities abound. I could have Kral kill you and Gordek, then rush in to save the day and reveal that Gordek was an evil Tokorellan spy. Behazh, the head Prefect, may not believe it, but the Khizarans will listen to anything that makes the evil Tokorel worthy of hate. Khizarans are killing each other right now because they can't tell a Khizaran from a Tokorellan, thanks to your discoveries in the Forbidden Area. And they will listen to anyone who plans to eliminate the Tokorellans forever. Oddly enough, I have such a plan. But don't worry, dear sister. I won't end your life. I won't end Gordek's life. You need to make it to Tokorel. If you lose your life, it will be at the hand of the Tokorellans on their world."

"You are sealing the death sentence of Khizara and yourself, Yokosh," Linsora said. "Neither you nor Tayla are stronger than Gordek, to begin with. You're just barely able to match my abilities. And how can Khizara even hope to fight Tokorel? Tokorellans would influence any fleet into believing that Tokorel doesn't exist by filling them with enough anxiety or stress to cause faulty memories!"

"Perhaps not," Tayla said.

Yokosh shook his head, "Not yet. Let her wonder awhile." Then he smiled and spoke to Kral, "Better yet, let them wonder together. Take Gordek to a cell. Put her in the same one. Then come back here. Tayla will go along to keep our friend Kral occupied." He grinned at Linsora. "She's good at keeping men occupied. I've heard she has a fondness for Tokorellans. Like your Permac."

Linsora found it hard to control her anger but knew now was not the time.

Linsora watched as two of Yokosh's men picked up the limp form of Gordek and dragged him toward the doorway exit from the bridge. As two additional guards escorted Linsora off the bridge, Yokosh said, "Oh, by the way, dear sister, I have reset the lock on the holding cell. Gordek will not be able to get out. And even if he thinks he knows the combination, he'll need to try over a billion combinations before he finds the correct one. And Gordek can influence to his mind's content, but you will both stay there until he's ready to cooperate with me."

Linsora tried to reach Kral mentally as he guided them to the ship's lower levels. Her eyes shifted to violet, trying to counteract Tayla's influence. The gun remained steadily pointed at her back, and Linsora noted that Kral's expression never changed. She knew that Tayla was stronger mentally than she was. She sometimes said things out of frustration, as she did on the bridge moments ago. She knew that Tayla would win in a fight of the minds and mental influences. That wouldn't be the case forever, though.

Linsora watched as the guards threw Gordek's limp body on the only bed in the cell. While the cell was spacious enough, the smooth metallic walls, one bed, a toilet, and a sink starkly contrasted

the rest of the ship. Linsora was pushed into the enclosure and heard the restraint field activate with a sizzle at the opening. Having no desire to share a bed with Gordek under any circumstances, Linsora paced. The hallway visible through the shimmering barrier of the energy field was empty. Linsora knew that Tayla had taken Kral and left.

“Knowing Yokosh, he probably doesn’t feel we need to be guarded. I imagine he’ll send someone to bring us to him when you’re awake and he’s ready,” Linsora said to the unconscious Gordek lying on the bed. She felt a shuddering lurch when the ship began to move and heard the pitch of the engines rise as preparations for the first jump were made.

Only when the whine of the engines quieted did Gordek begin to stir. “Why are we here. Linsora, what have you done?”