

TAMER

KING OF DINOSAURS

2



NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
MICHAEL-SCOTT EARLE

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TAMER: KING OF DINOSAURS 2

Michael-Scott Earle

Chapter 1

Warmth wrapped me in a cocoon, and I felt something squeeze my chest tightly. A bright light burned my eyes as I struggled to escape the bonds around my torso. I screamed, shouted, and thrashed.

Then I woke up in a hut.

I was still terrified of the light, but it was a weird thing to fear. After getting swarmed by raptors, threatened by flesh-eating birds, and chased by a huge fucking carnotaurus, my brain had plenty of nightmare material from my time in Dinosaurland. Nine times out of ten, fangs and teeth were my biggest threats. But this flash of light was very distinct, and I remembered it coming out of a pair of hands. Then I recalled that the woman I had saved shot beams of energy from her palms.

I shuddered with a chill despite the jungle heat of this world. Inside the round yurt-like hut I called home, it felt even hotter. The indoor cooking fire burned low, but it still bumped the temp an extra ten degrees. I studied the light coming in through the door and tried to think cool thoughts.

I pushed the flashy nightmare away from my mind while relaxing

under the relative coolness generated by my lover as she lay draped across my chest. She could dispel any bad dream.

Galmine was a curvaceous woman with skin that was somewhat like gray stone. Her long silver hair and vibrant emerald eyes made her seem just alien enough to be sexy, but not so alien that I didn't recognize her human similarities. In fact, I was still trying to figure out how I was lucky enough to end up with this supermodel of a woman.

Last night, after finishing the fort, saving the pink-haired woman, who called herself Kacerie, from certain death, and collapsing into my bed of leaves, Galmine entered the hut and asked to become my lover. I was looking forward to my first real night of sleep in days, but the alien woman beamed me out of this world instead.

She wasn't my first sexual experience, but after my night with Galmine, I wasn't ashamed to admit it was my first time making love. The sexy emerald-eyed woman had mastery over her movements, and it didn't take long for her to control mine. Her timing was so precise I'd begun to think it bordered on magic. She knew when I was getting close to my own climax, but she held me on the edge until she was ready to explode with me.

The whole night was a blur of pleasure.

Now I watched her sleep on my chest. Her silver hair was wildly out of place, so I gently brushed it back from her face. She smiled in her sleep and seemingly hugged me even tighter. She was already pressed against me, but I wanted more from her.

My eyes followed the curve of her spine down to the start of her amazing ass, but I couldn't see any lower because of how she was laying on me. I ran two fingers down her back while appreciating how smooth her rock-like skin actually felt. Her ability to create the illusion of clothing was now turned off, and her body was totally nude.

That was enough to get me stiff as a board again. I argued with my conscience about waking her, and the cute little peeps of her snores made the choice even harder, but peace was so rare in Dinosaurland it would have been a crime to waste it.

“Wake up, Galmine. I'm not done collecting on what you owe me,” I whispered as I rubbed her shoulder with my fingertips.

I was only twenty, and my man brain was in constantly aroused mode. For the past month, it endlessly thought about fucking Galmine even as the

rest of me fought off dinosaurs, talked respectably to the other women, or stood guard over the camp. However, the world was so dangerous I was never able to follow through on those fantasies without putting everyone else at risk.

So now I was going to make love to her again.

I reached down to caress one of her butt cheeks, but the curvy part where it met her leg was just out of my reach.

“I can move so you can touch me anywhere,” she said with a sleepy chuckle.

“There are a few places I’d like to explore,” I said as I ran the tips of my fingers over her curves.

Her skin was cool when at rest, but it could also get almost too hot to touch. At some points last night, I was certain she’d somehow doused her amazing skin with baby oil and heated it up with our friction.

“Mmm,” she said as if tasting something yummy.

Without opening her eyes, she slid slowly across my abdominals like a melting ice cube. Soon her breasts pressed against my ribs, and my boner was

smothered underneath her stomach. Her skin was warm and slick where it met mine, but I wanted her to keep going lower so that she could take me in her mouth.

I groaned with pleasure as she slid herself a bit more in the right direction. Just a few inches lower and it was going to be a great morning. “Strike while the iron is hot,” I said while enjoying her slowly gyrating on top of me.

“I do owe you more for saving our lives,” she whispered.

“Yeah, hey. If you want to keep paying me back, I won’t complain.”

I held my arms around her neck as I took a moment to look in her eyes. I caught a whiff of her flowery perfume and didn’t hide my effort to breathe it in. I’d figured out it was another trick of her alien body, probably designed to make her suitors unable to resist her, but I didn’t really need it because I couldn’t have desired her more than I already did.

“I will accept every ounce you give me,” she whispered.

“Oh gaawwwd,” I moaned when she slid lower and kissed my stomach. My man brain began to run the show. She was saying all the right things to stroke my ego.

“All I know is that I need you again,” Galmine said between kisses. “And again. And—” She slid up my body and cut me off with a quick peck on the lips that momentarily moved her warmth from where I wanted it. “You are hard and soft, just as I imagined all those nights when I was left on my own.”

Galmine began melting down my body again, and her fingers grabbed at the base of my shaft so she could angle it into her mouth.

“Victor, I am sorry to interrupt, but I need you to look at something,” Sheela called to me from outside the flimsy curtain blocking the interior of the hut.

“Ugh, Sheela. For real?” I shot back as Glamine’s mouth hung open only a few inches from my tip. Her green eyes were practically begging me to let her taste my cock.

“Yes, it is-- Victor!” the cat-woman’s voice had been calm when she first spoke into the hut, but now she shouted my name.

Galmine gasped when I pushed her off me, and then Jinx let out a surprised squawk from his spot in the corner of the hut. I rolled across the floor toward my underwear, kicked one leg into my Fruit of the Looms,

hopped toward the door, and got my other leg through a half second before I plowed through the curtain.

The afternoon sunlight smacked me in the face painfully, but I forced my eyes open and twisted toward where I saw Sheela's mane of long blonde hair. The cat-woman held her bow in her hand, and she was running toward Trel and Kacerie, the new woman that I had saved yesterday. Both the spider-woman and the pink-haired woman were backing away from the swing door of the fort, and it only took me a moment to see what they were afraid of.

One of the green raptors had somehow climbed to the top of Hope's swinging door.

"Shit!" I growled as I snatched a spear from its spot leaning against the hut and ran after Sheela. The warrior woman was raising her bow, and she let one of our primitive arrows loose just as the dinosaur leapt from the top of the door.

The arrow cut through the air with an angry hiss and slammed into the skull of the beast as it dropped. The creature didn't even let out a squeak or yelp; it just dropped in the air all insta-kill style. I reached it in ten more steps and then slammed my spear into its throat just to make sure that it was dead.

“Damn, Sheela, great job with--” I started to say, but then I saw a patch of green feathers appear as another deinonychus crested the wall.

Then three more joined it.

“I only have two more arrows!” Sheela shouted as she pulled one of the shafts from her hip sheath.

“Trel and Kacerie, get to the hut!” I shouted, and my words seemed to shock the two women out of their slow backpedal. They turned to run past us, and I prayed that Sheela and I would be able to stand against four of these fuckers.

“Hit the one on the right!” I ordered Sheela as she pulled the string of her bow back. She let loose with the shaft, and the arrow hit the raptor in the shoulder. The green-feathered bastard screamed, and for half a moment it looked like it was going to tip over and fall on the other side of the wall.

But then it fell forward into our fort as the other three jumped inside.

“Hit another one!” Adrenaline was making the world seem to slow to a crawl, and I sprinted toward the closest jumping raptor.

For half a moment, I wondered what the fuck I was doing charging

these guys. Each of them was about the size of a Great Dane, with teeth that could tear through my muscles and bones ten times easier than the big Scooby-Doo breeds. Then I remembered Sheela at my side, Glamine and Trel in the hut, and Kacerie's look of terror when I saved her yesterday.

If I didn't kill these fuckers, these beautiful women would probably die.

I imagined that my arms were like rubber bands, and I pulled my spear back before I let it thrust forward into the first landing raptor. My weapon connected with him just as his legs took the pressure of his landing, and he really wasn't able to dodge or snap his jaws at me. The tip tore into his chest with surprising ease, and he let out a painful yelp when I shuffled forward and drove the shaft of my weapon deeper into him.

Sheela's last arrow whizzed by my head and hit the raptor who had landed to my right. The shaft sunk into his throat, but the dinosaur somehow ignored the damage and took three quick steps toward me.

I twisted myself around the spear I still had impaled inside of the first raptor and then pushed the shaft at the dino Sheela just injured. It was a cumbersome movement, but the monster's jaws closed around the wood in

between my hands, and I got an alarmingly close look into the eyes of the angry beast.

I could also smell its sour breath and feel the muscles in its neck strain.

“Shit!” I gasped as the raptor with an arrow in its neck thrashed the spear free of my grip. The pointy end was still attached the first raptor, and that one let out another pained screech as its friend accidentally drove the weapon deeper.

“Victor!” Trel screamed from behind me, and I kicked the raptor away before I turned to see her toss a spare spear at me. I’d always been terrible at sports, but I somehow snatched it from the air as if we had practiced the move a hundred times. It was a good thing too, since the only uninjured raptor was sprinting toward me with its head down, and I only had a single second to get my weapon pointed in the correct direction.

The impact caused a shock of energy to hammer my arms and chest. I hadn’t really based out my legs, and the speed and weight of the raptor almost threatened to knock me over. Fortunately, my bare feet were able to kind of grip the ground as I stumbled backward, and the raptor took my spear through its stomach. Unfortunately, the dinosaur didn’t seem to care that I’d

run it through, and it continued to push toward me as my spear slid through its body.

“Ahhh!” I gasped as I tried to push my spear into it. The raptor’s jaws snapped closed about two inches away from my front hand, and a bit of panic replaced the adrenaline.

“Hold your spear!” Trel yelled as she landed at my side. Two of her legs thrust out like finger flicks and knocked into the nose of the dinosaur. It didn’t look like she hit it hard, but the monster was easily distracted and forgot about biting my hands so that it could try to chomp into Trel.

“No!” I growled as I leaned into the spear and tried to muscle the raptor away from the spider-woman. This was a big son of a bitch, maybe it actually weighed more than I did, but my muscles were being fueled by primitive survival instincts, and I was able to leverage the thing away from Trel.

I quickly glanced over to Sheela and saw that she’d moved to protect my back from the other raptors. She was jabbing a spear into the dino with an arrow in its neck, but the one she’d shot in the shoulder was circling to her side, and I knew she was going to need help in a few seconds.

“Fucking die!” I screamed as I tried to lift up with my spear. The problem with this raptor was that I’d gotten him in the stomach and not hit an organ that would cause him to die in a few moments. Hell, he was probably as juiced up on adrenaline as I was, and might not have even known that I’d run him through the stomach.

One of Trel’s spider legs smacked him across the face, but his eyes turned down to the spear, and I saw the spark of intelligence there. The raptor took a step away from me, and I was all of a sudden trying to keep him on my weapon instead of keeping him away from me.

“Trel, help Sheela!” I shouted as I took a few quick steps toward the raptor I’d impaled.

“Got it!” she yelled, and I saw her spider legs coil under her human body half a moment before she sprung into the air.

The raptor on my spear suddenly changed his strategy, and he surged forward when I thought he was going to keep moving backward. His sudden forward step caused him to slide deeper down my spear and his jaws angled to bite me in the face.

His teeth closed not even an inch from my nose.

I grunted, lifted up the back of my spear, and then pushed forward as hard as I could. The raptor tried to keep coming at me, but the angle of my weapon was too steep, and I was pushing too hard. We both ran across the open courtyard of the fort before I slammed the tip of the spear into a crack in the walls. My weapon pushed through the tiny gap in the logs we had erected and I felt it kind of lock in place.

“Sit tight, asshole,” I gasped as I moved my grip to the back part of the spear. The raptor let out a frustrated growl as it thrashed against the stuck spear, but it looked like it was starting to lose a bit of its strength, and blood was pouring out of its stomach as if someone had turned on a bath faucet.

A trio of spears leaned up against the wall, and I grabbed one before turning to the last three raptors. Trel and Sheela were keeping the ones with the arrows in their bodies at bay, but the one that I just speared in its chest had wiggled free of my weapon. He was spewing blood all over the ground of our fort, but he also looked really pissed off, and he turned toward me with a low rumbling hiss.

He then turned toward the hut where Kacerie and Galmine watched our battle.

“No!” I shouted as the injured raptor sprinted toward them.

I was about twenty yards away from the raptor, and I knew the beast could run faster than me, but I threw all logic out the window and sprinted toward the hut. I was already gasping for breath because of the fighting, but I ignored the agony in my chest, the blackness on the edges of my vision, and the pain of my bare feet slamming into the ground.

The raptor wasn’t moving as fast as I expected, probably because of its chest wound, but it still looked like it would reach the door of our hut before I would get there. I tried to pump my legs faster, and I felt a bit of surprise when my limbs actually complied.

Both Galmine and Kacerie were peeking out from behind the curtain, but they ducked back inside as soon as they saw the raptor and I sprinting toward them. They seemed to be frozen with shock, and I wanted to scream a warning to them, but I didn’t want to sacrifice even a tiny bit of oxygen.

If I got there half a second after the raptor, things would be really bad.

But we got there at the same time.

“Ahhhhhggggghhh!” I screamed as I plowed into the raptor. I’d meant to impale him with my spear, but the tip of my weapon had skipped across

his hide and gone over his back. I adjusted by bringing my right shoulder into him, and we both smashed through the curtain of the hut like wrecking balls.

Kacerie and Galmine both let out screams when we landed in the center of the hut. Fortunately, my shoulder check had knocked the raptor into the fire, and it screeched as flames began to crawl up its feathers. The dinosaur twisted on his back as if he was a dog trying to scratch his shoulder, but his movements only made the fire crawl up him faster.

“Watch out!” I shouted as it lashed out with its feet. The hut wasn’t nearly big enough for the four of us, and one of its kicks almost sliced Kacerie.

Jinx was a lot smaller than this raptor, but he let out an angry screech and then bit the bigger dino right on his snout. The raptor growled with annoyance and then made a quick snap at my little blue friend. The deinonychus jaws closed over empty air, and my buddy zipped around the campfire so that he could stand next to Galmine.

I still had my spear in my hand, and I pushed the butt of the weapon against the floor so that I could rocket to my feet. Almost as soon as I’d set the weapon to stab into the asshole, it rolled to the side and got its feet on the

ground.

I made a lunge over the smoking fire, aimed the tip of my weapon at the neck of the deinonychus, and then shoved my spear down as I landed. My strike was true, and the weapon tore into the side of the creature's throat as if it was made of wax.

It choked out a soft gurgling sound, turned its hateful eyes toward me, and then coughed out a half gallon of blood as it died.

“Uhh--”

“Wait here!” I interrupted Kacerie as I yanked my spear out of the monster's neck and dashed out of the hut.

Sheela and Trel had killed one of the other raptors, and I watched the cat-woman drive a spear into the chest of the last one they had been fighting. It collapsed with an angry screech, and I adjusted the direction I was running so that I would head toward the fucker I'd impaled against the wall.

The last living raptor was still thrashing against the spear stuck in the wall, so I stabbed my spear into his neck twice, and his body started to slow. By the fourth stab, he had stopped moving altogether, and his chest made a final death rattle sound.

“Damn,” I gasped as I turned around to survey the damage to the camp.

There was a ton of blood on the grass, and both Sheela and Trel were breathing heavily, but there didn’t appear to be any damage to the hut or Hope’s little corral.

“Are there any more out there?” I shouted to Sheela and Trel.

“I only saw the four trying to climb, and I only had two arrows, that is why I came to get you.” Sheela pointed to the hut, and I turned to see Kacerie and Galmine both poking their heads out. I gestured for them to come toward us as I walked to the center of the camp.

“You two okay?” I asked Trel and Sheela when I reached them.

“Yes, Victor,” Sheela said with a curt nod.

“Trel?” I asked.

“Fine.” The spider-woman shrugged. “But I have to go outside and look at the door. I’m hoping it isn’t damaged.”

“They figured out how to climb it,” I said. “We have to worry about that too.”

“I already have an idea.” Trel’s full red lips curled into a smile, and I

could see her vampire looking fangs.

“I figured you would.” I returned her smile, but my legs were starting to shake, and my stomach was spinning. My mind was beginning to come to terms with the fact that I’d somehow Conaned the fuck out of a bunch of raptors, and it was trying to explain to me that I was a dogcatcher from Earth who shouldn’t be here.

“You did well, Victor,” Sheela said as she rested her hand on my shoulder.

“Yeah,” I replied as I took a few long breaths. “Just trying to protect you all.”

“Is it going to be like this every day?” Kacerie whined as she came to stand near us.

“Yes,” I answered her curtly. Then I turned to Sheela. “Check the walls again to make sure that this was the last of them.”

“Yes, Victor,” the cat-woman’s gold-colored eyes glittered, and she dashed toward the wall.

“What kind of answer is that? Yes? Don’t you care that they are

attacking us?” Kacerie was pointing her finger at me, and her pretty nose was scrunched up.

“I just spent the last day explaining everything to you,” Trel groaned. “Don’t bug Victor. He has stuff to do.”

“Like the gray woman in the hut?” Kacerie crossed her arms. “Yeah, he’s been doing her for almost a day. I want to go home. Why don’t you all take me home?”

“Her name is Galmine.” Trel’s eyes narrowed. “I told you her name, and I explained that we are all stuck here and there is no going home.”

“You did, but he didn’t.” The pink-haired woman pointed at me.

“Uggggggghhh,” Trel moaned. “I can’t deal with this. I’m going to go check the wall on the other side of the camp. Victor, I want to speak with you later.”

“Got it,” I said to the beautiful spider-woman, and she walked away on her human legs.

“So what’s your deal?” Kacerie asked as soon as Trel was out of earshot.

“Sounds like Trel told you what is going on,” I said as I glanced over Kacerie’s shoulder. Galmine was still walking toward us from the hut, and she could probably hear what we were saying.

“So did the fuzzy one, but I’m asking you...”

“Victor,” I reminded her as I saw her searching to remember my name.

“Yeah, that’s it. Sorry. I’m normally good with names. I’m just having a hard time.”

“I get it,” I said as I smiled at her.

“Victor, I brought you your pants and shirt,” Galmine said as she neared us.

“Ahh thanks,” I said as I took the clothes from her and started to put them on.

“Are you going to answer my questions?” Kacerie asked impatiently as I put one of my legs into my pants.

“We are stuck here,” I explained. “We were taken by powerful aliens and dumped on this world. Dinosaurs are trying to eat us, so we have to work together to survive.”

“But when are they going to let us go home?” Kacerie’s eyes were a light pastel blue that contrasted with her pink hair.

“Probably never,” I said as I buttoned my pants.

“But you don’t know for sure?” she asked.

“Victor knows a lot of things,” Galmine said with a gentle smile. “We are alive because he protected us.”

“Look, I don’t want to be here,” Kacerie said to both of us.

“Sorry,” I said with a shrug. “I didn’t put you here. I’ve only been on this world for a month. We are just trying to survive. I’m sure Trel and Sheela explained to you that we could use your help.”

“Clear over here!” Sheela yelled, and I nodded across the camp to her.

“Same over here!” Trel shouted.

“I’m not really interested in helping,” the pink-haired woman continued.

“Then you can leave.” As soon as the words left my mouth, I wondered if I had actually said them. It kind of didn’t sound like something I would say, but damn it, I’d just worked my ass off for a solid month to make this

camp.

“What?” the woman asked with surprise.

“Yeah, this is our camp. We built it. I also rode out there on Hope to save your life. You haven’t even said thank you.” It was a bit petty since I didn’t really need her thanks, but it would have been nice if she’d said something instead of whining.

“You can’t kick me out,” she said as she waved her hands. “It is really dangerous out there. Those green feathered monsters keep trying to eat us. I won’t last an hour--”

“Then you need to stop demanding shit, start answering my questions, and then do what I tell you to do,” I interrupted her as I slid my sweat-stained T-shirt over my head. I was sure my clothes smelled awful, but I’d gotten used to living in my own sweat, so I couldn’t even tell anymore.

Bathtubs or a shower. One more thing for the too long of a list of shit we needed to build.

“Uhhh,” Kacerie’s mouth hung open, and she glanced over at Galmine to see if I was joking.

“Victor is really nice. It was his plan to build this fort. He is also a really great lover. You should let him penetrate you tonight--”

“Ahhhh that’s okay!” I interrupted Galmine and felt my cheeks turn red. “We don’t need to talk about it.” I sighed and then looked at the two women on the walls.

“Alright gang, group meeting!” I shouted. “It’s time to figure out what we are going to do next.”

Chapter 2

“First, things first,” I said after the four women had gathered around me. “How are we on food and water?”

“We need more water,” Sheela said. “Our jugs are almost empty.”

“Alright,” I said. “We can get that quickly.”

“We have killed many of the orange birds,” Galmine said. “But they will spoil soon. We are also running low on berries.”

“So we don’t need to eat these raptors?” I said as I gestured the two corpses we stood beside.

“Ewww, you would eat those?” Kacerie asked with disgust.

“We do what we need to survive,” Sheela stated.

“I won’t eat it,” Kacerie said.

“You need to get with the program,” Trel growled as she tapped her legs on the ground. “If I can deal with this food, you can too.”

“Oh? Here we go again; you think you are better than me. Sorry spider-girl, just because you are some sort of princess or--”

“Duchess,” Trel corrected as she raised a clawed finger, “and yes. If you would like to go there, I am better than you. I’m more beautiful, smarter, stronger; and did I mention I was a duchess? What did you do on your world again? Cut hair? You are just a peasant.”

“No one on my world speaks to each other as you have just spoken to me, or they get *Lanced*. So you better watch your tongue in a week.”

“You said *Lance*?” I asked. “That’s the beam that comes out of your hands?”

“Yes,” Kacerie answered. “While you were fucking the gray woman, these two explained this *Eye-Q* stuff.”

“Her name is Galmine,” I growled.

“Galmine, sorry.” Kacerie shrugged.

“You are a hairdresser?” I asked.

“Yes.” Kacerie crossed her arms. “One of the best in my city. I could definitely do something about this.” She pointed to Trel’s head. The spider-woman’s hair was a long lustrous obsidian color, but it was obviously tangled from all the work.

“My hair is--”

“Perfect,” I interrupted Trel. “Kacerie, tell us about your ability. The one your *Eye-Q* says.”

“*Lance*? Everyone on my world can do it. Once a week per hand. We can destroy another life if we choose.”

“That’s crazy,” I said as I glanced at her crossed arms.

“It’s crazy you all can’t do it,” the pink-haired woman said. “How did you maintain law and order on your homeworlds? Seems like idiots would just take advantage of people.”

“There was plenty of that on my world, but we are getting a bit off topic.” I gestured to her arms. “It takes you a week to recharge?”

“Yes,” she replied. “Until then, I am defenseless, and so alone here.”

“You aren’t alone,” I said.

“I will be if you kick me out,” she sighed. “You just said you would.”

“We all need to work together to help each other,” I said as I rubbed my forehead. “If you don’t help, then you can get the fuck out.”

“Victor is right,” Trel said. “We don’t want any freeloaders. It’s

incredibly rude to just sit around and let others do all the work.”

Sheela and I glanced at each other, but I decided not to point out the irony to the black-haired woman. She’d spent most of the last month letting us do all the work around the camp.

“I don’t know how to do anything around here,” Kacerie said. “They showed me how to make those little stone knives, but I--”

“We’ll show you what to do,” I said. “We’ll also need your ideas to improve the camp.”

“I don’t know anything about surviving!” Kacerie shouted. “I’ll cut your hair or something. That’s the only thing I know how to do, but I can’t hunt those things or build walls, or dig ditches to poop in. It’s gross.”

“Look,” I sighed. “We all want to go home, but our number one priority is surviving. We need to get water and food every day. We also need to ensure the camp is stronger so that the dinosaurs can’t get inside. If we can live through the next few months, we’ll probably be able to have a pretty efficient system. We’ll also rescue more people. You can’t just sit around here. We need your help.”

My mind was spinning with all the different tasks ahead of us, and I

started to feel a bit annoyed with myself for relaxing with Galmine. Yeah, the lovemaking had been wonderful, and I felt way more “manly” after being with such a gorgeous woman, but we had a lot of shit to do, and I needed to be the one directing everyone.

“Fine,” Kacerie moaned as she rolled her eyes. “I’ll help. Or do whatever. If you are going to throw me out if I don’t do it. I guess I have little choice. I’m defenseless until my *Lance* recharges, anyway. You’ll probably try to rape me or something.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” I asked.

“Galmine just said I had to let you penetrate me tonight. What happens when I tell you no? Will you just do it anyway or throw me out of the camp?”

“Wow, you are an idiot,” Trel said with a sarcastic tone. “Victor just spent the night with Galmine, and tonight he will be inseminating my womb so that I bear children. Why would he bother with you when he could have either of us?”

“Because I’m--”

“Stop,” I said as I raised my hand to interrupt Kacerie. “I’m not going to force myself on you. I just spent the last month with these three, and I

didn't touch them. I'm not some sort of crazy monster. I'm done talking about your hang-ups. Let's all discuss what we need to do then come up with a plan to do it."

Trel, Sheela, and Galmine all nodded, but Kacerie just frowned.

"Let's talk about water some more," I said.

"Yes," Sheela agreed.

"We are getting the water runs done quickly with Hope," I started, "but I'd like to get it to the point where we only do one run a day. Heck, I'd like to get it to where we don't even need to go get water."

"How would we do that, Victor?" Galmine asked with interest.

"Check those clouds over there," I said as I pointed up and to the distance. "They look like storm clouds. We've only had a few days of rain in the last month, but each of those days dumped enough water to last us a few months. We just have to figure out how to capture and hold it."

"We will need a tank," Trel said as she tapped one of her black claw-fingers against her lip.

"Yeah," I said. "It sounds like a complicated endeavor right now, but

we need to start thinking about making way more pots and methods of capturing rainwater.”

“We will need a lot of clay for pots,” Galmine said, “but I am good with it. I could make a tub to hold water if you get me enough.”

“We’ll start with a bunch of pots,” I said. “If we can carry eight or so on Hope, we’ll only need to make a single run every couple of days. Sheela and I can go and get more clay, and then you can show Kacerie how to make them.”

“Okay,” Galmine agreed as she slowly clapped her hands together.

“Along with that,” I said as I looked at Trel, “we’ll need a better harness for Hope so we can carry more water and clay.”

“I will think on it,” the spider-woman said as she glanced at our parasaurus. As if she knew we were talking about her, Hope let out a pleasant little toot.

“So that’s a plan for water,” I said. “We need to get some more today, and then we need a lot of clay. Let’s talk about food next.”

“Are you hungry?” Galmine asked. “Should I prepare us a midday

meal?”

“When was the last time you all ate?” I asked Sheela, Trel, and Kacerie.

“It was lunch yesterday,” Sheela said, and I felt a bit of surprise that Trel had not barged in on Galmine and me last night to demand we make her food.

“Yeah, Galmine, let’s get food cooking. Trel, can you inspect the door to make sure the raptors didn’t damage it before you join us?”

“Yes, Victor,” the spider woman said, and then she bounded away from me.

The four women and I returned to the hut, and Sheela and I dragged the corpse of the raptor outside. Once he was gone, and we got the fire going at full power again, Galmine pulled the already cleaned and defeathered carcass of an orange bird out of a clay pot. It was one we killed yesterday and didn’t actually smell bad.

“Butchers often hang meat,” I said as I thought about various movies and books I’d read. “I don’t really know if it that keeps the meat fresher for longer, but we are going to have to figure out how to preserve things we hunt

or gather, or farm.”

“Salt,” Sheela said.

“Yeah,” I replied to her with a smile. “I don’t know anything about getting salt or even how to use it to preserve food. Do you just throw a lot of it on the meat?”

“Yes,” Sheela answered. “The salt keeps the meat too dry for bacteria to infect. The thinner the slices the better, but we would need to find salt. We can also smoke the meat for a similar effect.”

“So we’ll need to find salt, or build some kind of oven that we can use to smoke,” I said as I thought through the labor.

“Victor, this might not be important right now,” Sheela said. “There is vast wildlife on this world, and it is not difficult to hunt or fish for food.”

“Yeah,” I said with a nod. “I’m just worried about if we have to hunker down inside the fort because there are a ton of raptors or a carnotaurus out there. We might not be able to leave the walls, so I want to be prepared. I’ll shelve the idea for now, but let’s talk about other ways to get food. We’ve got hunting, gathering, and farming. Seems like we are halfway decent at hunting. How do we get better at gathering?”

“We need more baskets,” Galmine said as she put the bird meat on a spit and set it over the fire. “Then we need to pick the berries. There are also roots and leaves we can eat.”

“Do you know which ones we can eat?” I asked. “I’m guessing that we each have different stomach workings.”

“I have a good idea,” the gray-skinned woman said. “We are different, but some vegetables, nuts, and tubers can also be soaked to remove harmful poisons. Then they can be eaten. I haven’t been able to get out of our cave and show you all what to look for.”

“Hmmm,” I said as I rubbed the beard growing on my face.

“The door is undamaged,” Trel said as she walked into the hut. “The logs we used are a bit rough, and they were able to wedge their claws on some of the knots and leverage themselves up.”

“So how do we fix it?” I asked.

“We’ll need to take some knives or axes and shave some parts so they are smoother,” she answered. “I will work on it later. What did I miss in the conversation?”

“Galmine knows how to identify berries and plants we can eat, but we’d have to take her outside,” I explained.

“Ewww,” Trel said as she made a choking sound. “Who wants to eat plants? That is what my food eats.”

“It is what I also eat, Trel,” Galmine said with a friendly smile. “This meat hurts my stomach.”

“Ugh,” Trel sighed. “So we have to get plants?”

“We’ll also need some for Hope,” I said. “She’ll eat the grass inside of our fort, but we’ll eventually run out. We’ll need to bring more in, or figure out a way for her to be out to pasture.”

“The solution is simple,” Trel said, and we all turned to her. “Victor needs to tame a bigger dinosaur. Galmine can ride on its back and tell us what vegetables to eat, then we can pick them.”

“Then we can put them in the baskets and bring them back,” Galmine said. “It is a good idea.”

“If I can tame a larger dino,” I said. “Even if I do tame one, where would we keep it? We might be able to fit another two or three parasaur in

there with Hope, but then it's going to get really cramped. Especially with them pooping all the time."

"Speaking of poop," Galmine said with a giggle. "It is a good fertilizer. I am very skilled at growing a garden, but I don't have enough space inside the fort. If we go out and grab some berries or other edible plants, I'll be able to start a garden outside the fort."

"I like the idea, but I also don't," I said. "I really want us to have a farm, but I don't want you outside of the walls where it is dangerous."

"I agree," Sheela said.

"I don't," Trel said, and we all gave her a confused look. "The answer is simple, again. This isn't our permanent home."

"But I like this place," Galmine said. "We all built it together and--"

"I'm not saying we need to leave this spot," Trel interrupted. "But we built this fort this size because we didn't have a lot of time. But Victor wants to pick berries, or leaves, or whatever with you, so having a larger dinosaur to ride will be safer, and we need more space. Now he wants a farm, we need more space. I bet that once he starts talking about defending the fort, we are going to come up with the same answer: more space." Trel folded her arms

over her magnificent breasts and gave us all a smirk. “Trust me, I’m smart. We need more space. Especially if we want to rescue more people. I will need some privacy with Victor tonight so that we can breed, and we only have room for this small hut inside of the fort. You all will have to sit outside while he inseminates me.”

“Uhh Trel, I’m not so--” I started to say, but the spider-woman kept talking.

“What happens when there are ten of us? Or twenty? Or fifty? We will need more space and private huts.”

“I agree with more huts,” Kacerie said as she shot Galmine and me an exasperated look. “If I must be here, I want my privacy.”

“Okay,” I said as I held up my hands so their attention came back to me. “I think this is a good segway into our next topic: Defense.”

“Yes,” Sheela said. “These walls are tall, but we will still have a problem with one of the larger carnotaurus type dinosaurs that we have seen. A tall one might be able to lean over the top.”

“Sounds like you are voting for larger walls and a bigger fort,” I said.

“Maybe.” Sheela shrugged. “How large do we make it? The whole clearing? It will take many months of work and be hard to guard without more help. A larger dinosaur might help us haul some of the more massive trees over, but we would have a problem lifting them into the support holes.”

“That will not be a problem,” Trel said. “I have devised a weight and fulcrum strategy that will easily tip larger logs into holes with little effort on our part. We can implement it with Hope, or we can use a larger dinosaur if you tame one.”

“Really?” I asked. “How does it work?”

“I can get into it now,” she said with a shrug, “but it isn’t immediately important. Just know that I can do it.”

“We can build around this fort,” Sheela said as she gestured out of the hut. “If we go another fifty feet out, we can make a new outer circle using the same design that Trel thought of. Then we will be able to fit in a garden and a larger pen for more dinosaurs.”

“But then we’ll have to rebuild another wall when we get more people,” Trel said. “We should go a hundred feet out. Our current fort is about seventy-five feet in diameter, so if we go a hundred more feet out, we’ll

have a bit under sixty thousand square feet.”

“That seems big,” I said as I remembered that an acre was around forty-three thousand square feet and a bit smaller than a football field.

“It will be too hard to defend,” Sheela said. “It will also take too long to build.”

“If this one cooperates, it will take us another six weeks. I have already done the math.” Trel pointed to Kacerie.

“I don’t know how to build anything,” Kacerie said. “It sounds like a lot of work.”

“Welcome to our life,” Trel scoffed. “Believe me, I’d rather be at home sorting through my line of male suitors from atop my throne of silk pillows, but we are here now.”

“It will still be too hard to guard,” Sheela argued.

“We will find more people to help us,” Trel said. “There is one of those sky beams every few days, and I will give birth to my brood in three months. If we only go fifty feet out, it will leave us with twenty-four thousand feet. That sounds like a lot until we factor in a garden for Galmine, a pen for more

of Victor's dinosaurs, and huts for the other people who might join us. If we do a larger fort, we won't need to upgrade again when we have another four people. We'll probably be able to fit twenty, and once we have those twenty, it will be easy enough to expand the wall out so that we take over the whole clearing." Trel's voice came out in an excited flurry of words, and it seemed like she was fighting the smile on her face.

"Six weeks?" I asked.

"Six weeks," Trel replied with a nod. "If nothing goes wrong, of course. It might even go faster if you can get some extra dinosaurs to drag trees and dig holes faster. Yes, I'm liking this idea even more. We'll have enough space to let your pet dinosaurs graze inside the walls. We can even make moveable pens so we can cycle them through different pasture."

"Alright," I said as I tried to forget about her mentioning her brood. "I'll think about it." Six weeks didn't seem like a long investment to rebuild the fort walls, but then I realized that I'd already spent a month here, and I had no idea if I'd ever get back home.

"We will need to create platforms on the interior walls, of this fort, and any future fort we build." Sheela gestured outside again.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“If I wish to shoot an arrow or use my spear, I must climb on top of the wall. We need a platform where we can stand elevated and shoot arrows down on creatures trying to gain entry.”

“Ahh yeah, that makes sense,” I said as I turned to Trel.

“I can build one tomorrow,” the spider woman said with a nod. “Will take me about half the day, but only a few hours if someone else helps.”

“We will need more than one,” Sheela said. “So that we can shoot from multiple angles.”

“How about three?” Trel asked. “Two flanking the door, and then one at the rear should work. If you both help me, I can get them done tomorrow. Then I can build larger ones when we have our new and improved walls built.”

“You are really into this,” I said as I smiled at the beautiful spider-woman.

“Hmmm.” Her lips curled a bit. “I guess I have a knack for building stuff. It’s strange since I never cared about it before coming here.”

“You are smart,” I said with a shrug, “it just sounded like you didn’t have to work much before you came here.”

“Oh, my dear Victor,” she said with an exasperated sigh. “You had no idea how hard it was picking out suitors. I don’t need to worry about that anymore.”

“You don’t?” Galmine asked with confusion.

“No,” Trel said as she wrapped her long stiff fingers around my bicep. “Tonight Victor will impregnate me. I’ll use my venom on one of the raptor corpses outside. It won’t be perfect, but the muscles, bones, and fat of the thing should be ready by the time I give birth. Then they will feed upon it and grow stronger. Life will be easy then since they will do my bidding.”

“Uhhh, Trel,” I said as I looked down at the hand she had wrapped around my bicep. “I’m not really sure I can impregnate you.”

“Don’t be silly. I am ovulating. You will impregnate me.”

“It doesn’t quite work that way,” I said as carefully as I could.

“What do you mean?” she asked. “Does your penis not work?” Trel turned to Galmine.

“Oh, it works wonderfully,” Galmine said as she smiled at me.

“That’s not the point--” I started to say, but Trel asked Galmine another question.

“Does he not make sperm then?”

“Oh, plenty of sperm,” Galmine moaned and licked her lips. “Plenty of delicious sp--”

“Ewww!” Kacerie shouted. “If you are going to talk about his dick all day, I’ll just leave.”

“We are having an important discussion,” Trel said to the pink-haired woman. “Just as on my homeworld, my pregnancy here should be considered with the correct amount of awe and reverence. Victor and I are the most important people in our little tribe, and our offspring will ensure that we all survive. Really, you should be honored that I’m allowing you to take part in this conversation.”

“Is she always like this?” Kacerie asked Sheela, but the cat-woman just shrugged.

“Trel, we are different species,” I said. “We can’t have children.”

“I don’t see why being different species has anything to do with it,” Trel said, but then her eyes narrowed. “Unless you do not find me attractive.”

“Uhhh, no. I mean, ahh, you are--”

“Ha! I know you find me attractive,” she interrupted me. “You are male, and I am beautiful. I watch your pants bulge whenever I talk to you. I already told you I would not kill you afterward, so what is your problem?”

“We just won’t have children. It’s impossible.” I tried to calm my pounding heart as her black eyes stared into mine.

“Fine,” Trel sighed. “I see how this is going to be. I’ll take care of everything.”

“What do you mean?” I asked as my stomach dropped. Having a night of sex with Galmine had really given me a boost in my self-confidence, but that was quickly withering under Trel’s dark piercing gaze.

“I’ll do all the work. You can just lie there, and I’ll ensure you fill my womb with every last ounce of your--”

“How did we get here?” Kacerie interrupted. “I thought you all were going to talk about survival, not having sex.”

“Good point, Kacerie,” I said. “Let’s get back on topic.”

“Whatever,” Trel hissed as her fingers tightened on my arm. “I’m not done with you.”

“So we need to build a new wall, and it will probably help to get another parasaur.” I thought about my *Tame* ability and wondered how big of a dinosaur I could control. Hope worked great, and she fit inside of our fort, but if I could get a big triceratops, it might be able to knock over a tree without us even cutting it. “I also want to get another parasaur so we can test out someone else riding it while I’m not around.”

“What do you mean?” Sheela asked.

“We’ve both ridden on Hope,” I explained. “I’ve also been by myself. I’m wondering if you can ride her to the lake or stream without me.”

“Hmmm,” Sheela said, and she suddenly looked a bit nervous.

“You could test that now,” Trel said.

“Yeah, but if Hope throws Sheela and then bolts, we might be out our only parasaur. It will be better for us to test it with a second one, so we don’t risk it.

“It is a good plan,” Sheela said quickly, and I guessed that the powerful cat-woman might have been a bit scared of riding one of the dinos by herself.

“Yeah, okay. I think we’ve got a short list of shit we have to do,” I said as I ran through them in my head. “Sheela and I have to go get water at the stream and then make a few runs for clay. Then we need to look for another parasaur or other rideable dino that can help us build the camp. While we are out, we’ll look for some sort of salt lick and more leaves to make cordage and baskets. Then our main focus will be on cutting down bigger trees and building the new wall. Sheela, did I miss anything?”

“No, Victor,” she replied.

“You forgot about your job with me tonight and helping me make the platforms tomorrow,” Trel said.

“Ahh yeah. Okay.” I felt my cheeks flush, and I tried to move my hips casually so that my hard-on wouldn’t be noticed by the spider-woman. Trel was all sorts of scary, but who was I kidding? She was also dangerously beautiful, and I knew I’d get over the legs coming out of her back as soon as we were having sex.

As long as she didn’t kill me afterward.

“Trel should also help us with the saddle for Hope so that we can carry more water,” Sheela offered.

“I know,” Trel said with a sigh. “I’m also going to fix the door and then think about the rainwater collection idea. I didn’t pay much attention when Galmine made all the pots, but I’ll look at her process this time and see if I can find some inspiration.”

“Great,” I said. “So Galmine and Kacerie will work on pots, spears, arrows, and baskets-- hey I have an idea.” The thought jumped in my head and I got excited. “They make traps to catch fish, I don’t really know how they are made, but I’m sure we can figure them out.”

“Traps to catch fish?” Galmine asked as she turned the meat over the fire. The smell of turkey was filling the hut, and my stomach let out a low rumble.

“Ahh, I know this one,” Kacerie said as she raised her hand. “One of my boyfriends was a commercial fisher, and he used traps.” The pink-haired woman made a motion with her hands so they were in a “V” shape. “There is a funnel basket that goes into a larger basket. The fish swim down the funnel toward a bit of food or something, and then they come out inside of the larger

basket, they aren't smart enough to swim back out of the smaller hole."

"Okay, that's your job when Galmine shows you how to put together the baskets."

"I also need shoes," Kacerie said as she pointed down her tight jeans toward her bare feet.

"Hmmm," I said. "We could probably weave something with the stuff we used for the baskets."

"Ugh," Kacerie groaned. "They are going to look terrible, I can already imagine them."

"You could just go barefoot," I said with a shrug.

"Those heels I took off? They are ten thousand credit shoes." Kacerie moaned and put her face in her hands. "I can't believe I'm here. This is a nightmare."

"Yeah, but you could be dead," I sighed, and the woman turned her light blue eyes to me.

"Yeah... Uhhh. Look, Victor, I haven't thanked you yet. Sorry I've been kind of a bitch. I'd be monster shit right now if it weren't for your

bravery. I want to go home, but until we find out how to do that, I'll help however I can."

"Thanks, good to hear," I said as I nodded along with Galmine, Sheela, and Trel. Her attitude seemed to have taken a 180 degree turn, but I wasn't going to worry about it right now. I had too much shit to do and not enough time to do it in.

"The food is done!" Galmine exclaimed as she finished turning the spit. We had some clay plates stacked in a corner, and she ripped pieces of the steaming bird off to give to us.

"Doesn't that hurt your hand?" Kacerie asked with what sounded like a mixture of amazement and disgust.

"No," Galmine answered. "I have thick skin. Here, this is yours. Welcome to our family." She passed the plate to Kacerie and the pink-haired woman glanced down at it.

"Something wrong?" Sheela asked her after she took her plate from Galmine.

"Uhhh, nothing," Kacerie answered.

“Then why aren’t you eating?” Trel asked after she finished chewing on her first bite of food.

“It’s uh-hh. Nothing.” Kacerie still hadn’t looked up from the food.

The rest of us ate in silence for a few moments. The meat really did need some salt, but I was starving, and I only gave each piece a few cooling puffs of my breath before I shoved them in my mouth.

“You still aren’t eating,” Galmine said with a pouty face. “Do you not like it?”

“I ah-hh. It’s just dirty.” Kacerie sighed.

“Dirty?” Galmine’s face formed an “O” shape.

“Yeah, you picked it up with your fingers. Sorry. I’m kind of a germaphobe. I didn’t see you wash your hands or anything.”

“Oh-hh!” Galmine said with a delighted sigh. “You don’t have to worry, my hands are clean.”

“Oh, okay. Thanks.” Kacerie carefully took a small piece of the cooked bird meat and then pushed it into her mouth. She chewed a few times, smiled, and then swallowed before grabbing the next piece. Soon she was tearing into

the food and letting out soft moans of pleasure.

“Glad you like it!” Galmine said after Kacerie was almost done with her piece.

“Yeah, sorry I thought your hands weren’t clean. I’m embarrassed that I accused you of--.”

“Oh, don’t worry,” Galmine said. “I washed them last night before Victor and I made love. They are very clean.”

“Excuse me?” Kacerie’s mouth froze mid-chew.

“Yes,” Galmine said proudly. “I didn’t want to get any dirt on Victor’s body, so I washed them last night.”

“But... you didn’t... uhhh.” Kacerie’s face had paled, and she looked over to me. “Wash them after?”

“We only have half a jug of water left. I didn’t want to waste it on my hands. Besides, Victor’s body was yummy.”

“Galmine,” I groaned. “You have to wash your hands before you start cooking.”

“Oh? I do? I’ve never done it before.”

“I have to go,” Kacerie said as she set down her plate, turned to the curtain of the hut, and then dashed out.

“Ohh, she didn’t like it,” Galmine sighed as we heard gagging in the distance.

“I would like a second helping,” Sheela said as she held out her plate toward Galmine for more.

“Meeeh,” Trel said with a shrug of her shoulders. “She’ll be fine. Besides, I’m looking forward to tasting more of Victor.”

Chapter 3

After we finished eating, Sheela, Trel, and I exited the hut and worked to clean up the bodies of the raptors. The spider woman asked us to leave the one I had impaled against the wall so that she could use her digestive poison to prepare it for her children. I didn't really want to know the details of how her process worked, so I busied myself with hauling the other three bodies outside of the gate with Sheela.

"The orange birds seem happy that we have left," Sheela said after we dragged the first raptor body out of the door. I turned to look where she was and saw a few dozen perched on the ramp outside of what used to be our cave. They were about a hundred yards away from us, and they hadn't seemed to care about our fort.

"Think they will eat the corpses of these raptors?" I asked as I looked down at our burden.

"They might, but I worry about getting too close to them."

"Yeah," I said as I glanced back to our walls. The corpses of the other raptors we had killed were still there, and I debated on our course of action.

We didn't want to be anywhere near these things when they started to rot. The smell would be terrible, but it would also attract other scavengers that might be dangerous.

"Let's go a little closer," I said. "Then we can drop the body off and hope that they dispose of it."

"How much closer?" Sheela asked, and I could hear the concern in her voice.

"Maybe halfway?"

"Victor, they are very territorial. If they attack us, they will chase us back to our fort."

"Then we'll kill them there," I said with a shrug. "The raptor corpses have to be moved, and I don't want to drag all of them to the edge of the redwood forest. That will take us the rest of the day, and we need to go get water and clay."

"Understood," Sheela said. "I will do as you ask."

We dragged the first corpse to the halfway point between our camp and the cave. Part of me wanted to go a bit closer, but Sheela's worry was eating

at me, so I decided to leave the corpse there and hoped that the orange birds would try to eat it.

“Next one,” I said as we turned back toward the camp. “We’ll clear the inside out first and then get the ones outside.”

“Very well,” Sheela said with her usual stoic nod.

“What do you think of Kacerie?” I asked.

“I do not have an opinion yet,” Sheela answered.

“You spent almost a whole day with her,” I said.

“Trel did most of the talking, I watched the clearing for raptors.”

“Ahh,” I said, and silence fell between us.

We reached the door, ducked back inside, and then grabbed the next corpse. Sheela didn’t speak as we dragged it back out across the clearing, and I started to get worried. The cat-woman was never much for conversation, but we had spent the majority of the last month working side by side, and there was something different about her today.

I didn’t say anything until we had grabbed the last raptor corpse from inside our walls and taken it almost to the dump site.

“Did I do something to piss you off?” I asked.

“What do you mean?” she asked. “How do I piss off?”

“Sorry,” I said. “It’s an expression. Are you angry with me?”

“No, Victor, of course not,” she answered quickly.

“You seem angry about something,” I said.

“It is nothing,” she said.

“Seems like it is something,” I replied. “Come on. We are buddies.

Yeah, we got Trel’s help, but you and I pretty much built that whole fort and the one before it. You can tell me stuff if you want to.”

“I was thinking of my husband,” she said with a sigh.

“Oh, yeah.” I felt my stomach drop a bit.

I couldn’t really understand Sheela’s perspective, so I didn’t know if it was worth trying. On one hand, she was married to a man who had like sixteen other wives. She didn’t really know the man, and it sometimes sounded as if she had been unhappy. On the other hand, Sheela seemed like the kind of woman who enjoyed having her place set in life.

“It is not how you might think,” she said. “I do not miss him.”

“Ahh. Okay. I don’t want to pry.”

We set the corpse down beside the other bodies and then walked back toward the wall. There were twelve or so raptor bodies from our fight yesterday, and we each grabbed onto the one closest to the door.

“We have very little chaos in our lives,” she continued without me asking. “There can be violence between families when a male tries to take another’s harem, but major struggles have not happened in my area of the world for quite some time.”

“I’m trying to understand how your culture works. Did you have cars, streets, cities, and jobs?”

“We didn’t have the vehicles you spoke of,” Sheela said. “We did have machines, engines, and electricity, but our people enjoyed running. Yes, we had cities and streets made out of stone or metal. Most men had jobs, but only a few women did. Once they were married, they were responsible for raising the children and taking care of the home.”

“So every one of your race just ran everywhere?” I asked as I glanced at Sheela’s impressive body.

“Yes,” she answered with a half smile. “Oh, the women sometimes

hunted game animals to provide food for the family, but we also had stores where food could be purchased.”

“Sounds kind of fun,” I said. “A blend of modern convenience and physical activity.”

“You mentioned that your people ride mostly in those cars and watch their ‘tell visions’? Did you enjoy physical activity before coming to this world?”

“They are called televisions.” I smiled at her as we dumped down the body. “And yeah, I liked going outdoors, but I also liked watching television and playing games that showed on the screen. I would have never thought I would be capable of building something like this.” I gestured back at the fort’s walls as we walked toward another corpse.

“What will you do when we return home?” she asked.

“Uhh, what do you mean?” I was a bit surprised by her question, and I turned to see her amber eyes glowing.

“It is an exercise I have been performing; which may have caused the mood you observed. If we were suddenly returned home, how would your life be different?”

“I dunno,” I said. “I feel like I gave up on rescue a few weeks ago when I had my talk with Trel.”

“When you were both alone in the cave?” Sheela asked with a raised eyebrow.

“I kind of realized that if her sisters with their spaceships and advanced technology weren’t going to come save her, there was no way anyone from my world was going to rescue me. So, I just accepted that I would be here forever.”

“Hmm,” Sheela said as she studied me.

“Yeah, but to answer your question, I think I’d do a lot of things differently. I would probably look for a new job.”

“Your occupation was animal hunter, correct?”

“Well kinda,” I said with a sheepish smile. “I helped find lost animals and moved dangerous ones out of our city. It was a good job but, my parents were animal doctors. When they died, I didn’t want to follow in their footsteps. I think I kind of sabotaged myself and took a job around animals that didn’t pay great. If I went back, I’d try to find something that paid more money and do my best to continue schooling so I could open up my own

animal hospital.”

“Like your parents?” she asked.

“Yeah,” I replied. “I lost my way, but now I realize that life is pretty brief. I was always kind of shy and didn’t really jump at opportunities. I was afraid of failure or being mocked, but this last month has taught me a lot.”

“But would you be happy if you returned?” she asked as we grabbed another corpse.

“Huh,” I said as I thought about her question. “I think happiness is kind of what you make of it. I really wasn’t happy in my old life. I was letting my parent’s death kind of define me. Know what I mean?”

“Yes,” she said with her usual nod.

“It’s weird, but I’m really happy here.” My words made me chuckle a bit, and I looked down at the raptor carcass we carried. “I could die at any second, but I’ve kind of learned what I am made of. If I got back home, I think I’d really change my life. I sure as hell would be a lot more grateful that I wasn’t getting attacked by dinosaurs every day.”

“I understand,” Sheela replied, and we didn’t speak for a few more

minutes.

The cat-woman and I grabbed another corpse, and then another, and then I kind of realized I hadn't asked her the question she had asked me, and I wondered if that had been her intent.

"Would you be happy if you returned?"

"No," she answered simply.

"Uhhh no? Why not?"

"I was alone."

"But you are married and there were the other wives. Didn't you have friends?"

"My husband cared little for me," she said. "We met briefly on our wedding day and exchanged only a few words."

"That's crazy," I said. "Is it supposed to be like that?"

"He had other wives. I was unimportant to him emotionally. He married me for ties to my family, and then I moved across our continent so I could live in his home."

"That sucks," I said. "You two didn't like... uhhh... Spend any--"

“We consummated the marriage,” she said. “He bent me over our wedding bed, thrust into me four times, climaxed, and then left without speaking to me.”

“Uhhh. Fuck. What an asshole.” My head spun with her words. Part of me couldn’t believe she was sharing this much detail, but another part of me ached that my beautiful friend was married to someone who didn’t care for her.

“It is what it is,” Sheela replied as we dumped the body. “From the conversations you and I have shared, it seems that male and females on your world have an even balance of power.”

“Yeah, kind of,” I said. “It’s complicated, but it doesn’t swing as far north or south as your and Trel’s world. It seems to be closer to Galmine’s, only without all the orgies. Or at least, I’ve never been to any orgies.”

“Me either.” She smiled at me, and her eyes glowed a bit.

“So, uhh, you don’t want to go home then?” I asked hesitantly.

“No,” she replied. “That is what I have been thinking about. There is nothing for me there. Here, I have friends and a purpose. Yes, it is dangerous, but I also feel alive. At home, I felt as if the days passed by in a numbing

tumble. To occupy myself, I would take long runs through the forest and plains. I would hunt alone, and now I realize I was hoping for something tragic to befall me.”

“For real?” I asked with concern. “That sounds like some serious depression.”

“Depression?” she asked with confusion.

“A deep sadness,” I explained.

“Yes,” she said. “That is a good description. I felt as if I had no escape.”

“You couldn’t have gotten a divorce?” I asked as we dumped another corpse on the pile. “I thought you mentioned something about divorce being possible.”

“Yes, but the situation is complicated. I would have to attach myself to another male, and my husband could challenge him in battle. I could not leave on my own, and if I did find a new husband, my potential mate would need to be willing to fight for me.”

“Damn,” I said as my heart beat heavy in my chest. “You are beautiful,

smart, caring, and talented. I'm surprised you didn't have more men lining up to fight for you."

"My husband is very powerful." Sheela shrugged. "Most men of my race stand about as tall as me, perhaps a bit taller. My head only came up to his shoulders, and his arms were as thick as my legs. Most men would lose, and any who might win have their own wives they were probably satisfied with."

"Ugh," I said. "That just sucks. I'm sorry. I can't imagine what that must be like to go through."

"It is fine," she replied as we grabbed another corpse.

"It's not though," I said. "You are my friend, and I don't want you to feel sad."

"Sadness is a part of life," she said. "We can only hope it does not last forever. My sadness has passed though. As I said, I am happy on this world. I am happy with you."

"Me?" I asked as I looked at her.

"With us. Our small tribe," she corrected quickly. "As I said, I have a

purpose now. I feel important and valued.”

“So you want to stay?” I asked, and we held each other’s eyes for a few moments.

“Yes,” she answered. “Perhaps you think me insane.”

“No. I get it.” My mind reviewed what she said, and I found that I did agree with her. I wouldn’t want to live in her world, and even though Dinosaurland was incredibly challenging, I felt like I was starting to belong here.

I still would have gone home if given the chance, but maybe one day I would prefer to stay here.

Sheela and I didn’t speak for a few more minutes, and soon we were grabbing the last corpse. The orange birds still hadn’t come to investigate the pile of bodies we made, but it was still far enough from our camp to provide me with peace of mind.

I just hoped that something smaller than a carnotaurus showed up to eat the pile of bodies.

“That’s the last one,” I said as we hauled the final raptor on the pile.

“Water now?” Sheela asked.

“Yeah,” I replied as we made our way back to the camp. Our task of cleaning up all the bodies had taken us a few hours, and the sun was hanging really low in the sky. It was almost the perfect time to ride to the stream, but I worried we might be too late to go and get clay.

“Huh,” I said as soon as Sheela and I walked under the gate. Hope was already standing beside the exit, and she had two of the larger water jugs tied to her saddle.

“I got Hope ready for you,” Trel said as she strolled toward us.

“Wow, thanks,” I said. “That was nice of you.”

“I do not wish to waste time,” the spider-woman replied as she held out the quiver and bow to Sheela. “We made more arrows for you. Only fifteen, but I have devised a new method that will allow us to craft them more efficiently.”

“Thank you, Trel,” Sheela said as she wrapped the quiver belt around her hip.

“Hurry back,” Trel said as she turned her dark eyes to me.

“We’ll still have to get clay after this,” I said.

“Uhhh, I know.” The spider woman rolled her head back. “That’s why I’m telling you to hurry. It will be night soon. I will fix the door while you are gone.”

“Thank you,” I said. “You are being really helpful.”

“I’m being selfish,” Trel said with a laugh. “I want to have my children, and I want to live. Don’t forget your spear.”

“Got it,” I said as I grabbed one that was leaning against the wall by the door. As I got on top of Hope’s saddle, I kind of felt like I was leaving my wife for a day of work, but then Sheela mounted behind me and pressed her body tightly against my back. This was one hell of a strange job, and the relationship I had with these three women was pretty far away from a typical “marriage.”

Hope let out a happy toot when we passed under the gate. As soon as we were a few dozen feet clear of the walls, I urged her to go faster, and her long legs stretched out in a long lope.

I had no way of really knowing exactly how fast Hope could run, but the wind was soon stinging my eyes, and Sheela was squeezing her strong

arms around my stomach. We dashed through the forest of massive redwoods, leapt over tall hedges of ferns, and then winded around the various moss-covered boulders. We made it to our small river in record time, and I felt a bit of disappointment when I slowed the parasaur down.

“That was exhilarating,” Sheela said as she flipped off Hope’s back.

“Yeah,” I agreed as I slid off with a much less graceful movement. I handed Sheela one of the jugs and then took the other to the edge of the water with her. I left my spear on Hope’s saddle, but she was only ten yards away, and Sheela had her bow slung over her shoulders. If anything attacked us, she could buy me the few seconds I needed to get my spear out.

“You still seem upset about something,” I said as she pulled her jug out of the water.

“Why do you say so?” she asked as she brought the clay to her lips to drink.

“I just know you.”

“I am sorry I am acting strange,” she said.

“Is it Kacerie? You kind of dodged my question about her earlier.” I

took a long drink from my own jug and let my eyes wander over the surrounding terrain.

“Perhaps I am a bit worried about her,” Sheela admitted.

“Why?”

“She was asking about our abilities. Her power is the beams from her hands. Her *Eye-Q* said it was level 2. She seemed amazed that we didn’t have it. Her questions concerned me a bit.”

“Do you think she’ll use her powers against us?” I asked as my stomach knotted up. Sheela was my battle expert, and I trusted her instincts. Especially when the enemy was a beautiful woman. I knew that I tended to think more with my penis than my brain around them.

“It is worth considering,” Sheela said. “I do not want us to kick someone out of our camp since it would mean probable death, but I am happy there are three capable fighters in our small group.”

“Why do you say that?” I asked.

“I would most likely be her first target, then either you or Trel. I would bet Trel since our friend is more capable than you in combat.”

“I’m trying to get better,” I said with a chuckle.

“I know,” Sheela replied, “I am just thinking what I would do if I wanted to take over the camp.”

“Kacerie would still have to hunt and gather water, and whatever. She needs us.”

“Agreed.” Sheela nodded. “Perhaps my fears are unjustified, but as I said before, you three are very important to me, and I do not wish to lose you.”

“I don’t want to lose you either,” I said.

“I noticed Kacerie’s attitude change around you,” Sheela said with a slight frown. “She was somewhat rude to me. It did not bother me much, but I decided to let Trel handle her. When you awoke, Kacerie went to you immediately with her complaints. You were unphased by her, so she quickly changed her strategy to become more agreeable.”

“She still seemed whiny and bitchy to me,” I sighed as I took another long gulp of water. “I’m glad Trel is cooperating with us now, but I really don’t have the energy to deal with someone else like her. I would like Kacerie’s help, but we are just fine without her.”

“I am glad you feel that way,” Sheela said, and I noticed her eyes drift to my lips. “Still, she is an attractive woman. I would not be surprised if she tries to appeal to your masculine properties.”

I let out a bit of a long laugh and shook my head. “I don’t have that many masculine properties. I’m just trying to make sure we all survive.”

“And you are succeeding,” she said. “I find it attractive.”

“Uhhh, yeah. Thanks.” I turned my eyes to her, but she was looking down at the water and filling her jug again. The angle of her crouch let me easily see the shape of her firm breasts, and it almost looked like her tattered bikini top couldn’t contain them.

“So let’s get back and then get clay,” I said as I forced my eyes away from the shape of her beautiful body. “We’ll need to--”

My voice froze in my throat as I turned back to Hope. The parasaur was turning toward the tree line of the redwood forest, and she was stamping her feet impatiently.

“There is something in the trees!” Sheela hissed as we both stepped across the shore toward Hope.

The hairs on the back of my neck were standing on end, and my stomach was trying to hold down a hundred angry butterflies.

“I don’t see anything,” I whispered as I desperately scanned my eyes through the dark shadows of the trees.

“Me either,” Sheela said, but Hope snorted angrily, and she actually took a step away from the edge of the water.

As if she was getting ready to run.

“Come back, Sweetie,” I called out to Hope, and the parasaur turned her head a bit so that she could see me with one eye. I half expected her to dash away and leave us stranded, but she stepped back toward us, and I quickly attached my jug to her saddle.

“Sheela, get your jug on and we’ll--” I caught movement out of the corner of my eye and turned my head sharply to the left. At the edge of one of the large redwood trunks, I saw a flash of feathers.

The shadows were dark, but I recognized the shade of green.

“Get on!” I jumped on Hope the instant four raptors leapt from behind a clump of ferns.

Sheela dropped her jug and leapt up to the saddle behind me. As soon as I felt one of her arms around my chest, I kicked Hope forward, and the parasaur sprang away from the edge of the stream. We were pointed away from the group charging us, and quickly outpaced them, but then my stomach dropped when I saw six of the large-clawed dinos pop out of the fern hedges some forty yards ahead.

These fuckers were herding us.

“Hold on!” I shouted to Sheela as I pulled left on Hope’s reins and pushed into her flank with my right leg.

The parasaur twisted to the left, and we shot toward the stump of the massive hollowed out tree. The twist in our direction allowed me to see the two groups of raptors chasing us, and Sheela reached over her shoulder so she could free her bow.

Hope let out a startled toot from her horn as I steered her into the wide open maw of the fallen log. There was plenty of space up top, but I still ducked my head a bit to ensure that I didn’t get clipped.

Sheela had her bow out, and her left arm slid free of my chest. I let out a cry of terror when I felt her let me go, but before I could reach back to grab

her, I felt her legs wrap around my abdomen. I spared a quick glance behind me and saw the blonde warrior woman twist her upper body around so she could point her bow at the group chasing us. She was using her legs to anchor herself to my body, and I lowered my left hand to her shins to ensure that she didn't accidentally bump loose.

Up ahead, the ground of the log-tunnel was broken by a jagged spike of petrified wood. It jutted out some four feet like a mini mountain, and I realized there wasn't enough space to steer Hope around it.

"I'm going to jump it!" I shouted as I urged my mount to run faster. Hope sensed my desire, and she ducked her head down so that she could get more speed.

I felt Sheela's arm pull her bow back. Then I heard the twang of the string and a howl of agony behind us. I didn't have time to look, but I guessed that we had one less deinonychus to worry about.

Then we reached the hurdle of sharp wood, and I prayed for Hope to jump over it without cutting her belly open.

There was a moment of weightlessness, and I almost dropped my right hand from the reins so that I could push Sheela's thighs into me. It would

have been a mistake though since Hope's landing was really bumpy, and I felt my legs start to slip free of the saddle.

"Shit!" I growled as I yanked my hand on the rein so that I could stay on top of Hope's back. The movement made the parasaur toot angrily, but she didn't stop her sprint.

"How soon until we are out of the tunnel?" Sheela shouted as I felt her body tense with the movement of another bow pull.

"Fifty yards!" I guesstimated as I looked at the distant hole of dim golden light.

Sheela let loose with another arrow, but I didn't hear a scream behind us. I did, however, see a flurry of movement through the cracks in the ceiling of the massive hollow tree trunk. They were quick whips of black and green color that blocked the sunset from spilling through the breaks of the wood, and I guessed that some of the raptors were pursuing us from on top of the tree.

These fuckers were way too smart.

"We are going to have company as soon as we get outside!" I shouted to Sheela as I willed Hope to try to run faster. My eyes were stinging from

our speed, and the cracks of gold light coming through the musty wood were causing a kaleidoscope effect on my vision.

Twenty yards left, and the shadows from the roof made me think the ones up there were just a bit behind us.

“How many are behind us?” I shouted without looking back.

“Five!” Sheela replied over the sound of the wind blowing past my ears, and I guessed that four of the ten had jumped up onto the log.

We reached the end of the hollowed out redwood, and I heard Sheela shoot another arrow. A howl of surprise echoed from behind us, and I guessed that she had gotten another.

Then we shot out of the end of the log like a bullet leaving the barrel of a gun.

I looked up as we ran and saw the raptors leap into the air. Sheela shouted something that I couldn’t understand, and I pulled Hope’s reins to the right while I pushed on my left foot. The parasaur angled in the direction I wanted to go, but two of the raptors still landed right next to her.

And they brought their clawed feet down as they landed.

The one on my left missed tearing my leg in half by just a few inches. His oversized toe claw tore through the saddle instead, and I kicked out with my left leg to push him away so he couldn't bite at my chest.

The one on the right actually nicked Hope's front shoulder, and the parasaur let out a startled honk from her horn as she twisted away from her attacker. I hadn't quite expected Hope to shift as she did, but it wouldn't have been much of a problem if the raptor on my left hadn't sliced through the cord that held the saddle in place.

Hope twisted left, and our saddle kept going forward. Both Sheela and I were flung from the top of the parasaur's back, and we rolled on the ground like tossed marbles.

For half a moment, the world was just green grass, brown tree trunks, and a spinning blend of those colors. I rolled across a surprisingly soft ground and tried to protect my head the best I could with my arms. A rock dug into my shoulder a moment before I stopped tumbling, but it hadn't really injured me, and I was able to pop back up on my feet only a second after Sheela.

Then I saw the raptors closing in on us.

I knew that Sheela and I were about to die, so I commanded Hope to

keep running home. The saddle was still beside me, and even though the clay jug of water had broken in the fall, my spear was still in its holder, and I was able to yank it free before the group of green feathered assholes made it to us.

“Stay close together!” Sheela ordered in a surprisingly calm voice as she pulled an arrow from her quiver and put it against her bowstring.

“Okay!” I replied, but my voice cracked in the middle, and I felt my limbs start to go numb. I’d been brave this morning and taken on four of these fucks, but this was almost twice that number, and they were charging toward us at full speed.

I lowered my spear and then watched Sheela’s arrow leave her bow in slow motion. It connected with the face of the fucker closest to us, and I pointed the tip of my own weapon at the raptor that was next in line.

Then they were on us.

Chapter 4

I thrust my spear forward and up at the green feathered raptor leaping toward me. His jump had taken him over the flailing body of the dino that Sheela just arrowed in the face, and the angle of his descent gave me a good view of his throat.

I didn't really have any training with a spear beside the few hours I'd spent with Sheela and the combat I've been through, but the weapon was really easy to use, and I found it easy enough to angle the tip upward toward the target. I was also a bit lucky, and the point tore through the raptor's throat at the side, and the beast didn't get stuck on the weapon. Instead, he flopped on the ground beside me with a spray of crimson rain.

I carried my thrust to my left and aimed my weapon at the other fucker jumping toward Sheela. The cat-woman was still calmly loading an arrow, and I wondered if she somehow thought that she'd be able to get it on the string, pull it back, and then kill the raptor as it was in mid-air.

Maybe she could, but I was still going to try my best to defend her.

My spear-tip hit the thing in the chest below its left wing. He hadn't

leapt as high as the first one I'd just killed, but the impact of my thrust was powerful enough to dig a good four inches into his flesh, and the thing let out a screech when I managed to heave it backward into its friends.

“Good!” Sheela said as she raised her bow sideways and let loose with the arrow she had half-nocked.

The bolt flew the ten feet between the raptors and took another one in the chest. It screeched with surprise when it realized that it had gotten hit and then slowed its running speed suddenly.

And all the other raptors skidded to a halt.

“What. The. Fuck?” I whispered slowly as the raptors all turned to one Sheela had just hit.

“Maybe that is the leader,” Sheela said as we both took a step away from the group of dinosaurs. They were all hissing at the one Sheela had just shot, and it, in turn was hissing back at them between wheezes.

“Shit,” I gasped as I realized that they had some way of communicating to each other. “I totally underestimated these fucks.”

“There is a tree behind us,” Sheela whispered as she spared a quick

glance back. “We need to be near it so they cannot surround us.”

“Got it,” I replied as we started to step backward. Unfortunately, our movement got the attention of the raptors, and they turned away from their boss to screech at us.

Sheela let go of the arrow she had nocked, and it hit the leader again in the chest. He let out a bellow of surprise, and I had to make a quick few jabbing motions with my spear to keep the group at bay.

Then, just like Sheela predicted, they began to circle us.

“Fuck,” I gasped as we backpedaled toward the massive redwood tree behind us.

The leader was still standing, even with the two arrows sticking out of his ribs, and he let out a snarl as he took a few steps toward us. Most of these raptors were about the size of giant dogs, maybe two hundred pounds at the most, but this guy looked almost big enough for me to ride, and he must have been around two hundred and fifty pounds. He was probably the alpha for the whole little family we’d been murdering for the last day, and I wouldn’t be surprised if he’d decided that it was time to deal with us personally.

But then again, these fucking feathered dinos probably weren’t that

smart.

At least, I hoped they weren't smart enough to plan this whole ambush.

My feet felt the roots of the redwood under me, and I glanced down so I didn't trip over anything. One of the raptors on my right saw me look away, and he darted forward toward my leg at the same time as one on the left jumped at Sheela. Her bow sang as I shoved my spear forward. My weapon went right into my attacker's jaw, and it let out a hysterical screech when I tore through the back of its throat. The raptor Sheela shot with her bow tumbled on the ground between us and the group of his friends, and I saw the warrior woman had put her arrow through his throat.

"Victor, some of my arrows fell out of my quiver when we fell. I only have two left."

"Fucking shit fuck," I growled as I tried to keep my wits about me. There were still too many of these assholes around us, and I didn't know if I'd be able to kill them all.

Maybe Sheela could.

"I'll give you my spear after you use your arrows," I said. I hated the idea of giving up my weapon, but Sheela was a better warrior than me, and it

was the best chance we had for surviving.

“I believe we can climb the tree,” she said as the butt of my spear bumped into the massive trunk.

“Uhh, how? The thing is like ten feet in diameter, and the closest branch is thirty feet up.”

“The saddle is made of many lengths of cord,” she said as she pulled one of her arrows back. “We can use it to wrap around the trunk and then scale it.”

“Shit!” I shouted as one of the raptors jumped at me. The point of my spear missed him, and I overstepped a bit. His jaws snapped down and around my weapon, and I could have sworn that his teeth closed around the hairs of my knuckles.

“The saddle is all the way over there!” I shouted as I nodded toward the device Trel had made. It was some twenty feet to our left, and Sheela would have to run around the group of raptors to get to it.

Or she would have to go through them.

“I can get it,” she said nonchalantly.

“Uhh, then how are we going to untie all the rope and wrap it around the tree?” I asked as I swung my spear around to keep the raptors at bay. I figured we had about half a minute before they realized that they could all just attack at once, and then Sheela and I would be lunch.

“You can climb up first while I defend with your spear, then I will climb up.”

“I don’t know how to climb up the tree like--” A raptor interrupted me by making a sliding type movement toward my legs. I was caught completely off guard by his maneuver, and my spear passed harmlessly over his head. I stepped back in time to keep my legs from getting sliced open by his snapping jaws, but I knew I’d damned near gotten killed.

We couldn’t do this for much longer. There were too many of these oversized roosters, and they were slowly figuring out how to coordinate attacks.

“I will climb using my claws and then lower a rope to you. Then you can climb up.” Sheela’s plan sounded less crazy than me trying to lumberjack up the tree, but there was one thing she probably didn’t realize.

I couldn’t really do a pull-up, and I doubted that I’d be able to climb a

rope fast enough.

A cold realization came over me, and I felt my brain begin to calm. At the moment, there were only three possible outcomes to this situation. The first was that both Sheela and I would get killed and devoured by the group of snarling raptors. The second was that one of us would live, and the other would die. The third was that we both lived.

I didn't think I'd be able to climb the rope fast enough, but if I could buy some time, my friend could live.

Even if it meant my own death.

"Go run and get the saddle." The words escaped my mouth as if someone else had said them. I almost didn't feel like I was in control of my body anymore. I was looking at myself over my shoulder as if this was a game I played.

"I will wait until the ones on the left are--" Sheela interrupted her own words by sending an arrow into the one on our far left, it stumbled away from us when the shaft pierced its eyeball, and the two beside it turned to look at their snarling friend.

Then Sheela sprinted away from me.

The big-clawed raptors turned toward her, then glanced back toward me, and seemed conflicted about what to do. It was a bit of a blessing, and I stepped toward the one who had almost bitten off my hand and jabbed my spear at his face. The point of my weapon hit him in the head but didn't pierce his skull. Still, he twisted away with a surprised screech of pain, and the entire group turned their attention back to me.

Uh oh.

I stepped back as the alpha raptor darted toward me. He moved like lightning, even though the asshole had two arrows sticking out of his chest, but I managed to lean my face out of the way before he could bite it off.

Another one on my left made a lunge at me, but I kicked out with my left leg and managed to slam my foot into his throat before he could snap his jaws over my hip. I spun my spear around to the side and then thrust the weapon into the face of another raptor that had leapt toward me. He screamed when I tore his face open, and blood showered the ground as he turned to dash away from me.

I turned toward the saddle, but it wasn't where I had seen it lying, and my heart dropped into my stomach. Where was Sheela? Had one of the

raptors gotten her before she grabbed the saddle? Then where was it? I couldn't believe that she'd been able to grab it so fast, but I didn't hear her return.

"Victor!" she shouted from above me, and I raised my head slightly to see one of our ropes fall through the air. She had somehow already retrieved the saddle, and climbed up the tree, tied all the ropes from the saddle together, and then thrown it down to me in like thirty seconds.

"I'm not going to be able to pull myself up quick enough!" I shouted as I swung my spear around like it was some sort of long sword. The raptors were starting to close in around me, and I saw the alpha's eyes focus on the rope next to me.

"Slip your leg through the loop and then jump when I say!" she shouted, and I glanced down to see that the end of the rope tied into a noose-like knot.

"I'm in!" I shouted as I kicked my leg through the loop and thrust my spear at the alpha. I was a good two feet too far away though, and the animal didn't even flinch when my spear missed him.

"Jump!" she shouted, and I coiled my legs before I jumped up and

grabbed as high as I could on the rope with my left hand.

I slingshotted off the ground as if a giant had flicked me.

The rope tightened around my groin like a vice, and I let out a scream of agony as my nuts got squeezed. I almost dropped the spear I carried in my right hand when the shock spread through my groin, but I somehow kept hold of it, and then found myself face to face with Sheela.

“Hello,” she said with a half smile. She was dangling from the other end of the rope, and I realized that she had thrown herself off the tree branch and used the momentum of her fall to lift me off the ground. We were both hanging some fifteen feet in the air, and I glanced down to see the angry group of raptors circling below us.

“Hi,” I gasped as another wave of agony coursed through my stomach and legs. My vision was spinning a bit, and I felt like I had to throw up.

But at least I was alive.

“Give me your spear,” Sheela asked, and I handed it to her without question. The cat-woman grabbed it with her right hand, and then I watched her use her left hand to climb up the rope. Her movements looked effortless, but I could see the long muscles in her arm, shoulder, and back tense a bit

each time she pulled herself up on the rope. She used her feet to hold onto the rope when she had to reach up, and I couldn't imagine the amount of muscle control she must have possessed.

She really was amazing.

"I will coil the rope around the branch to keep it from unraveling," Sheela said once she reached the branch, and I watched her wind her length of rope around under mine so that it wouldn't slip loose. "Can you climb? If not, I will pull you up."

"I'll... try..." I gasped through clenched teeth as I reached my right arm up to join my left. The agony in my nuts was now making my lower body numb, and I knew I couldn't do a pull-up to save my life. Still, I wanted to give it a try before I had to tell Sheela that she needed to haul me up like a bucket of bricks.

I pulled my elbows down toward my hips and let out a gasp of surprise when my body easily rose up the length of rope.

Now that the tension was out of the cord, the pressure on my groin was a lot less. A bit of relief flooded through my stomach, and I reached with my left arm to grab higher on the rope. Then I did it again with my right hand

and was soon pulling myself up on the tree branch with Sheela's help.

"What is wrong? Are you injured?" her hands rested on my shoulder while her golden eyes stared at me with obvious concern.

"I'll be okay," I whispered as I carefully pulled the rope from between my legs.

The raptors were now far below us, and I saw a few of them attempt to climb the tree. Their claws couldn't find purchase on the bark, and they kept tumbling away from the trunk. The scene might have been a bit comical if we hadn't almost died and my body wasn't in agonizing pain.

"You do not look okay," Sheela whispered.

"The rope just got me," I said as I gestured down to my belt, and I saw her gold eyes open wide with understanding.

"Ahh. I see."

"Thanks for the save," I said as I forced myself to stand up on the branch. It was surprisingly wide, maybe two feet in diameter, but I still kept one hand on the tree trunk to steady myself. Then I pumped my feet up and down in an attempt to force blood back down my legs.

“It was the only solution I could think of. I am sorry for your pain.”

“It’s fine,” I said. “I’ll be alright. We are alive, that’s what is important, but now we have bigger problems.”

“Agreed,” Sheela said. “We are still running distance from our camp, but I am afraid that the raptors will wait for us.”

“I feel like these guys have been stalking us,” I said as I looked at the large alpha raptor. He was standing back from the group and looking up at me with angry eyes. “The biggest one that you already put two arrows in seems to be the leader.”

“He is larger than the others,” Sheela agreed.

“Do you have any arrows left?” I asked as I glanced at the bow lying on the branch.

“I have one,” she said as she held it up. “It is a far shot, though. I do not think I will make it.”

“You hit one of the fuckers jumping over the door in mid-leap.”

“Yes, but that was only from twenty feet. He is at least fifty.”

“Is your *Critical Strike* skill ready?” I asked.

“Do you think I should use it?” She raised a blonde eyebrow slightly.

“I’m just wondering what will happen if we take the head guy out. Will the rest still stay to bother us? Or will they leave us alone?”

“I can try,” she said as bent over to grab her bow. She turned her ass to me when she leaned over, and even though my groin was feeling all sorts of agony, I couldn’t help but stare at the place where her bikini bottom barely hid her vagina.

Sheela stood up with her bow nocked, blinked her eyes twice, and then adjusted her aim a bit lower. She held there for half a moment frozen like some sort of Greek Goddess statue, and then the arrow left her weapon with an angry twang.

I watched the shaft arch through the air before it plummeted below the line of our branch. It seemed to gain speed as it dropped, and then it sank into the head of the massive alpha raptor with a wet thud that echoed through the redwood grove.

The alpha raptor dropped to the ground instantly, and its body didn’t even spasm.

“Yes!” I shouted as the other raptors turned toward their boss. One of

them took a few steps closer and bent its neck down to touch the corpse. It seemed to realize that its leader was dead after a few seconds of investigation, and it let out a guttural growl.

The remaining raptors seemed confused by the alpha's death, and they spent the next few minutes milling around the base of our tree. Before they were either trying to climb it, or were glancing up in our direction, but now they wandered like dogs trying to pick up a scent, and they weren't even bothering to look up at Sheela and me.

A few minutes later, they all dispersed in different directions.

"Wow, that was weird," I said. "It's like they suddenly all got stupid after you killed him."

"Interesting," Sheela said. "It is understandable though. The leader is the most important part of a group. Without them, order and tactics are often forgotten."

"Maybe with animals," I said with a shrug. "But it just seems odd that they were so much smarter with the big guy around."

"Try to recall how Trel, Galmine, and I were surviving without you," Sheela said. "We were not faring so well. It would be difficult if we lost you."

The three of us are friends, but you give us a purpose and keep us united.”

“Awww, thanks, Sheela,” I said as I turned to her. “You are pretty damn awesome yourself. You were shooting arrows at those raptors while holding onto me with your legs, and you scaled this tree, tied the rope, and hauled my ass up in less than half a minute. I’d be all sorts of dead without you.”

“I am happy to help,” she said with a wide grin that showed her sharp cat-like teeth. “I...” she started to say, but then her voice trailed off and her eyes stared into mine.

“Hmmm?” I asked as I shook my leg to get more feeling back into my crotch.

“It is nothing,” she said quickly as she looked down at her feet. “I do not know if the danger has passed. How long do you think we should wait?”

“I’m not sure,” I said. “I don’t even know if Hope made it back to camp. I’m actually kind of worried about her returning without us. Trel and Galmine will be concerned.”

“Trel will come looking for us,” Sheela said.

“You think?” I asked with a snicker. “The farthest she ever came out of the cave was to the fort. She doesn’t seem interested in exploring the wilderness.”

“She will for you,” Sheela said. “She has developed deep feelings for you.”

“Well, it’s dangerous for her or Galmine to leave the camp. Hell, it is dangerous for you and me to leave the camp.”

“I agree,” Sheela said as she gestured down to the corpse of the raptor. “After seeing how the group responded to his death, I believe that you are too valuable to risk on these missions. If you can tame a dinosaur to carry me, I believe a natural evolution of our progress will involve you staying in the camp where it is safer.”

“Nope,” I replied. “I’m not sending you out alone if I don’t have to.”

“It makes sense,” Sheela said. “I am the most suited to this dangerous role, and my loss will not impact the efficiency of the camp. Especially when you have fish traps, water capturing, and farming figured out.”

“No, Sheela,” I said. “You are more than just someone who gets our food and water. You are my friend, and I need you. Also not to mention, that

I don't know what the fuck I'm doing half the time, I'm still learning from you every day." Her eyes opened a bit at my words, and she crossed her arms.

"I understand, but your needs are just emotional. It is not--"

"Don't give me that bullshit," I interrupted her. "You were depressed on your home world because you needed to feel like you had a place. Now you do. Your place is by my side. I need you, so don't talk anymore about how expendable you are. That's an order."

"Yes, Victor," she said as she closed her eyes and bowed her head.

"I'm going to see if I can get Hope to come back to us," I said. "She might already be back at the fort, but maybe she is still roaming, and she'll return."

"What if the raptors are still around?" Sheela asked.

"Then I'll tell her to run," I said. "Hope is faster than them with me on her back, so she's gotta be way faster without me. The only reason they caught up to us is because she carried both you and me, and they laid an ambush for us. Hold on, let me try to focus on this for a few minutes."

I thought about Hope, and then kind of imagined her running down around the bottom of our tree. It was similar to the instructions I'd mentally give her when I was close, but I always did those when I had a line of sight on her. I had no idea how it would work when I didn't know how far away she was from me.

I thought about Hope, and our tree and Hope coming to the foot of our tree for what felt like fifteen minutes. My head actually started to hurt from my extended bout of concentration, and I finally let out a sigh and decided to take a bit of a break.

"Looks like she's not com--"

"Hey! Victor! Sheela!" I heard a voice cry out from behind us, and we both spun to see Trel riding on Hope's back. The obsidian-haired woman had her spider-legs curled up behind her like wings, and she was scanning the forest with her clawed hand over her brow.

"Trel!" Sheela and I shouted, and our friend immediately looked up to see us.

"There you are!" Trel said with an exasperated sigh. "What are you doing? You were supposed to be getting water, not sitting up in a tree."

“Uhhh, we were attacked by raptors,” I said.

“So?” Hope continued her trek toward the tree and then stopped right where I had imagined she would and began to munch on some ferns.

“There were many of them,” Sheela said.

“So?” Trel repeated. “You should have just killed them instead of climbing a tree.”

“Ugh,” I groaned as I tried to control my anger. “We tried. There were just too many of them and we had to--”

“I’m playing with you!” Trel laughed. “Can’t you take a joke?”

“Oh,” both Sheela and I said.

“Yeah, we all got scared when Hope came back alone. Galmine, Kacerie, and I were arguing about what to do, but then Hope started scratching at the gate and honking. I wondered if she knew where you were, so I got on her back.”

“Damn, good job, Trel,” I said.

I gestured for Sheela to climb down the rope as Trel dismounted, and the cat-woman did so. My palms got sweaty when I looked at the distance

down to the ground, but I remembered how easily it had been for me to climb the rope up, and I leaned over the branch to grasp the rope. A few dozen seconds later and I was standing on the ground and Trel's lips were pressed against mine.

"I was worried," she whispered in my ear after our passionate kiss ended.

"Me too," I replied. "We are going to lose this rope, and you'll need to make a new saddle, and we'll need to make another trip back with our spare pots for water."

"I can get the rope," Trel said as her spider legs extended from her back.

I watched her scale the tree like some sort of Doctor Octopus from the Spiderman comics. Her arachnid legs did all the work of clinging to the wall, and her human body just floated in the air. It took her less than five seconds to reach the branch and untangle the rope, and she descended even faster.

"Easy," Trel said as she handed the coiled rope to Sheela. "You know, I've never been this far out of the camp before." She looked up to the trees, and I saw her wink her eyes a few times.

“What are you thinking?” I asked as I turned an eye toward Hope. The parasaur didn’t seem worried about anything, so I guessed that the raptors were long gone.

“We could build in the trees,” she said as she blinked her eyes to use her *Eye-Q*. “They are very strong and we would be safe high off the ground.”

“Hmm,” I said as I looked up at the tall trunks of the massive redwoods. “What about a farm or stable for our tamed dinos?”

“Might be useful as a backup fort,” Trel said with a shrug of her shoulders. “Besides, you have only tamed two dinosaurs so far, so I’m not thinking our stables need to be that big.”

“Hey, I’m working on it!” I said with a laugh. Damn, it felt good to be alive. It felt great to kiss Trel, and it felt wonderful to know there was going to be a tomorrow. For a few minutes, I was sure I was going to die, and I’d been okay with it because I knew Sheela might live.

“Well, you need to work on getting water, and then clay, and then inseminating me,” Trel said with a coy smile. “So let’s get back on Hope, return to the fort, and complete our tasks.”

“Yes, ma’am,” I said with a mock salute.

Then the two beautiful women and I climbed onto Hope's back and rode back to our fort.

Chapter 5

Sheela and I went right back out as soon as we returned Trel to the fort. Galmine and Kacerie didn't want us to leave again, especially after we told them about the organized raptor attack, but we really didn't have a choice, we had no water left, and we had broken two of our jugs. We did have four more that we could use for water, but I hadn't planned on breaking two of them, and now we really needed clay.

The ride back to the stream was uneventful, but Sheela and I were on high alert and knew that we would be in big trouble if we got attacked again. We didn't have a saddle to help us stay on Hope, and we could only really carry one spear and two jugs between us. The trip was tense, and we both breathed a long sigh of relief once we had returned safely with the water.

"Victor, I believe we should skip the trip to the lake for clay," Sheela said as she gestured to the sun. There was only a sliver left of light, and the air was beginning to fill with the sound of frogs and crickets.

"Damn," I sighed and tried to rearrange my plans so that we all wouldn't waste too much time. I intended to have Galmine show Kacerie her

clay handling techniques while Sheela, Trel, and I worked on baskets. Then, when the clay was drying, Galmine and Kacerie could continue with either baskets or cordage.

“Trel,” I called out to the spider-woman as Sheela and I slid off Hope’s back.

“Yes?” the obsidian-haired woman answered without looking over to me. She had laid out some of our thinner poles on the ground in a trapezoid shape, and I saw her blink her eyes a few times as she tapped her lips with one of her black fingers.

“Can you work on the saddle tonight and tomorrow? That is the priority now.”

“Victor.” She sighed and finally looked over to me. “Priority is my pregnancy; everything else is secondary.”

“If we don’t have the saddle, it will be hard for us to get a lot of clay,” I said. “If we don’t get enough clay, we’ll have to keep making runs for water every day, which will take time away from working on the improved fort.”

“Not a big deal,” she said. “It only takes you a few minutes to get water every day.” The woman turned her black eyes away from me and

looked up to the branches of the massive redwood tree we had built our fort walls against. Then she looked down at the trapezoid shaped array of wood poles on the ground.

“Except today Sheela and I were almost killed by raptors,” I said as I tried to control my voice. She was suddenly being difficult, but I remembered who I was talking to. Trel was brilliant, but also selfish. I was going to have to show her what was in it for her.

“But you weren’t,” Trel said as she glanced back up to the tree again.

“If if I had, what would that mean for your babies?” My question caught her attention, and she turned down from the tree so she could see me.

“Hmm, I see your point, Victor. I will work on the saddle tonight.” Trel turned her black eyes to Sheela and cleared her throat. “You are both going to be astounded by what I am about to say.”

“Astounded?” Sheela asked as her cat-eyes opened.

“Yes,” Trel sighed. “I’m afraid I have made a mistake.”

Sheela and I both looked at each other and then turned back to Trel.

“I was thinking of the trees in the forest, and I realized that we could

easily occupy this one.” Trel pointed up above her to our tree, and I cranked my neck back so I could see it. The massive redwood was probably a good sixty feet in diameter, and the nearest branches were probably that high off the ground.

“How?” I asked.

“It would be difficult without nails,” Trel said, “but I realized I can use rope to suspend platforms. I can ascend the trunk easily, and we can have a rope ladder descend so the rest of you can follow.”

“So we are going to need a shitload of rope,” I said.

“Yes,” Trel said. “But the cordage we are making with plant fibers will not be strong enough. This is the mistake I made.”

“How are we going to make stronger rope?” I asked.

“Dinosaur sinew,” Trel said with a sly smile. “I will still need a lot of it, but it will last much longer than what we are using now, and it will support more weight. I made a mistake by not thinking of it sooner.”

“We have a pile of raptors out there,” I said as I pointed to the door of our fort.

“Yes, but night approaches. If they are still there in the morning, we can use them, or we can all drag them back into the fort and then begin the long process of cutting them open and tearing out their tendons and ligaments.”

“We also need to get fibers to make baskets,” I said as I went back to my plan about what to do tonight without clay.

“That will be much easier to gather,” Trel said. “You should leave now and get them. The sinew approach will take a long time for us to process. We will need to tear them out of the corpses, then let them dry, then cut them into thinner strips, then wind them together, then combine them into thicker cords, then rope. It will take two, maybe three times as long to come up with cordage using it, but the result will be much stronger.”

“It would be much better for bows,” Sheela said.

“Yes. It is a better material. I am apologizing because I didn’t think of it before, and I’m angry for the time we wasted.”

“That’s okay, Trel,” I said. “We aren’t used to doing this. We are all learning as we live. We know now. If the raptor bodies are still there tomorrow, we’ll get what sinew we can, if not, there will be other fuckers that

attack us. We'll use every piece of them to survive."

"Good," she said. "Now, before I get to the saddle, let me show you this platform. This will be the side support structure. I will join them together with slots and cordage. The shape of the trapezoid creates a slope on this one end. I will just need to make a rectangle at the back, steps on the front, and a floor to it. Then we will be able to step up and stand at an elevated position."

"It is a good design," Sheela said.

"Of course it is!" Trel beamed. "Now go get more material for cordage, and I will begin building a new saddle. Bring as much as you can before the sun sets."

"Got it," I said.

"I'll put the water in the hut and then join you," Sheela said as she carried the two jugs away.

I gave Trel a smile, and then turned to walk back to Hope, but the obsidian-haired woman grabbed my arm.

"We have a problem that you will need to deal with," she whispered.

"Oh?" I asked.

“Kacerie is not willing to leave the hut tonight. I will not make love to you outside like some sort of animal. You need to deal with her so that she gives us our privacy.”

“Deal with her?” I asked with a bit of surprise since Trel had emphasized those words.

“Yes, kill her or something. She is annoying and getting in the way of my pregnancy.”

“I’m sure she can be reasoned with,” I said. “No one needs to kill anyone.”

“I said ‘or something.’” Trel huffed. “If it were up to me, I’d just kill her.”

“Trel,” I started to say, but she continued.

“I knew that would anger you! That is why I haven’t done it. You think she is useful, for whatever reason. Anyways, you are our leader and my selected mate. Just tell her where her place is in our tribe so that I can give you a night of pleasure. My womb is ripe and craves your seed.” Trel’s dark eyes pierced mine, and I felt a shiver of excitement descend my spine.

“I’ll fix it,” I said as I saw Sheela exit the hut. Neither of the two women seemed to like Kacerie, but I wasn’t going to judge her until I spent more time with the woman.

Sheela and I jumped back on Hope and trotted out of the doorway. The trip to the closest group of ferns was really quick, but we were going to be able to carry more on the back of Hope than if Sheela and I had just run there.

“Now it appears something is bothering you,” Sheela said as I cut the dozenth fern away from the ground and stacked it in her arms.

“Neither you nor Trel seem to like Kacerie,” I said. “I need to spend some time with her.”

“Agreed,” Sheela said. “Galmine, Trel, and I have developed a strong bond with you. I believe Kacerie will as well.”

“Yeah,” I said as I put another bundle of ferns into Sheela’s arms. “That seems like enough. Let’s--”

A loud roar cut through the forest. It was almost deafening, and I saw the fallen leaves and needles on the ground actually vibrate.

“Get the fuck home!” I hissed as I turned to Hope. The parasaur’s head

was held up high, and I saw her twist her neck toward where the noise had come from.

Sheela and I ran to the side of our steed, and I helped my friend mount so that she didn't drop all the ferns. Then I leapt up in front of her, and Hope sprinted back to the gate. Another roar sounded as soon as we made it through, and I quickly tied our locking ropes around the door handles so that it couldn't be moved.

Kacerie and Trel were running toward me on bare feet, and I saw Galmine poke her head out of the hut's door.

"What was that? How close is it? Do we need to hide?" Kacerie asked.

"Something big, I don't know, and we have nowhere to hide," I answered as I grabbed some of the ferns from Sheela.

"What do you mean, you don't know? Aren't you our leader? You are supposed to--"

"Let's go in the hut, eat dinner, and work on these ferns," I said to the women. Kacerie's face turned red when I didn't answer her, but Sheela and Trel moved to follow my instructions, and the pink-haired woman was forced to follow.

The inside of the hut was a bit cramped with five of us, but I opted to sit with my back at the doorway, and we soon had the ferns distributed among us.

“We don’t have clay, so we are going to work on cordage and baskets,” I began as soon as we all sat down. “Trel and I are going to figure out better ways to make baskets, while Sheela and Galmine teach Kacerie how to make cordage. We’ll use the center parts of the fern for the baskets and the outer parts for the cordage so we don’t waste any of the parts. Stack the basket parts over by Trel and me. Any questions?”

“What are we going to do if the monster that roared comes?” Kacerie asked.

“We’ll probably die,” I said with a shrug.

“What kind of answer is that?” she hissed. “You won’t save us?”

“Do you want me to save you?” I asked her with a half-smile.

“Uhh, yeah.”

“Cool, don’t worry then. I’ll save you.”

Kacerie’s eyes narrowed. “I don’t believe you.”

“Oh, you should,” Galmine said. “Victor is incredibly brave. He’s fought many dinosaurs and never been beaten. He will protect us. You don’t need to worry.”

Kacerie rolled her eyes, but I noticed Sheela’s mouth open wide. She turned to look at me, and her eyes seemed to glow with the firelight.

“What’s wrong?” I asked her, but the cat-woman shut her mouth and then shook her head.

“Get to work,” I said. “We can’t do anything about that big motherfucker finding us, but we can focus on the baskets and cordage. Make it happen.”

My friends all nodded, and we split into the two task groups.

During the last week of fort-building with Trel, we’d developed a much closer relationship. She used to belittle me at every chance, insult me when I made a mistake, or harass me when I tried to work with her. Our friendship had reached a turning point when she told me that she loved me and didn’t want to lose me. It had triggered an alert in my *Eye-Q* and added her to my list of “Women” assets. I still didn’t know exactly how the system knew for sure that she should be on the list, but as we sat and puzzled through

the best way to weave baskets, I knew the spider-woman had come to value me as a friend and leader.

Soon, I hoped she would value me as a lover.

After a few different attempts, we came up with two basket designs we knew would work for our purposes. The first we created by taking the smaller offshoot leaves from the ferns, stacking them together in bunches of ten that were about a finger in length, and the bending them in half around another bunch. We then tied them together with one of the longer arms of the leaf Sheela, Kacerie, and Galmine were using to make cordage. The design took on a bit of a circular-spiral shape after we did this a few dozen times, and the tightness of the leaves meant that mud, clay, or any other semi-liquid type fill would have trouble escaping. We made the bottom circular-spiral about a foot in diameter and then used the same “stacked and bent leaf” method to create rolled sides that we tied to the base. The end result was a cylinder basket with three-foot tall sides and a circumference that was easy to wrap our arms around. There were small holes in a few spots where we didn’t quite get the leaves tight enough, but it was going to be the perfect basket to carry clay or mud in. The best part of the design was that it was made entirely with

the smaller parts of the fern, and it incorporated using the leaves we really didn't have much use for with our cordage making process. It left the larger center stalks available to peel and use for cordage, but Trel and I came up with our second design that used those thicker parts to make baskets that would be great for trapping fish or carrying ferns.

For our second design, we took eight thick center stalks from the fern leaves and laid them out on the ground in a star shape. We bound the center where these eight stalks intersected with cordage, and then we weaved one of the stalks using an alternating pattern of up and over or down and under each of the star arms.

The concept was pretty simple, and we were able to push the weaved parts closer to the intersection and create a similar base to what we had with our leaf designed basket. It wasn't nearly as liquid-tight, but it was strong, and I was confident the bottom wouldn't fall out if we put weight on it. When we were happy with the size of the base, we just bent up the arms of the star and then wove more of the stalks through the arms. This basket wasn't near as air-tight as the first one, but it would be able to hold leaves, firewood, and trap fish just fine. It also didn't use the same parts of the fern as the earlier

design. We might even be able to craft stronger baskets with this design if we used really thin tree stalks.

We didn't hear anymore roars from distant dinosaurs while we puzzled through the baskets, and my friends quickly began chatting about plans for the fort, starting a farm, and building fish traps. Kacerie didn't really participate in the conversation, but I noticed she was exceptionally skilled at winding the cordage. She wasn't as quick as Trel, but I could tell that her background in hair styling had given her a lot of finger dexterity.

After we finished the first two baskets, Trel and I showed the other women the designs. Galmine continued with her cordage making, but Sheela and Kacerie switched tasks and went to work building more baskets.

"I am going to go work on the saddle replacement," Trel said as she grabbed a coil of rope from the floor of the tent.

"It is dark out there," I said.

"I can see in the dark," she said. "I'll return for dinner. I believe you have another job to attend to?"

"Yeah," I replied, and I saw Sheela shoot me a questioning look.

Trel left without saying another word, and I turned my attention to Kacerie. I didn't really know how to approach the subject. It seemed as if I was being a bit of a dick by asking these women to leave the hut so that Trel and I could make love.

"Kacerie, you are doing a great job weaving those baskets," I said.

"Ahh, thanks," she said as she looked up from her work. "It's pretty simple."

"It's a big help. I know this has been a hard transition for you," I said.

"You have no idea." The woman sighed and closed her light-blue eyes.

"Well, I kind of do," I said. "We all do. We were all taken from our worlds without any explanation and then just put here. We know what you are going through."

"Do you?" she said as her eyes narrowed. "You don't know anything about me."

"I'd like to know more," I said with a shrug. "I think maybe we got off on the wrong foot."

"What do you mean by wrong foot? I took my shoes off when you

asked me.”

“Oh, sorry,” I said. “It’s a saying from my world. It means that we didn’t really get a chance to talk or become friends quickly. I just grabbed you from the raptors and got you back here.”

“Yeah,” she said with a shrug. “I already thanked you for that.”

“That’s not what I meant,” I said. “Can you tell us a bit about yourself?”

“What do you want to know?”

“Tell us about your world, and how you grew up, and your job. Did you have a family, or husband, or kids?”

“Oh ewwww no,” she said with a sour look on her beautiful face.

“Kids are annoying. No husband either. I never found anyone good enough to marry, but I was dating four different men. All rich, of course, I was heading to meet one when I ended up here.”

“Like a date?” I asked.

“Sure.” She shrugged. “It was this expensive party-- look, you all don’t care, and I don’t care to talk about it. I’m here, working on this basket instead

of lounging around my apartment, or going on dates, or working. It's terrible."

"Yeah, I get--"

"I could be dead," she interrupted me, "but I'm guessing you saving me is just delaying the inevitable."

"No," I said. "We are going to live. We have a plan, and--"

"Weaving baskets?" she asked with disgust in her voice. "Did you hear the same roar I heard? Whatever made that sound isn't going to care about the walls you built or the baskets we are making. You don't even think you can fight it. How are we supposed to survive on this world? Everything wants to kill us. I thought you and Sheela were dead when Hope came back. I'm thankful you aren't, but what about tomorrow?"

"You are right to be afraid," I said, "but we can't control the big dinosaur out there. All we can do is what we can do with what we have. Tonight we are weaving baskets, tomorrow we'll be getting clay and making pots, then we'll be making sinew rope and I'll tame a larger dinosaur. We'll build a bigger wall. We'll build a farm. We'll get stronger. In a few months, we'll hear that roar and laugh about how worried we once were. We just have

to keep moving and trying to survive. We can't do anything about it now, but we will in a month."

"So, just pray it doesn't come eat us?" she asked.

"Sure," I said. "Or don't bother. Just focus on what is in front of you."

"Alright," she said with a sigh. Then she looked down at her basket and continued her work.

I puzzled through how I was going to tell the three women that Trel and I needed the hut. It had been easier with Galmine, because I'd just come in last night to sleep, and the gray-skinned woman followed me inside. Now I was pretty much telling them that they needed to leave and stand outside while Trel and I had sex.

"So, I need to talk to the three of you about something," I said after a few more minutes of pondering my words.

"Yes, Victor?" Galmine asked as she smiled at me.

"I have feelings for you, Galmine," I said. "I had a wonderful time last night, and this morning."

"I know." She smiled sweetly at me.

“I also have feelings for Trel. I know we didn’t start off as friends, but we get along well together. She thinks I’ll be able to get her pregnant, but I don’t--”

“Victor!” I heard Trel hiss from outside of our hut, and I turned around to look out the curtain.

“What’s--”

“Come out here, please,” she asked, and I felt a little concerned because I’d never heard her use the word “please.”

I quickly stepped out of the hut and heard Sheela following me. The light from the white moon was pretty bright, so I could see the entire area of our walled-in camp.

“What is wrong?” I whispered to Trel.

“Come look,” she urged as she gestured toward the door. Sheela and I walked with her, and I started to hear angry squawks in the distance.

“Can you climb up the wall?” Trel asked as she pointed.

“I will lift you,” Sheela answered before I could, and the cat-woman held out her hands in a cradle as soon as we reached the logs.

I put my left boot in her hands, felt her pulse her arms two times, and then I pushed off the ground with my right leg as she lifted. Sheela was crazy strong, and I was easily able to pull myself up to the top points of our fort wall. Trel skittered up easily, and Sheela climbed up with only a little more effort.

“What am I looking at?” I asked as I felt a bit of fear descend my spine. I could smell something off in the air. Kind of like the time when I drove past farmlands that had just been fertilized.

“Look by the corpses you put down,” Trel said, and I glanced off into the darkness.

“I can’t really see anything,” I said.

“I can,” Sheela replied with a sigh.

“Oh wait,” I hissed as I started to see shapes move across the ground and lift into the air.

Then I realized that the screaming I heard in the distance was actually closer than I thought.

“They are fighting,” Sheela said as my own eyes struggled to make

sense of the dark shapes fluttering through the moonlight.

“It is the orange birds and the larger green type, like the one that was in this tree,” Trel said.

“Pterodactyl,” I said.

“Whatever,” she replied. “There are hundreds of them. Some are going after the corpses, but others are trying to get into the cave.

As soon as she spoke, I heard a screech tear through the sky above us. It sounded like it was only a foot over our heads, and the three of us ducked.

“They are coming this way,” Sheela said.

“Fuck,” I groaned. “Alright. Everyone inside. We are done for the night. Let’s get something to eat, work on whatever baskets we need, and then see what tomorrow brings us.”

“But we have something to do tonight,” Trel sighed.

“I know, but it will have to wait.” I pushed away from the wall and dropped down to the floor of our camp just as another screech sounded above us. Trel and Sheela quickly followed, and we made haste back to our hut.

By the time we all got inside, the screams sounded like they were right

above us.

“What is that?” Kacerie asked with obvious fear painted on her face.

“Two types of flying dinosaurs are fighting above us,” I explained.

“We need to stay in here for the rest of the night.”

“They are ruining my planned pregnancy,” Trel growled as she sat down. “I don’t really want to have sex with them screaming above us, but I do suppose these are desperate times.”

“Trel,” I said. “We are going to have to try again tomorrow.”

“What?” she gasped. “Why?”

“Because,” I said as I gestured to the other women in the small hut.

“They can’t watch,” Trel crossed her arms. “I’m not into that.”

“Yeah, uhh no. Well, they can’t go outside. I think we are safe in here, but I don’t want anyone to get attacked.”

“Ugh!” Trel moaned. “Fine, give me a fern so that I might turn it into a--”

“I just used the last of them.” Kacerie frowned as she held up her half-made basket.

“Meeerrawww,” Trel groaned, and her spider legs tapped angrily against the ground. “This is unbelievably frustrating. Victor, I only have a few days of ovulation. Tomorrow you will perform your duties as my mate.”

“Yeah,” I said as I sat down next to her.

“You don’t seem excited enough, nor are you upset enough that we are unable to have sex right now.”

“Wait, you want me both excited and upset at the same time?” I tried not to laugh, but it came out anyway.

“Yes,” she replied seriously.

“I’ll work on that, but now, I’m going to sleep.” I couldn’t do anything about the massive aerial dinosaur battle going on outside, and the sound was extremely annoying, but not sleeping would cause me problems tomorrow.

And we had a lot of shit to do tomorrow.

“You do not want dinner?” Galmine asked me with concern.

“Naw,” I said. “I’m really tired, and we have a lot of work tomorrow.”

“What of Hope?” Sheela asked.

“I doubt that either of the flying dinos will attack her, but there isn’t

anything we can do either way. There are hundreds out there, and they'll tear us into pieces if we get their attention. I'm going to use my ability to make sure she stays calm." I hadn't gotten any sense of movement or heard any noise from Hope, but I tried to imagine her just laying down calmly and sleeping through all the racket in the air.

"I will also skip the meal then," Trel proclaimed. "Victor, you must wrap your arms around me when you sleep. Understood?"

"Uhh, yeah." Her words surprised me, but I lay out on the floor of our hut and held my arms open for her.

The spider woman let out a soft sigh and then slid down next to me. She pushed her face into my chest, and I felt her long pointy fingers kind of knead into my stomach.

"Arms. Around. Me." Her voice was a whisper, but I followed her wishes, and she sighed again when she laid the side of her head on my bicep.

"I like your scent," Trel whispered softly in my ear. "I was foolish to treat you as I once did. Tomorrow I will make it up to you." She was only wearing her tight silk bra and boy-shorts, and I kind of wished that I'd taken off at least my shirt before lying down. But then again, everyone else was

still in the hut, and I noticed Sheela staring at me.

The cat-woman's golden eyes flashed for half a moment, but then she turned away before I could understand the expression on her face. It almost looked like Sheela was angry, and I realized that we were going to have to talk about our friendship soon. I wasn't sure if she had feelings for me, but I had them for her, so I figured I needed to man up and say something.

"I will sleep also," Sheela said over the screams of the dinosaurs fighting above us.

"Same," Kacerie said. "Although I don't know how I'll do it with them screeching. Aren't you all worried about one of them falling on our hut?"

"We'll deal with it if it happens," I said. "No use worrying about it now."

"You seem to not worry about anything," Kacerie grunted as she lay down beside Sheela.

"No," I whispered. "I'm worrying about everything, but focus on what I can fix."

"I will keep watch while I lay next to Victor." Galmine wiggled against

my back, but Trel was already twitching with the first hints of a deep sleep, and I guessed that the spider-woman was beyond exhausted.

“You okay to lay there without sleeping?” I whispered.

“Yes, I am fine. Please rest, Victor. You will need all your energy tomorrow.”

Galmine didn't have to offer again, the sensation of Trel in my arms, Galmine against my back, and the combined scent of their bodies were making my eyelids weigh two-hundred pounds.

Sleep came quickly, and I dreamed about riding on the back of a dinosaur larger than a T-Rex.

Chapter 6

I awoke to sunlight piercing through my eyelids like splintery chopsticks. The light was a dark gold in color, and I guessed that it was early dawn. I felt Galmine's body pressed against my back, and Trel was still unconscious in my arms. I glanced down at her sleeping face with a bit of amazement. We weren't lovers yet, but that was only because of circumstances outside of our control. Trel had been my antagonist for practically the entire month I'd been in Dinosaurland, but now she snuggled up against my chest peacefully.

I slowly lifted my head to where I remembered Sheela falling asleep on the other side of the small hut. She wasn't there, but Kacerie was laying with her back to me.

I moved as slowly as I could and untangled my arms from under Trel. She let out a soft sigh when I slid my bicep away from her head, but I used my fingers to lower her down to the ground softly. I untangled her sharp fingers from my shirt and then wiggled out from in-between Galmine and Trel. I was a bit surprised my movements didn't wake them up, but we were

all still struggling against the exhaustion of building this fort, so I was happy that I hadn't woken them.

Jinx was curled into a ball besides Galmine's tummy, and he gave me a lazy gaze before he ducked his head down and closed his eyes again. That guy had absolutely zero reasons to be lazy, but I figured he would keep Galmine company while she slept.

I walked out of the hut and prepared myself to witness the devastation of the battle fought over our heads last night.

I wasn't disappointed.

There were over a dozen corpses of orange birds inside of our walls and a good fifteen larger pterodactyl bodies. Some were impaled on the spiky tips of our walls, some were splayed open next to the corral where we kept Hope, and a smaller orange bird had actually crashed into the roof of our hut. There were bodies everywhere, and where there weren't bodies, there was blood and orange feathers.

I didn't see Sheela around, so I tiptoed over to Hope. The parasaur was lying curled up in her little home, but she was awake and lifted her head up as I walked toward her.

“Hey girl,” I said as I ran my hands over her snout and pressed my forehead against her. “Sorry about last night. You didn’t seem worried,”

She let out a soft toot and then shook her head slowly so that my face rubbed against her’s.

“Did you see Sheela?” I asked her as I patted under her chin.

Hope surprised me by turning toward the door and letting out a soft toot. I saw that the rope locking the gate was actually off, and I grabbed a spear before moving toward it.

The open clearing on the other side of our walls looked even more chaotic than inside our fort. There were even more bodies out here, more feathers, and almost a lake of blood at one spot some fifty yards from us. It had been World War Dino out here, but it was clear who was the winner: the distant cave where we once lived still had orange birds at the mouth, but there were a lot less of them roosting than before.

I saw Sheela off to my left. She had one of the leaf baskets on the ground next to her, and she was kneeling with her back to me.

“Hey,” I said as I walked up behind her.

“Hello, Victor. Did you sleep well?” Her lips curved into a slight smile, and I could see her sharp cat-teeth.

“Yeah,” I said as I looked down at her hands. She was butchering one of the pterodactyls with a small flint blade, but her cuts were focused on the legs and wings of the animal. “What are you doing?” I asked.

“Sinew,” she replied as she gestured to the basket. She had the large cylinder almost half-way filled with the wet, bloody bands, and I realized that every corpse within twenty feet of her had been operated on.

“Good thinking. Trel will be happy if we can get her all of these.” I gestured to the almost endless bodies in the clearing. “Why didn’t you work on the ones inside of the camp first?”

“Those are already ours,” she said with a shrug. “I fear that scavengers will descend upon this spot soon, so I wanted to claim what I could for us.”

“Yeah,” I said as I reached into my shirt pocket for my own blade. It was actually surprisingly simple to make razor sharp stone knives. Their blades didn’t last for long, but I’d gotten skilled at breaking the right kind of rocks at the right kind of angles and then sharpening them again.

“We’ll need to get clay soon, but let’s fill up the basket as much as we

can until everyone else wakes up. Can you show me where to cut?”

“Of course,” Sheela answered. “But perhaps this is a better use of our time than getting clay.”

“Hmmm,” I said as I turned her recommendation over in my head. “We still need to get clay soon. This is a great windfall, but if we spend the day cutting out sinew, then Galmine won’t be doing much. If we take an hour and get clay, she will be able to work on that project and teach Kacerie. Then you and I can go back to doing this.”

“I will obey your orders,” Sheela said with her usual shrug.

“It’s not really my orders,” I said with a laugh. “More like my wishes. Do you like it when I order you around?”

“I do,” she said as she turned toward me. Her eyes stared into mine, and I felt my heart start to hammer in my chest.

“So teach me how to cut their tendons and ligaments out,” I whispered. Then she blinked, nodded, and pointed to the wing of the pterodactyl she was working on.

“Cut here,” she said as she drew her small flint blade across the inside

part of the wing arm. “Then pull the skin aside. This is the wing tendon.”

Sheela then moved her blade to the ends of the wing joint and used the knife to pry the wide band off the bone. Then she cut it free with a quick jerk of her arm.

“Simple enough,” I said as I reached for the other wing.

We worked for a few minutes in silence, and I watched her gather the sinew from the creature’s legs. It wasn’t really as gruesome as I thought it would be, and I knew that the long rubbery bands would be able to help us build better bows and building materials. Maybe even a better saddle.

“Sheela, you were talking about your husband yesterday, and--”

“Victor,” Sheela interrupted. “I misspoke yesterday. I am honor bound to my husband, and I made it sound to you as if I was not happy with him. That is not the case.”

“Ahh,” I said as I tried not to let my disappointment show on my face. “I get it. Don’t worry. I don’t think negatively about you at all.”

“You do not?” she asked.

“No!” I said with a laugh. “In case you haven’t noticed, I really like

you. I enjoy the time we spend together, and I wish I could make you happy.”

The blond woman stared at me for a few seconds. “You are a good man, Victor Shelby. I am honored to know you.”

“I’m honored to know you, Sheela. I don’t want to offend you, but I think your husband is a--”

“Please,” she interrupted me again with a wave of her bloody hand. “I do not wish to speak poorly of him. He is how he is, and I am who I am. I am here now, and I am thankful to have a purpose. Let us change the subject.”

“Alright,” I said with a sigh.

“I have something important to ask you.”

“Yeah?”

“Before you were brought to this planet, you mentioned that you had captured a small reptile at a party.”

“It was a poisonous snake.”

“We have such creatures on my world. Can you give me details about how you captured it?”

“Uhh. The snake? What do you mean? I just scooped it up into a box

that the woman at the party laid over it.” My memories jumped back to Lacey’s party, and I wondered if my high school crush had thought about me not ever coming back to her party.

“It was that simple? It did not bite you?” Sheela turned to me and the interest was evident in her cat eyes.

“Yeah. It tried to bite me, but I moved my hand out of the way and grabbed it.”

“Ahh, so they are slow? The snakes in my world are very fast.”

“No, it was fast,” I said. “This one was a rattlesnake. The end of its tail makes a noise to warn other animals not to mess with it.”

“So the rattlesnake shook its tail, then tried to bite you? You had a warning?”

“Yeah,” I said. “Why are you so interested?”

“It was something Galmine said last night,” Sheela said as she cut out another tendon.

“About what?”

“You once told me you never had any warrior training. Is that true?”

“Well, I took a bit of martial arts when I was a kid. Most kids do, but I started helping my parents around their clinic and--”

“They cared for animals, correct?” Sheela turned to me.

“Look, just come out and say what you mean to say.” I stood up from the pterodactyl corpse I was working on and crossed my arms.

“Victor, I do not know what I wish to say yet. That is why I am asking you questions. Were you ever bit while working for your parents?”

“Uhhh,” I said as I thought back. I’d always been great with animals, and I’d been around them almost my whole life, but Sheela had just made a strange observation. “No. I’ve actually never been bitten. Or really scratched by an animal.”

“Yet you’ve worked with them often?”

“Yeah,” I said. “I’m just lucky. I always wore protective equipment on my hands and--”

“No,” Sheela said. “There is something else going on. Galmine said that you have ‘fought many dinosaurs and never been beaten.’ It was an interesting comment for her to make.”

“I’m just lucky,” I said. “I don’t know where you are going with this. Galmine’s statement is kinda... like obvious. If I had gotten killed by a dinosaur, I wouldn’t be here. Then she wouldn’t have said that about me. This is survivor bias logic stuff.”

“Maybe,” Sheela shrugged. “But I have fought beside you many times now. When I think back to yesterday, you killed two of the raptors that climbed our wall yourself.”

“Well, you had already shot them with arrows,” I countered.

“Perhaps, but then when we went to get water, we were ambushed. We were almost surrounded, and our backs were against the tree when they attacked both of us. I have trained for combat, but even for me, these beasts attacked with blinding speed. None of them laid a tooth or claw on you though.”

“Sooooo... I still don’t get what you are saying,” I replied. “Are you saying that I have some sort of dinosaur combat superpower?”

“Do you?” she asked with a cat-like grin.

I laughed and then bent back down to cut more of the tendons out of the dino I was working on. “Remember the crocodile in the lake? You saved

my ass from him. He would have eaten me easy. None of those raptors got a claw or tooth on you either, and you ran right through them.”

“Hmmm,” Sheela said. “Maybe, but if I remember the crocodile correctly, the beast had lunged out of the water and missed you with his first chomp. Then he dashed up the slope of the lake and you evaded his jaws once more before I counter attacked.”

“I don’t really remember,” I said. “It was a blur. I was thirsty, and tired, and scared. All I know is that you saved my life and brought me to the cave. I’m very thankful for you.” I smiled at the beautiful woman, and her eyes met mine.

“I am grateful for you too, Victor,” she whispered, and I saw her eyes drift down to my lips. “I have trained in combat for many years, but you mentioned you have not. I feel as if you have much potential.”

“Uhh, listen,” I said as I felt my heart start to hammer in my chest. “Sheela, is there something going on between us?” As soon as I asked the question, I felt kind of dumb. It was fucking obvious that something was going on between us.

“What do you mean?” she asked as she raised a blonde eyebrow.

“My question was dumb. Sheela, I want something to be going on between us.” My own words made my stomach tumble and churn, but I reached out with my left hand to touch her bicep.

The beautiful cat-woman’s golden eyes grew wide, and she looked down at my fingers. I couldn’t read anything else but surprise on her face, and I braced myself for her to shoot me down. On the one hand, her rejection wouldn’t hurt that bad because Galmine was already my lover, and Trel soon would be, but I also didn’t want to mess up the friendship Sheela and I had nurtured over the last month. It just seemed painfully obvious the woman was into me even though she had turned the conversation to her marriage every time we meandered anywhere near a romantic topic.

“Hey!” a voice called out from our gate, and I turned to see Trel lifting up the door with a pair of her spider-legs while she walked under. She carried two plates of food in her hands, and one of the water jugs was cradled under her armpit. “It is breakfast time.”

“Thanks, Trel,” I said as I took the plate of smoking dinosaur from her.

“Yes,” Sheela said. “Thank you, Trel.”

“They made a mess last night,” Trel said with disgust as she gestured

to the surrounding carnage.

“Yeah, but we’ll get plenty of sinew.” I nodded to the basket and noticed that Jinx had come out with Trel. The cat-sized blue feathered dino was rubbing against Trel’s leg.

“Good. I need a lot of it,” she said as she bent down to pick Jinx up. The little chocobo dino didn’t complain, and she began to stroke his feathers with her right hand as she cradled him in her left.

“You like Jinx now?” I asked.

“Now? My dear Victor. I have always loved this adorable little pet of yours.”

“Uhhh, right,” I said with a laugh.

“That laughter seems mocking,” Trel said as her eyes narrowed. “Jinx is a valuable member of our tribe. He isn’t as important as me or you of course, but he ranks a few notches above Kacerie at the moment.”

“She’ll come around,” I said. “I’m guessing Galmine is awake and made this?”

“Yes,” Trel replied. “I am ready for you to inseminate me now.”

“Listen, Trel,” I said as I prepared to argue with her. “I really want to... ummm do this with you.”

“Of course you do,” she replied as her eyes narrowed, “but something in the tone of your voice makes me think you are about to displease me.”

“I need to make sure that everyone is working on something. I can’t be the bottleneck. I have to go get clay so Galmine and Kacerie can work. We also have a bunch of corpses where we can get sinew. I also need to find a larger dinosaur to tame. I also--”

“Stop,” she said. “You are speaking nonsense. I will only be ovulating for another day. As my selected mate, you must perform your duties. All other tasks are unimportant.”

“Our survival is the most important,” I said. “So Sheela and I are going to run to get clay really quick, then we are going to come back with a bunch in one of the baskets we made. Galmine, you, and Kacerie are going to use as much as you can to figure out larger jugs, and maybe a tub. While the clay is getting heated by the fire, you and I will kick everyone else out and use the hut. I’m thinking after lunch. Cool?”

Trel’s mouth twisted, but I couldn’t tell if she was trying to hide a

smile or not. “What of my platforms and the saddle?”

“I thought you fixed the saddle last night?”

“No, the birds interrupted me.”

“Well, we aren’t going to be able to go get clay until you fix the saddle, so Sheela and I will get more sinew while we wait for you.” I turned to Sheela and gestured to the camp. “Teach Galmine and Kacerie how to pull the tendons out. I don’t want them wasting any time.”

“Yes, Victor,” Sheela replied, and she jogged back to the camp with her plate in her hands.

“I feel as if you might be delaying our cotius,” Trel pouted as she crossed her arms. “If not for the bulge in your pants or the way you stare at my body, I might think you were not interested in filling my womb with your seed.”

“I’m really interested,” I said. “But I don’t want everyone else standing around with their thumbs up their ass while you and I spend an hour in the hut.”

“But, Victor,” Trel sighed. “We are more important than them. Also,

we will require much more than an hour. I need all of you to ensure--”

“I get it,” I said as I fought against the tight feeling in my pants. “Get that saddle fixed. I’ve got a plan and I need to execute it before I have fun.”

“Very well,” Trel pouted. The woman turned to walk away from me, and I couldn’t help but fix my eyes on her fantastic ass. The tight silk shorts she wore didn’t cover up the curve of her butt cheeks, and my mouth almost started to water when I thought about making love to her. The beautiful spider-woman turned around and caught me staring at her, and she winked at me with a coy smile. I thought she’d try again to convince me to change my plans, but she just returned to the fort.

I poured some of the water on my hands to help wash and then ate the still steaming meat on my plate. My hands were still covered with grime, dried blood, and who knows what else, but there wasn’t a bar of soap within probably a thousand light years of me, so I was just going to have to deal with germs.

I scarfed my food and then went back to cutting the tendons. We had a decent amount in the basket now, but I wanted to get as much as I could before the scavengers came.

The list of competing tasks I needed to complete seemed too overwhelming.

I wished we had thirty more people in the camp. I was expecting Kacerie to fall in line, but I figured that I was going to need to talk to her many more times before I got her cooperation.

“Victor! I have completed the saddle!” Trel shouted from the wall.

“Great! Coming back!” I threw my plate and the jug of water in my basket of cut sinew and then carried it back to the door.

Trel held it open so I could walk inside, and then I set down the basket at her feet. Sheela was teaching Galmine and Kacerie how to remove the tendons of the dead dinosaurs inside of our walls, and I could tell from the look on the pink-haired woman’s face that she was not excited about the task.

“Looks good,” I said to Trel as I checked on Hope’s saddle. The side straps looked a lot thicker, and there were now loops to hold a total of six jugs. “I’m really happy that you could do this so quickly.”

“I’m highly motivated,” Trel said as she bit her lower lip. “Please hurry back.”

“You got it,” I said. “Sheela, get a new leaf basket, we are going to get clay. Everyone else, cut as many tendons as you can from the bodies. Try to get them from outside of the wall, but don’t be too far away. Safety first.”

“Yes, Victor,” Galmine said with a wide smile, but I saw Kacerie’s face pale.

“You expect me to go outside? Uhhh. No.” The hairdresser crossed her arms.

“You have your orders,” I said as I climbed on Hope’s back. Trel handed me two spears, and I pushed them into the sheaths on the saddle.

“And who made you boss? Why do I have to listen to you? It’s not safe out there.” Kacerie’s voice cracked a little.

“Look, just stay close to the walls, so you can run back inside if you need to. We need the sinew, and it’s time you contributed.”

“I’m just going to stay inside,” she said.

“Then I’ll deal with you when I get back,” I growled as our eyes met. The old Victor would have probably tried harder to convince her, but I’d saved the woman’s life from a group of green raptors more than once. She

could pull her fucking weight.

“That sounds like a thre--”

“Sheela!” I shouted, and she darted out of the hut with one of the leaf baskets. The cat-woman made the leap onto Hope’s back without using her arms, and then I spun the parasaur around so we could exit the fort.

Then we pushed under the door, and I kicked the parasaur into overdrive.

The wind caressed my face and Sheela’s hair tickled my nose as Hope dashed across the clearing. Even though I could smell the blood in the air, and there were corpses of flying dinos everywhere, riding Hope made me feel alive.

“How are you holding onto the basket?” I shouted over my shoulder as I angled Hope adjacent to the area where the orange birds occupied the cave. Both of her arms were wrapped around my waist, but I didn’t want to turn around while I was guiding Hope.

“I used cordage to tie it around my waist and the saddle!” Sheela shouted over the wind, and I nodded.

Hope hit the foothills next to the cave, and I pushed her up to the side of the slope. I kept her pace a little slower than I would have on flat ground so she didn't actually stumble, and we were soon riding near the tips of the smaller pine trees that skirted the much larger redwoods. Other than the parts deep in the redwood section, the rest of our small valley was visible, and I slowed even more so that I could twist my head around.

"Something wrong?" Sheela asked as I looked back over my shoulder.

"Just want to get a high view of our valley." I turned from side to side to look over the clearing and the distant river where we got our water, and I noticed Sheela watching me instead of looking toward our home.

"Looks fine," I said. "One day we might want to have a scout station up here. We can give someone a fast dino to ride down to the camp, or some sort of signal flare. I doubt the larger carnivores can climb up a slope this steep."

"It is a good idea," Sheela said, and our eyes met. The tension between us was more than obvious now, but it was hard to tell if she was upset at me that I'd made a pass at her, or interested.

I was really bad with women, and I knew even less about beautiful

alien women. I was feeling a lot more comfortable bossing them around because of the success I'd just had with the fort, and the sex with Galmine had boosted my confidence, but I really didn't know how far I could toe the line with the beautiful warrior woman.

"Let's continue," I said, and she nodded before I kicked Hope's sides.

The rest of the ride to the lake was uneventful. We forded through the second river in the valley, pushed up the far hill's switch back game trail, and then came to the top of the crest where we could look down on the lake. A few herds of parasaur drank on the far distant side of the water, but the finger area where Sheela and I preferred to fish and get our clay was unoccupied by any other dinos.

That might not have been a good sign.

"Keep a look out," I said to Sheela as I guided Hope down the far slope. The area over here was dense jungle, but I stayed on the lower part of the hill's slope until we could get down onto the sandy beach.

"Should we hunt for some fish while we are here?" Sheela asked. "We have eaten the orange birds for the last two weeks."

"It's a good idea, but I don't want to spend too much time on it. I'll

gather the clay, and you spear whatever fish you can. If you don't catch any by the time I've got all the clay in the basket, then we'll leave without any."

"I will get some," she said with a sly smile.

I rode Hope in a circular pattern around the spot and checked her attitude. She didn't seem nervous, or excited, or tense, but I still looked into the dense jungle to our side. After a few minutes of riding slowly around our spot, I guessed that there was no danger, and I edged us closer to the shore of the lake.

Sheela took her hands off my stomach and untied the rope around her own waist. We both dismounted with practiced movements and I traded her one of the spears for her basket. The fishing spot and the area to collect clay were about forty feet from each other, and I saw her test the waters a bit with her spear before she stepped in. The sight of her long muscular body walking into the water with her tattered swimsuit on almost made me trip, and I turned away so I could focus on getting the clay.

Then I froze in my tracks and felt the air leave my chest.

There was a group of boot marks in the clay, and they were most definitely not the ones I left from the last time I was here.

“Sheela!” I hissed as I turned to the woman. She looked up from where she was fishing, saw the expression on my face, and then jumped out of the water.

“What is wrong, Victor?” she whispered after she ran to my side, but her golden eyes focused on where I was pointing.

“How many do you think?” I asked.

“Three,” she whispered as she carefully stepped toward the clay. “The sand did not keep their footprints, so it is hard to know where they came from, or where they went, but they were most definitely here.”

“How long ago?” I should have been excited by the tracks since it meant more people were alive besides us, but I only felt a bit of dread.

I had no idea who these people were. They could have been evil men that would gladly kill me and rape my friends.

“Yesterday,” she said. “Perhaps the day before.”

“Doesn’t look like they took any clay,” I said as I studied the spot. My hypothesis might not have been true since the muddy stuff tended to reform after I took pieces out, but I’d made multiple trips here and seen the gouges I

made when I collected for a few days in a row.

“They must have come for water,” she said as she scanned the jungle.

“I can patrol the edge of the trees and attempt to see where they exited.

“I don’t like the idea of tracking three people we don’t know through a dinosaur infested jungle,” I said. “Let’s stick to the plan, get the clay, maybe grab some fish, and then get back to our fort.”

“Understood,” Sheela said as she returned to her fishing spot.

I set our new leaf basket down on the sand next to the clay and grabbed a massive handful of the light vermillion colored material. I was unsure exactly how much weight the basket would safely carry, so I paused after my tenth scoop and carefully tested the bottom. It was still holding, so I scooped ten more handfuls in before testing it again. I guessed it weight about twenty-five pounds, and the bottom was still holding strong. It was also about half full, so I put ten more handfuls in before trying to lift the basket. The bottom felt surprisingly sturdy, and I guessed that I could probably do another ten scoops, but this was significantly more clay than we had ever been able to pull in one trip, so I didn’t want to get too greedy. If the basket broke then the whole trip would have been pointless.

“How you doing?” I asked Sheela as I picked the basket up and brought it over to Hope.

“I seem to have acquired some fish.” Sheela grinned and then gestured to the three large white fish lying on the sand. I hadn’t even noticed her catching them, but it looked like more than enough for us all to eat for lunch.

“Great job, Sheela,” I said. “Let’s get go--” I saw movement across the small lake finger some hundred yards from us, and I felt my body tense. The jungle was vibrating as if it was trying to shake itself from the earth, but before I could jump on Hope, grab Sheela, and get the hell out of here, the green curtain parted, and three large triceratops pushed out onto the beach.

“Damn,” I hissed with relief. “I thought we were going to have to run.” The trikes seemed like they were minding their own business and they moved to the edge of the beach so they could dip their massive heads into the water.

“They seem peaceful if not disturbed,” Sheela commented as she threaded one of our cords through the fish gills. “I am ready to return.”

“Hmmm,” I said as I studied the trio of three-horned dinosaurs. They were each around ten feet tall at the shoulder, and my *Eye-Q* told me that there was one male and two females.

“Victor?” Sheela asked after I didn’t move for a few moments.

“Sheela, I want to tame a trike.”

Chapter 7

“Victor, that is different from the plan you wanted to follow,” she grunted.

“Kinda,” I chuckled. “I want to tame a trike in the next few days, but I think they are probably going to be too big for me.”

“Then we will attempt later,” she said.

“Yeah, but we are still going to tame something right now,” I pointed over to the distant side of the lake where the herd of parasaur was located. “I know I can get one of those since I already tamed Hope. If we had an extra one, both you and I could ride to get water, clay, and food. We’d also have an easier time hauling logs to build the new fort walls.”

“What of the boot prints? You were worried about them returning.”

“This will only take a minute,” I said as I set my eyes on the distant parasaur.

“I am unsure about being on one of these parasaur by myself,” Sheela said hesitantly.

“It’s easy,” I said. “Here, let’s tie this basket to her saddle and then you can drive while I sit behind you.”

“But that is the subservient seat.” Sheela shook her head. “You are my lead--”

“It’s just going to be over to the other side of the lake,” I said. “I want you to get used to controlling one. Then I’ll tame one more and we can ride it back to our fort.”

“They are grouped tightly together,” Sheela said as she glanced across the lake. “When you tamed Hope, she was separated from the group.”

“I’m confident this will work,” I said. “We should be able to get close because we are riding on Hope.”

“What if they attack us?” Sheela asked.

“They won’t, but if they do, we’ll just haul ass away. Hope is plenty fast.”

“But she will bear the weight of both of us on her. The other parasaurs are larger and will be able to catch her.”

“Then we’ll shove a spear in them and tell them to fuck off,” I sighed.

“Why do you have such a problem with this?”

“The inside of our fort is already very small,” she said without answering my question. “Hope is a smaller parasaur. It will be difficult to fit an additional one inside.”

“But it won’t be impossible,” I replied. “I’ll make it work. Is it the riding thing? Are you afraid of controlling Hope without me?”

Our eyes met for a brief moment, and she nodded slowly. “I do not enjoy admitting fear, Victor. I know I should not be afraid of such--”

“No,” I said. “I get it. In your world, you didn’t have cars or horses, or bikes, or anything. You just ran everywhere. It makes sense. But we aren’t on your world now. We are in Dinosaurland. You are going to have to figure out how to ride these beasts. That’s my order.”

“Yes, Victor,” she said. “I will do as you tell me.”

“So let’s tie this clay and then you can steer. No more complaints or fear. I’ll be right behind you to help you learn how to steer. Also, I can control Hope from on the back of whichever beast I choose to tame, so it really won’t be that risky for you. Don’t worry, you’ll do great.”

I lifted the basket of clay onto Hope's saddle and then Sheela helped me tie it down with a few lengths of cord. As soon as it was secure, I jumped up to the rear part of the saddle and gestured for her to sit in front of me. The beautiful blonde woman frowned as she looked at Hope's reins, but then she took my hand and I pulled her up.

"Tap the heels of your feet against her sides to make her go forward," I instructed, and Sheela followed my directions.

Hope moved forward slowly, and I wrapped my arms around Sheela's tight stomach. My friend seemed to relax when I held onto her, and I felt her exhale.

"Pull on the reins to make her stop. Try it now."

Sheela pulled gently on the reins, and Hope stopped. Then she let out a happy toot, and I heard Sheela gasp with surprise.

"That's okay," I said. "She likes you. Don't be afraid. Make her move forward again."

Sheela tapped her heels on Hope's flanks and the parasaur walked along the shore of the beach.

“How do I make her go faster?” Sheela asked.

“Ha!” I laughed. “I just taught you how to start and stop and you already want to start speeding. Typical.”

“You are mocking me,” she chuckled.

“Naw, I would never mock you, Sheela. Let’s try turning though. Press with one heel into her side and then pull on the reins to point her head in that direction.”

Sheela did as I instructed, and Hope turned away from the shore of the lake and pointed toward the jungle.

“Now turn her back around,” I said, and Sheela did so.

“You are a natural at this,” I said.

“Thank you,” she replied. “Perhaps it is the teacher?”

“Naw, although it could be the steed. Hope’s a good girl. Aren’t you girl?”

Hope replied with a happy toot, and I laughed.

“Okay, so tap a few more times on her sides and she’ll increase speed. She’s good at sensing how fast you want to go, and if you lean forward, it’s

easier for her to understand you want to go faster.”

“I will try,” Sheela said as she tapped her heels against Hope’s sides three times. The parasaur turned her walk into an easy trot, and we were soon moving across the beach at a comfortable lope.

“Some speeds are more comfortable than others,” I said. “This is kind of like a slow jog. Feel how jarring it is?”

“Y-y-y-yes,” Sheela said as she bounced against the saddle and my chest.

“Go a bit faster and she’ll put her head down and run smoother,” I said.

Sheela followed my instructions and Hope’s speed increased. The parasaur’s strides grew longer, and the ride smoothed out a bunch.

“Great job!” I shouted over the wind that was now blowing Sheela’s long mane of blonde hair in my face. Her hair smelled like sandalwood mixed with a bit of pine, and I pulled a bunch of it out of my face so it lay over my shoulder.

“Thank you,” she replied as she steered Hope toward the outskirts of the lake.

“Turn her so you go on the left side of that log,” I said into Sheela’s ear, and she pulled on the reins. Hope did as Sheela told her, and we turned away from the shore of the beach.

“Now go right around that palm tree. Then left around that boulder!” I pointed ahead, and Sheela yanked on the reins. We twisted through a few more obstacles easily, and I felt like my friend had gotten the hang of handling the magnificent parasaur.

“Alright, take us over to the herd,” I said.

“Yes, Victor,” Sheela replied, and she kicked Hope’s sides to increase our speed. I expected the movement, but I still tightened my arms around Sheela’s stomach.

It took us a good five minutes to circle the lake and come around the other group of parasaur. A quick count gave me thirty-four in the herd, and I identified ten males in the group. They stood maybe two feet taller than the females and glanced at us suspiciously as we approached.

But they didn’t signal the herd to run.

“Slow down a bit,” I said, but Hope’s speed had already decreased so that we were moving at a fast walk, and I wondered if I’d accidentally

controlled her.

The closer we got to the herd, the more I realized how much of a runt Hope was. The males of the group weren't as bulky huge as the triceratops on the other side of the lake, but they were actually a two or three feet taller at the shoulder when on all fours, and they were a good twenty-five feet tall when they reared up on their hind legs. If Hope was a big bed truck, then these were all semi's. I was going to need a step ladder to get on the back of any of these beasts, or I was going to have to make the leap while standing on Hope's back.

I knew I could tame one of these crest-headed dinos. I'd already done so with Hope. I didn't know for sure that I could tame a trike, and something about the three-horned dinos made me think I'd be trying to punch too high of a weight class if I tried. I still hadn't really used my tame ability, so I needed to practice it on a few more dinos, get the hang of it, and then try it on a triceratops.

"Which one do you think will be the best?" I asked Sheela as we slowly approached the herd.

"There is a group on the opposite side that appears to have smaller

ones,” Sheela said as she pointed.

“Yeah, I see them, but they actually look really young. Hope’s young too, but I have a feeling they kind of kicked her out because she wasn’t growing fast enough.”

“The others do seem much larger than her,” Sheela agreed.

“What about the male closest to us?” I asked as I pointed. He was probably the smallest male of the group, but he still stood about twelve feet tall at the shoulder and had a tail that was probably just as long.

“He is still quite large,” she whispered.

“Yeah, but we need a boyfriend for Hope,” I said as I fought against the laughter in my stomach. “I already have a name picked out: Bob.”

“It sounds like a fine name, Victor, but--”

“It’s actually a great name,” I giggled. “Let’s do this. Bring us closer.”

Sheela kicked lightly against Hope’s sides, and the parasaur moved toward the water where her kin drank, washed, and ate. The male we were targeting had a reddish-brown hide, and he let out a long, low-pitched toot when we got within twenty feet of the first female of his group. Sheela’s

body tensed, but Bob didn't run away or attack, so Hope kept walking toward him.

He was knee deep in the water of the lake, some thirty yards from us, and Hope pushed into the ring of females that gathered around him.

"Hey, buddy. How's it going?" I whispered as the massive dinosaur turned his eyes to me. They were actually a light shade of brown, and they looked at me without any hostility. Any sort of fear I might have had about approaching the magnificent animal faded. This guy was meant to be my pal, and I knew we'd have a great time together.

"I'm Victor," I whispered as Sheela guided Hope closer. "You are a good looking boy. Look at your skin! It's quite handsome. You've got great muscles too. Look at all the women around you. Are these all your girlfriends?"

Bob let out a low pitched toot, and I felt my rib bones vibrate. It was like a tuba being played into a train tunnel, and a tiny bit of my fear came back.

"I'd like you to come back with me and be my pal. I promise I'll take good care of you. We'll feed ya lots of great food, and I'll take you on

adventures every day. Sound good?” We were ten feet from the side of the massive male, and I felt my heart start to hammer in my chest. Or maybe I was just feeling Sheela’s heart hammer so hard in her chest that I thought it was mine.

“Whoooooa boy,” I said as he took a big step away from me. “It’s okay. I’m not going to hurt you. I’d just like to pet you. You are such a good looking boy. Awww. There we go.” Sheela had stopped Hope right next to the male’s left side, and I reached out to touch the massive parasaur’s flank. His scales felt just like Hope’s, but each one was almost twice the size as what was on her hide.

My *Eye-Q* was already open, and I turned my head so I could look into his gentle eyes.

“I’m gonna get on your back now, and you are going to come with me,” I said with confidence that actually surprised me.

Nothing happened for a few seconds, and then Bob sank down lower in the water.

Parasaurolophus Walkeri tamed. Flashed across my vision, and my heart leapt into my chest.

“I did it,” I whispered to Sheela as I let go of her stomach. I held my hands on her shoulders to help me balance when I stood, and then I leaned over so that I could touch the top of Bob’s back ridge. I grunted, leapt, and then pulled myself up on his back.

The ridge on his spine jutted up about four inches, and there wasn’t really a great place to sit without squeezing my nuts, so I kneeled on either side of the ridge and then mentally commanded the massive parasaur to stand up on his hind legs. He shifted backward as he stood up from the water, and I leaned forward so that I could clamp my fingers around the ridge at the base of his long neck.

“Sheela, do you see this?” I asked her.

“Yes, Victor,” she replied as she looked up at me. Her eyes glowed with the light of the sun, and she held the reins tightly against her breasts.

“You look magnificent. I am very impressed.”

“Ha!” I laughed loudly, and a few of the parasaur stepped away with surprise. “Nothing impresses you, so I’ll take it.”

“Not true,” she replied. “You impress me every day, Victor.”

“Awww, thanks. Well, I feel the same way about you.”

“Oh?” she asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Yeah, let’s get out of the water.” I thought about Bob walking to the shore of the lake, and my mount took a big step through the water. The females moved aside to let him pass, and we soon made it back to the beach.

Riding Hope had been amazing, but being on Bob’s back was a whole new experience. I was at least sixteen feet off the ground when he stood on his hind legs, and I towered over all the other dinos. It felt almost like I was riding on a tank, and every step Bob took felt like it equaled three of Hope’s.

“Wow, wow, wow,” I said as I thought about him spinning around on the beach. He was a bit slower to obey my command than Hope was, but I figured that it was because we hadn’t spent as much time together. He still pivoted as gracefully as the smaller parasaur, but I could tell he wasn’t used to making such acute movements.

“Let’s go home, buddy. I want to introduce you to Trel, Galmine, and Kacerie.”

Bob let out a low happy toot, and I patted his shoulder gently.

“Sheela, you ready?” I asked.

“Yes,” she answered as she looked up at me. The clay basket on her saddle looked almost too big, and I knew we’d be able to carry three times as much on the back of Bob. Hell, I could carry Galmine, Trel, Kacerie, and a bunch of baskets on the back of Bob if I commanded him to walk on all fours.

But now I had him on his back legs, and I wanted to see how fast he could go.

“Giddyap, Bob!” I hissed as I tapped my heels against his flanks.

My new parasaur took a long step forward, then another, and then a third before he found his jogging pace. It immediately became apparent that he couldn’t accelerate as quickly as Hope could, but it only took another six steps for me to figure out that his top speed was way faster. The wind almost instantly began to make my eyes water, but I didn’t care. His long lopping steps set down perfectly on the sandy beach, and there were almost no jarring bounces. He was actually a bit easier to ride than Hope, and I turned around to see Sheela chasing behind me.

“Is that as fast as you can go?” I shouted at her as I willed Bob to pick up some more speed. My new pal obeyed me, and he bent his neck down a

bit so that he could really bring his tail into play.

Then his engine opened up like a race car.

“Shiiiiitttt!” I growled as he seemed to go from thirty to seventy in two steps. I clamped my fingers harder around the ridge on his neck and ducked my head low so that I could see through the wind. I really had no idea how fast Bob was going, but the wind was pushing on my chest like crazy, and it took every ounce of willpower to keep my eyes open. I thought about him slowing down a bit, and he made a few more steps at a much slower pace.

Then he let out a quick bass toot as if to tell me that I should be careful about what I wished for.

I turned around and saw that I’d put a good hundred yards between Sheela and me. She wasn’t riding Hope as fast as I normally did, but she was moving at a good clip; Bob was just a big lumbering drag racer.

But I guessed he also had a good tractor engine. He must have weighed four tons, and I imagined his wide lizard feet would really be able to grab onto the ground. He probably couldn’t haul as much as a triceratops, but he was going to be a great help with our future build plans.

“He is fast!” Sheela shouted as she pulled Hope up alongside me.

“Yeah! I’ll go a bit slower. Try and keep up! We’ll do a quick ride around the north side of the valley.”

Sheela nodded, and I kicked Bob’s flanks lightly so that he’d pick up speed. The big parasaur let out a French horn sounding note and then floated across the sand on his massive legs. We ran past the same few obstacles I had Sheela steer Hope around, and I practiced steering Bob around the palm tree, past the boulder, and over the downed log. He was big enough to just step over the log without even jumping, and I let out a short laugh.

The green raptors weren’t going to be much of a problem for Bob. They might be able to nip at his legs, but a single stomp from his foot would squash one, and I’d be able to spear or rain arrows down from the safety of his high back.

I glanced back to ensure the Sheela was still following me. She was, so I angled Bob toward the side of the jungle where the hill slope met the beach. My new pet plowed up the slope with no perceived loss of speed, and I angled him up to the higher parts of the hillside. I was soon racing across the wide path on the ledge, and I turned to look back down on the lake.

Then I saw the smoke and ordered Bob to stop.

It was hard to tell how far away the fire was. Or even if it was a fire. All I could see was a thick plume of black smoke lifting up into the eastern sky.

“Sheela!” I hissed when she rode up next to me, and my friend turned to look where I was.

“It is far away,” she said. “Perhaps over fifteen miles.”

“There hasn’t been any sort of storm recently,” I said. “So I don’t think lightning caused it.”

“I agree,” she said.

“It is probably another camp,” I said. “Maybe they are clearing the forest for space.

“Victor, I do not think that is the reality.” She shrugged.

“Yeah,” I sighed. “It’s probably something bad. Either dinosaurs attacked someone’s camp, and a fire got out of control, or...”

“Or a tribe of survivors is attacking another tribe of survivors,” Sheela finished my sentence.

“Let’s do as I planned. We’ll do a quick ride around the valley’s crest.

Keep an eye out for any fires or trees that we didn't clear. Got it?"

"Yes, Victor," she said. "Will you tell the others about this once we return?"

"Hmmm. Let's not. Whoever is fighting is far away, but I think we need to consider that the dinosaurs aren't the only threat here. We need to put a priority on building our walls and saving people that come with the teleport beams."

"So you will not mention this to Trel, Galmine, or Kacerie?" Sheela asked.

"Definitely not Kacerie," I said. "She's having enough problems dealing with the menial tasks. If I tell her there are survivors out there that might not be friendly, she could freak out even more. I'll tell Trel and Galmine tomorrow. Today, we need to celebrate getting Bob, and cut out as much sinew as we can."

"Understood," Sheela said.

"The problem is that this creates even more pressure on us," I said. "It's only a matter of time before someone finds us. If they are cool, then it will be cool, but I'm guessing they aren't going to be cool, so it's not going

to be cool.”

“You use that word often,” Sheela said.

“It’s cool.” I winked and got a half-smile out of the cat-woman.

“There is much more work to do.”

“Yeah, and on top of learning how to survive, we might also need to learn how to fight. Good thing we have a badass warrior woman that can train us.” I smiled down at my friend, and it seemed as if the skin beneath the fur on her cheeks reddened a bit.

“I would enjoy teaching you all,” she admitted.

“Let’s do our patrol.” I gestured to the side of the hill and thought about all the tasks we had to do. If there were other tribes out there, and they were aggressive, they weren’t going to wait around for us to get our shit together.

We had a lot of work to do, and no time to do it.

Sheela and I both kicked our parasaurs into sprints that took us over the crest of the hill and into our valley.

Chapter 8

Sheela and I had already made a few trips on the north hillside of our valley and hadn't seen any sign of other survivors, so I wasn't expecting to see any on this trip. However, I was a bit more concerned about the possibility of getting attacked by things that were not dinosaurs, so I paid closer attention to the trees we rode past. I also looked at the side of the hill for any signs of passage while we rode our parasaur down the shores of the river we had to ford to make it to the lake. We didn't see signs of anything humanoid, but we still made a wide loop around the redwood grove that circled our camp clearing before we rode back toward our fort.

The clearing was pretty much how we left it. There were still a few hundred corpses on the grass, the pile of dead raptors, and a small pond of blood off to the side of our fort. The pond was about half the size it was before we left to get clay, so I figured it would all soak into the ground in the next hour.

Trel, Kacerie, and Galmine were actually outside of the gate working on cutting sinew from a pile of corpses by the door. Trel had been super

smart, and just dragged the corpses over so that the women could process them right by the entrance to our fort. If they saw danger, they could duck inside the door.

The three of them looked up as soon as Bob emerged from the clearing, and I saw Kacerie turn and dash into the fort. I guessed that she hadn't seen me on top of the giant parasaur.

"Trel! Galmine! Kacerie!" I waved as I dashed through the clearing. Bob seemed to sense my excitement, and the big boy let out a few low toots that sounded like he was blowing raspberries into a trombone while pulling on the slide.

"What is that?" Trel asked as she stood up from her work.

"This is Bob!" I said proudly. "He's Hope's new friend!"

Trel's pretty mouth was opened with surprise, and she craned her head to look up at me.

"Wow," Galmine said. "Victor, he is amazing! I am so proud of you for taming him! He will really help us build quicker. It looks very safe up on top of his back."

“Yeah it is, but we are going to need to build a bigger saddle, and a bigger door, and probably a bigger fort, but we already planned on that last one.”

“Yeeeeeaaapp,” Trel sighed as she looked up and down the large dinosaur. “Did you have to get one this large?”

“Of course!” I said. “Go big or go home. That’s what they say.”

“Who says that?” Trel huffed. “This isn’t efficient at all! Even if I build a door, he’ll take up every square inch Hope and the hut don’t occupy!”

“Then you’ll have to fix it,” I said as I smiled down at her.

“But you want me to build platforms, and I have to help with baskets, and then we need to cut down trees, and--”

“Hey, Trel,” I interrupted her and held my hand down. “Come climb up here.”

“What? On that thing? No. Thank. You. I was just beginning to tolerate Hope’s smell and oafish demeanor.”

“Come on,” I said as I beckoned with my fingers. “You’ll like this.”

“Like what?” she asked with a sour expression on her face.

“Just climb up here and sit behind me!”

“Fine!” Trel stepped toward Bob as I thought of him crouching down so she could climb easier. He followed my wishes, and the spider-woman skittered up his legs before she stood behind me.

“Kneel down,” I said.

“The ridge on his back is uncomfortable,” she hissed.

“Just kneel like me. You’ll need to make a padded saddle that can account for the spine.”

“Ugh. He smells worse than Hope.” Trel’s shapely human legs coiled underneath her hips, and I gestured for her to wrap her arms around my stomach. She didn’t squeeze me very hard, but as soon as I ordered Bob to push forward, Trel let out a small gasp and grabbed me tightly.

I steered him around the walls of the fort and then toward the spot on the south side where I had saved Kacerie a few days ago. I didn’t put much speed down because of all the corpses, but as soon as I made it to the redwood tree line, I told Bob to go a bit faster, and we plunged into the canopy like a speeding monster truck.

“Yeeeeeeee!” Trel howled when the parasaur picked up more speed and dipped his head down. I let out a light laugh and then twisted him around the base of a big redwood before pointing him toward the small river where we got our water. We made it to the massive hollowed out tree in only a handful of seconds, but I thought Bob was too big to fit inside without freaking out Trel, so I just ran parallel to it until we reached the river.

“The riv--” she started to shout as soon as we reached it, but I only slowed Bob down a little, and he plowed through the water like a bulldozer. Massive waves sprang up on each side of his thick torso, and Trel let out a shriek as she pushed her face into my back. The water just misted over us though, and we hit the other side without slowing down much.

Bob let out a happy sounding toot as soon as we reached the other side of the river, and he gave a little wiggle to throw some of the water off his legs. The movement wasn’t enough to upset our seats, but Trel still gasped while her spider legs all braced down on his back so that he wouldn’t throw us.

“Cool, huh?” I asked as I slowed him down. “I feel invincible up here.”

“It is terrifying!” Trel hissed. “Please let me get down.”

“Naw,” I laughed. “I can’t let you down here. For one, it’s too dangerous. Also, you don’t like it yet. We need to keep going until you are laughing.”

“Victor, I am not going to enjoy--” she started to say, but the words caught in her mouth when I ordered Bob to start sprinting again.

I ran the parasaur around the river until it wrapped all the way around the north side of the valley. I found the spot where we usually crossed to get to the lake, and then we forded the water with another magnificent splash. Trel screeched again when we did this, but she didn’t push her face into my back.

I tore up the slope of the north hill and then picked a path up near the crest. I didn’t want to get all the way up for fear of potential enemies being able to see us, but I felt safe enough staying on the sloped side that faced our small valley. I made Bob stop up close to the top, and I pointed out toward where the clearing to our camp was.

“This is our territory. Pretty cool, huh?”

“Yeah,” Trel agreed. “I will admit this is a good view.”

“Will you also admit that you like riding on Bob’s back?” I turned my

head so I could smirk at her.

“Hmmm.” Our faces were a few inches apart, and her dark eyes stared into mine. “It is not as bad as it first was, but there is another male I would prefer to be riding.”

“As soon as we get back,” I said. Then I kissed her softly and found her mouth eager for mine.

“You have been putting me off,” she whispered after our lips parted. “I have never been so frustrated. You frustrated me the moment I met you.”

“Really?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said. “I found you attractive, of course, but you weren’t taking any of my hints.”

“Uhh. Hints? You were really mean to me.”

“Yes, but you should have realized that was because I wanted you. Ugh. Yes, I’m sorry I was mean to you, but it’s kind of your fault.”

“Let’s put it behind us,” I said. “Can you make a saddle for Bob? I’d also like to tame a few more of these so we can each ride one.”

“I can make one, of course,” Trel said. “But I still have to do the

platforms, and we will need to hurry with the new wall so that we have space. If you want a dinosaur pet for each of us, we should push the wall out even more. Perhaps we need two acres.”

“It will be too much,” I said. “We still need more people, and--” as I spoke, I saw a pillar of light descend on the other side of the hill to our north. It was a pale orange color, but I couldn’t really tell how far away it was without cresting the hill. Normally, the pillars seemed to appear in groups, but I didn’t see any others descend from the sky.

“Hmmm,” I said as I turned Bob around so that we faced the light.

“It looks far away,” Trel said. “We shouldn’t bother, let’s go back to the camp. You promised me that we’d have our time together. I will stop ovulating the day after tomorrow.”

“Yeah,” I said as I smiled again at the dark-haired beauty. There was too much to do. I might be able to make it to this new arrival on the back of Bob quickly, but it also could take me a lot of time, and I’d promised Trel that we would become lovers.

I felt like I was being pulled in a thousand different directions, but I needed to focus on taking care of my own women before I worried about

anyone else.

“Let’s head back,” I said as I turned Bob back around so he pointed down the slope.

Trel gasped in my ear when I kicked him forward, but it sounded more like a gasp of enjoyment than one of terror.

The big parasaur made it back to the camp in only a few minutes, and I found Galmine, Kacerie, and Sheela at work tearing more sinew out. The basket we had used to collect the parts was almost full, and I felt a bit of excitement when I thought about all the cool uses we would have for the cordage.

“Did you enjoy your ride?” Galmine asked when I pulled Bob up to them and let Trel off.

“It was terrible, but I’ll improve it with a better saddle.” Trel smirked at me when I climbed down Bob’s back, and she held her hand out to me when I finally got to the ground.

“Have you seen any scavengers?” I asked them as I gestured to the bodies in the clearing.

“There have been a few on the side of the--” Kacerie started to say, but Trel cleared her throat violently.

“Poor Victor, all he can think about is working. Hey, male. I have a job for you. It is very important, and you are the only one here that can do it. Let’s go into the hut.”

“Yeah, sorry for the delay.” I smiled at the group of women and let Trel pull me toward the door. “Get as much sinew as you can! Try to clear the bodies so that they aren’t near the walls! Be careful with Bob and Ho--”

“They aren’t idiots!” Trel interrupted me. “They can figure it out. I have a more important task for you.”

“Sorry. Hard for me to let go.”

“I know,” Trel said as she gave me a fanged smile. “That is why I like you. You never quit working. I hope you know I’ve never respected or cared for another male as much as I care and respect you, Victor.”

“I know,” I whispered as we walked into the hut. “You aren’t even going to feed me to our offspring when we are done. I guess that’s a win for me.”

“Yessss,” she hissed as her mouth came up to kiss mine. I felt the fangs on her teeth, but I felt the presence of her aggressive tongue more.

The air inside the hut was warm and slightly smoky from the fire we kept burning all the time. As I kissed Trel, I felt Jinx rub the back of my legs, and I gave him the command to exit the hut and hang out with Galmine. He left with a happy squawk, but Trel didn’t seem to notice. Or at least, she didn’t stop kissing me.

“I need you,” she whispered when our mouths parted. Her fingers were at my khaki shirt buttons, and my hands were cupping her wonderful ass. Her silk boyshorts were really tight around her butt and hips, and she had to wiggle out of them when I pulled them down with my thumbs.

She got my long sleeved shirt off and then passed it over her shoulder to one of her spider legs. The black limb caught it and then carefully set it on the ground while her fingers moved to pull up my undershirt. My fingers were now tracing circles around her bare hips, and I walked them up to the tight silk tube top that covered her magnificent breasts. I had to raise my hands when she pulled my undershirt off, but then she raised hers when I pulled off her tube top.

My pants were still on, but we kissed again, and I enjoyed the sensation of her bare torso against mine. I had spent the last month gawking at her breasts and nipples through her thin dress, and the feeling of them sliding against my skin was making my head spin like one of those tea-cup style rides.

Her claw-fingers reached down to my belt and unbuckled it with an expert movement. She went to pull down my pants, but my shoes were still on, and we each let out some light laughter when I almost fell over. I soon had my boots, socks, pants, and underwear off. Then we were back in each other's arms, and her legs were wrapped around my hips.

Then Trel-Idil-Iria and I became lovers.

My experience with Galmine had been wonderful. The gray-skinned woman was passionate, and we enjoyed each other with slow, sensual movements broken up by explorative kisses. She couldn't move that fast, so our bouts of love-making consisted of me sliding deep into her while we rubbed against each other. It had been great, calming, and I'd felt almost like our spirits were joined when our bodies were.

Trel fucked me like she was on a mission. We started up standing, and

her spider legs supported her while her human legs wrapped around me. That position gave me too much control though, and she ended up pushing me to the ground so that she could just straddle me cow-girl style. She pushed the palms of her black hands into my shoulders and then ground her hips into me with a frantic intensity.

Trel was in complete control of the situation. She bent her head down, hissed with pleasure, and worked me over like she was trying to get her forty minutes of cardio done in five.

Eventually, her hisses of pleasure turned into moans, and our bodies thrashed together as we both reached a climax. She was actually out of breath afterward, and the beautiful woman lay against my chest as she traced her pointed finger through the beard on my chin.

“Don’t move,” she whispered as she stood from me, anchored herself on her spider legs, and then flipped herself over so that she hung upside down.

“What are you doing?” I asked as I stared at her naked body.

“Ensuring all of your seed reaches my womb,” she whispered as her long obsidian hair pooled on my bare chest. “This is our first round. You will

enjoy the next one even more.”

“It was great, but I’m not so sure I can go for another fifteen--”

“Nonsense, you are still hard,” Trel said as her hungry eyes turned to my naked body.

“It doesn’t quite work that way, Trel. I have to--”

“You just have to lie there and relax, Victor. Don’t over think this. You were made to inseminate me. It is our purpose to produce a wonderful brood of offspring.”

“Okay,” I said with a light laugh. I still doubted that Trel and I could make babies, but I definitely didn’t mind trying with her over, and over, and over again.

“So far, you have been more enjoyable than my previous two mates,” she whispered as she reached down to touch my penis. For half a moment, I thought her pointed fingers would accidentally rip or tear the sensitive skin there, but her hands were very smooth, and I was soon ready to fuck her again.

I lost track of time, but I kept count of how many times I filled the

beautiful woman with my sperm: six. Each time after the first I didn't think I'd be able to go another round, but Trel used either her hands, her mouth, or a combination of the two to get me rock-hard again. We tried a variety of positions, but her spider-legs made traditional missionary a little difficult. She was able to use her spider-legs to elevate herself on her back so I could penetrate her while I stood, so it was a bit like missionary. Our last round was reverse cowgirl, and I thought that there would have been no way I could have ejaculated any sperm, but she pushed the edges of her fingers into the base of my testicles and massaged something there that brought me over the edge. It was one of the most intense orgasms I'd experienced in my short life, and I had to bite my arm so that I didn't scream. I'd somehow made more sperm, and she moaned with delight when I filled her once more.

"Goooooooood," she panted after we came down from our passion. "I am very happy with you, Victor."

"Uhhh, thanks," I panted as I tried to stop the ceiling of the hut from rotating around me. "You were great too. Uhhh. Amazing actually. The room is spinning."

"Of course I am great. I'm Trel-Idil-Iria." She stood from me, and I

gasped as I slid out of her. “But we were talking about you. You were wonderful. I am very pleased.”

Trel used her spider legs to rotate herself upside down, and she walked over so that her face hung above mine. We kissed for a half a minute, and then she sighed when her lips pulled away from mine.

“It really is too bad that you have to die,” she whispered. “I wouldn’t mind doing that with you a few more times. You are much more talented than my last two mates.”

“Uhhh, what?” I asked as the ceiling stopped spinning suddenly.

“I believe you heard me,” she whispered as her hands came down to grab my shoulders. “Our babies will need to feed.”

“But wait,” I hissed as I tried to sit up. Her hands held me down though, and it suddenly seemed like she had superhuman strength. “You said you wouldn’t kill me.” I pushed the heels of my bare feet against the mat we’d laid out in the hut, but it slid away when I tried to push myself up.

It felt like each of my shoulders was supporting four hundred pounds, and I realized that Trel’s legs were giving her the leverage to keep me pinned.

“I lied.” Trel’s face pouted a bit. “You filled my womb with plenty of your seed. I am confident I’ll bear children. Don’t fight this Victor. It will just hurt more. My bite will numb you pleasantly. Just let the memories of our love making carry you into the darkness. You really were excellent.”

“No!” I tried to shout, but her left hand grabbed me by the throat and my words were cut off suddenly.

I tried to kick or lift my hips up, but her legs were too far away to each side, and her naked human body was a vertical line hanging right above me. There was nothing for me to kick, or push, or leverage against. There was only the incredible strength of her arms pinning my throat and shoulder.

Trel smiled at me, and the twin vampire fangs extended another six inches out of her mouth.

“Ahhhhcckkk!” I gasped through her grip on my throat as I tried to wiggle free.

“Shhh,” she whispered as her mouth dropped toward my throat. “Don’t fight my love. I am so proud of you. I will sing your praises to our children. They will never forget you.”

I couldn’t breathe. I couldn’t think. I couldn’t help myself. Trel was

going to kill me after an afternoon of mind-blowing sex.

The crazy thing was, I almost thought it was worth it.

“Just relax, Victor.” Her wet tongue drifted across the side of my throat and trailed up to my earlobe. Her tongue slipped into my ear and I fought against a moan of pleasure. Holy shit. Trel was about to murder me, but she was still turning me on.

Fuck it. I should have known this was how I’d go out. Tricked by some beautiful woman. My life flashed before my eyes, and I felt an incredible sense of sadness that I hadn’t done more with my existence.

“Annnnnndddd. Fooled you,” she whispered into my ear, and her hand released my throat.

“What?” I gasped with surprise.

“Ha! You should see the look on your face!” Trel cackled loudly and flipped herself over so that she was straddling my waist again. “Your eyes were this big!” She brought the tips of her fingers together to make giant circles and then she held them up to her own black eyes.

“Wait. What?” I sat up, and Trel’s cackle turned into a roar of laughter.

“You... Thought... I’d... Kill... You... Ha!” Her body vibrated on top of me as she laughed, and her spider legs slapped the floor of the hut.

“That was a joke?” I asked as I touched my throat.

“Uhhh yeah, cool dude!” She had her arms wrapped around her lean stomach now, and she rocked back and forth on me. Somehow, I was still hard, and her movements pushed my tip against her lower back.

“Holy shit!” I shouted. “Trel, I thought you were going to kill me!”

“I know!” she screeched. “I wish I had a vid-camera. It was hilarious.”

“Uhh, no,” I growled. “That was fucking terrible. I can’t believe you’d do that.”

“Ha!” she laughed again and shook her head to make her hair bounce.

“No, for real. My heart is just calming down now. I seriously--”

Her lips pressed against mine suddenly, and I fell back against the floor mat. She growled into my mouth as she kissed me, and my tongue fought against hers.

“You think I’d kill you, Victor Shelby?” she growled as she pulled her lips from mine. “Trel-Idil-Iria keeps her word. I told you I’d be your lover

without poisoning you. I told you I was yours forever. I'm furious that you did not believe me. I should kill you for your insolence." I gasped as her fingers closed around my throat again. But then I saw the smile on her lips.

"You are in trouble, Trel." I hissed.

"Oh?" she asked as she relaxed her grip on my neck.

"Yep. You need a spanking." I brought the palm of my hand up and smacked her on her ass cheek.

"Oh!" she gasped when I hit her. Then she gasped again when I smacked her other ass cheek.

"And tickles," I growled as I moved my fingers toward her stomach.

"Victor Shelby. Don't you dare! I am a Duchess. I do not-- Eeeekkkk!" Trel screeched when my fingers poked into her skin on the sides of her tummy, and she leapt off my torso.

"Tickle, tickle, tickle," I laughed as I rolled to my feet and walked toward her with my fingers wiggling.

"No! No! No! I take it all back! You are a terrible male! I'm going to kill you next time!" Trel laughed as she snatched up her silk clothes and

dashed out the door.

I didn't care that I was naked. Trel had to pay for tricking me, so I sprinted out the door after her. She hadn't made it far, so I managed to grab her around the waist as I somehow avoided her thrashing spider legs. We both went down in a pile, and she screeched out laughter as my fingers poked every part of her smooth skin.

"No! Stop! Ekkk! Victor! Stop tickling me! This isn't funny!" She almost couldn't talk because she was giggling so much.

"Then why are you laughing!" I asked as I moved my fingers into her armpits.

"Nooo! Stop!" she laughed as she tried to pull my hands away from her.

"Ahhheeeemmm!" a voice shouted next to us.

Trel and I both stopped our naked wrestling and looked up at Kacerie. The pink-haired woman had her arms crossed over her chest and an unhappy scowl on her face.

"Are you two done in the hut? Some of us would like to eat dinner and

work with the damn clay you were so interested in getting.”

“Uhh, yeah,” I said as I looked down at Trel. We were both covered with sweat and bits of grass from where we were rolling.

“We are done for tonight,” Trel huffed, “but I intend to have him tomorrow, and every afternoon moving forward, so maybe you should--”

“We are good,” I interrupted Trel as I ran my hand down her smooth inky hair. “You can use it now.”

“Fine,” Kacerie barked, and then she stormed into the hut. A moment later my boots, socks, pants, and two shirts flew out of the door and landed near us.

“I just can’t believe her attitude,” Trel sighed. “It’s like she doesn’t even understand all the things you do for her. How ungrateful.”

“Trel,” I chuckled as I thought about how she acted toward me for the last month. “You are something else.”

“I know,” the beautiful woman sighed as she moved her mouth toward mine. “I am all sorts of amazing and wonderful. And now I’m all yours. Just don’t let it go to your head, male. You have a problem with being a bit too

cocky and arrogant.”

“Me?” I laughed. “I’m arrogant and cocky?”

“Yes, of course,” she said, and then we kissed again.

Chapter 9

That night was a bit of a celebration. We'd gone from a minor setback the day before when Sheela and I almost died and lost two clay jugs; to acquiring a shit ton of sinew for cordage, a good thirty pounds of clay, and Bob.

We feasted like a king and his queens that night, and everyone but Galmine ate a freshly barbequed orange bird. My gray-skinned lover chose to eat the last of our berries, and I told her we planned on getting more the next day.

When Kacerie left the hut to use our latrine bucket, I gestured for my three friends to lean in close over the fire. Sheela and I told them about the smoke that we had observed, and our worries about other hostile tribes. Galmine had trouble believing anyone would want to attack us, but Trel immediately suspected that they might already know our presence because of the various fires we lit over the last week when we cut through trees, and she began to puzzle through ways to mask our presence better.

We brainstormed a few ideas until Kacerie came back, and then we

moved the conversation away from the topic, and to a discussion about keeping watch at night. The shifts were much easier to cover with five people, and I volunteered for the second one.

Other than a group of smaller raptor-like scavengers that came to eat at the corpse buffet, and the dancing green lightning bugs, the night passed without excitement. I slept nestled between Trel and Galmine and enjoyed kisses from both of them throughout the night. I knew Galmine was all into free love, and she'd often spoken about how her society just had massive orgies every night, but I thought Trel would have been way more possessive than she was. She didn't seem to mind Galmine kissing me, other than to demand my lips after she saw me kissing the rock woman. She just wanted to be treated as an equal, and I had no problem with that, even if I kept asking myself how in the hell I had gotten so lucky.

We had to leave Bob outside of the wall, which worried me a bunch, but I could sense both his and Hope's general attitude, and neither seemed distressed during the night. I figured that the giant parasaur was large enough to take care of himself against any of the green raptors, or anything a bit bigger than me. He'd probably have a problem with a carnotaurus, but I could

always order him to run, and I knew he'd easily be able to get away.

I woke up the next morning at the crack of dawn to find both Galmine and Trel sleeping with smiles on their faces and their hands on my chest. I did my best to wiggle out of their embrace without waking them, and then I looked over to see Kacerie sleeping with her back to us on the other side of the fire. Sheela was not inside of the hut, but I found her outside of our gate cutting more sinew. She had a second basket almost full and didn't notice me walk up behind her.

"Good morning," I said, and she spun around to face me.

"Good morning, Victor," she said as she gave me her usual nod.

"Need some help?" I asked. There was a bit of movement off to my left, and I turned to see more of small dino scavengers coming to eat from the piles of bodies.

"I am almost done here," she said. "There is more sinew to gather, but I will have to walk out to the clearing near the cave, and I am worried that the orange birds will attack."

"Alright," I replied as I looked to where she pointed. Ten of the turkey-sized birds occupied the ramp, but another thirty were relaxing on the grass

below the cave. There used to be hundreds around, but their corpses were now decorating the clearing.

“I have moved most of the bodies we have already processed away to the outskirts,” Sheela continued. “But I did not know if you wished me to spend more of my time moving any more.”

“I think we need to get this group right here away,” I said as I gestured to the pile of ten bodies at her feet. They were starting to smell a bit now, and I guessed the whole clearing would reek by the end of the day.

Then we would really have a problem with all sorts of scavengers.

“I will get to work on it,” she said as she reached down to finish pulling the sinew from the last bird.

“I’m also worried about that pond of blood,” I said.

“It might soak into the grass,” Sheela said with her usual shrug. “I do not know what we could do about it besides just wait.”

“Yeah, you’re right,” I said. “We’ll also need to clear a working area for the lumber. That part of the grove over there has trees a few feet wider than what we used for our current wall. Let’s clear the bodies away from

there and then get to chopping.

“Should we retrieve water first?” Sheela asked.

“We’ve got a pot left after last night,” I said. “It should last us till lunch. Then Trel will have a new saddle made for Bob, and Galmine will have taught Kacerie how to make more pots. I’ll make a run then.”

“It is a plan,” Sheela said with her usual stoic nod.

“But is it a good plan?” I asked her as I grinned.

“Victor, all of your plans are excellent,” she whispered. “It is why I obey you.”

“Is something else wrong?” I asked since I noticed she wasn’t looking up at me when she spoke. It could have just been that she was working on cutting the sinew, but Sheela normally looked at me when we discussed our plans.

“You continue to ask me that,” Sheela said.

“Yeah, and you then explain to me that there is a problem. Then we talk about it, and you feel better.”

“My feelings hardly matter in this case,” she said as she cut the last

sinew off the bird.

“They matter to me,” I replied. “Is this about Trel and me? Or Galmine and me?”

“I have finished this task,” Sheela said as she tossed the last strap of sinew in the basket. “I will work to remove the corpses from this area and the trees that you wish to process.”

“Okay,” I said as I considered what to say next. Her tone made it apparent that she didn’t want to talk any more about it, so I really had two choices: press Sheela more, or give her some space. “I’m going to do a quick loop around the valley on Bob. I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

“Very well,” Sheela said as she turned away from me.

I walked around the wall to where Bob was resting. The big parasaur raised his head when I approached him, and I rubbed my hands across his snout.

“Hey buddy, did you have a good night sleep?”

He let out a soft toot, and I moved to climb up on his back. As soon as I was on top, he rose up on all fours, stretched out his body like a dog, and

then let out another series of low toots. These noises were a little louder than his first greeting, and I suspected that they woke Trel, Galmine, and Kacerie up.

I turned Bob away from our wall and urged him to the edges of our clearing. He was getting more used to carrying me on his back, and the acceleration wasn't as bumpy as it had been yesterday. I did a quick lap around the edges of the redwood grove surrounding the clearing but avoided the orange birds' cave.

I hadn't expected to see anything unusual in the clearing, so I rode Bob deeper into the redwoods. Dawn seemed to have the least amount of dinosaur activity, but I still startled some smaller birds, lizards, and a few large mammals that looked like a cross between a squirrel and a monkey.

I hit the hill on the north side of our clearing and checked over the valley as I rode toward the lake. The lack of a saddle meant I really couldn't push Bob up to his max speed, but then again, going any faster would make it hard because of the wind stinging my eyes. We were someday going to have to learn how to make riding goggles, but I didn't even know where to begin that process. Couldn't you make glass with heated sand? How did you shape

it? How did you cool it?

There was way too much to do, and here I was going for a bit of a joy ride.

Well, it wasn't quite a joy ride. Yeah, Bob was really awesome to ride, and I felt like I was in control of a super fast tank, but I also needed to check our territory out, and I wanted to double check on the fire that Sheela and I had seen yesterday. Thoughts of a potential enemy tribe filled some of my dreams last night, and I wanted another look at the smoke.

I descended the jungle so I could ford the river, then I pushed Bob back on the low slope of the hill. I was getting really used to the trails we frequented to get through the valley, but now I realized my habits might put me in danger. I'd played plenty of first-person shooting games where I'd just camped a popular spot with a sniper rifle. How soon would someone figure out that this was a path we frequently took and set up an ambush?

I pushed my fears aside and focused on the task at hand. It was good for me to be concerned about this new danger, but there wasn't much I could do about it this instant. All I could do was make tiny adjustments to my plan and then stick to that plan the best I could. I didn't know my enemy, but I

knew there was a potential enemy out there. I was already way wiser than I was yesterday, and I was tweaking my plans a bit to account for the new danger.

I made it to the crest of the lake's valley and stopped Bob's run. There was still a bit of smoke outside in the distance, but it looked like most of the fire had died down. It was what I expected to find, and I let out a sigh of relief. Hopefully, whatever was going on over there kept going on so that no one bothered to come this way.

I tapped my heels on Bob's flank and he walked closer to the crest of the hill. The hand shaped lake spread out below me, and I scanned my eyes over the beaches. There were three triceratops in the same spot I'd seen them yesterday, a smaller group of parasaurs bathing in the finger next to the three-horns, and a group of large Komodo dragon looking dinos lounging on the sand on the far side of the lake. I had never seen this later species of dino, and I opened my *Eye-Q* so that I could identify them. Unfortunately, they were too far away, and I didn't really feel like riding down there to get a closer look. I'd probably have to come back for more water and clay later today anyway, so I figured I could catch them at that time.

Since my *Eye-Q* was open, I tabbed through my attributes.

Strength: 4

Stamina: 3

Movement: 3

Special Skill: TAME -- Level 2.

“Alright!” I whispered out loud when I saw that my *Stamina* had gone up to a 3. I wished the *Eye-Q* would have told me exactly when it happened, but I reasoned that it probably occurred when I was sleeping and recovering from the day’s activities.

I set my eyes on the *Level 2* of my *Tame* skill. The smallest trike of the trio down below was about two or three times the bulk of Bob, and Bob was fucking huge. I didn’t know if weight or aggression had anything to do with taming the dinos, but it made a lot of sense to factor it in. I wasn’t going to try one of the triceratops until I got my skill up to a 3, so I was going to have to level it up by taming more parasaurs.

But that could wait until I came back here with Sheela again. I told the blonde woman I’d only be gone for a few minutes, so I needed to get back

before she got worried.

I turned Bob away from the lake and tore down the side of the hill. As I felt his legs pump and his back sway beneath me, I wondered if I'd ever get bored with this feeling of power. I was in complete control of the beast, and he changed his speed, direction, and gait as soon as I thought that he should.

Sheela did look a bit relieved when I returned, and I realized that I'd forgotten to bring a spear with me. As soon as Trel made the saddle for Bob, I'd have to make sure I kept one or two on him at all times. Maybe we'd also keep a bow and some arrows.

Trel, Galmine, and Kacerie were standing together at the mouth of our propped up gate, and they turned toward me when I stopped Bob a few feet from our wall.

"Good morning, Victor!" Galmine called out as she raised her hand toward me.

"Good morning, ladies," I said.

"We await your instructions," the gray-skinned woman said happily. "I have breakfast cooking. What else should we do? More water pots with the clay?"

“Yeah,” I said. “Please teach Kacerie and Trel what you are doing, and then work on converting the sinew to cordage. We are also going to need more plant cordage so either Sheela or I will have to get you more later today.”

“I can get some,” Trel said, and I actually blinked in amazement.

“You’d be okay to gather ferns?” I asked her.

“Well, I wouldn’t be ‘okay’ with it, since it is beneath my elevated position as your lover-queen of our tribe, but being queen means that I have to take upon myself jobs that my serfs cannot do by themselves.”

“But Trel, I am also Victor’s lover. Does that mean I am a queen as well?” Galmine asked.

“Hmmm,” Trel said as she studied the stone-woman. “I suppose so, but don’t let the title interfere with your duties.”

“I won’t,” Galmine said.

“Wait,” Kacerie said. “Does this mean I have to sleep with Victor if I want any sort of social standing in our tribe?”

“No,” I said at the same time as Trel said “Yes.”

“No!” I said again as the spider-woman shook her head and frowned at me. “Kacerie, I’m not expecting you to sleep with me. I just need you to help Galmine with the pots, and then I want you to help us with the cordage. You are really good at weaving, and your talents help us out a bunch.”

“It’s boring though,” the pink-haired woman said. “I don’t really think I should be doing this kind of activity. Can you take me out on one of your dinosaurs for a ride? I’ll gather ferns with you.”

“We’ll figure out the fern gathering later,” I said to the three of them. “Trel’s going to help me with something real quick and then work with you on the clay.”

“What about breakfast?” Galmine asked.

“Bring it out to me while I work,” I said as I gestured for Trel to climb up on Bob. “I don’t have time for a break.”

“Yes, Victor,” the gray-skinned woman said, and she turned back toward the hut with Kacerie.

“What do you need from me?” Trel asked after she had climbed up beside me and given me a soft kiss.

“I need you to tell me how far out to build the wall,” I said as I gestured to the clearing. “Then I’ll have Bob and Hope start digging the trench.”

“Easy enough. Send him more that way.” She pointed away from the wall, and I walked Bob a few dozen paces toward the redwoods.

“Here,” she said. “This is a hundred feet out. It will give us a circle diameter of around two hundred and seventy-five feet, and we will encompass the large tree within the new walls. I’ll eventually build part of our fort up there.”

“Got it,” I replied as I ordered Bob to start digging his front hands into the soft grass. He was a much stronger digger than Hope, and he soon had a small trench made.

“Can you control both of them at the same time?” Trel asked.

“Hummm,” I said as I commanded Bob to keep digging. I thought about Hope coming out to help us, and the smaller parasaur ducked under our door and jogged toward Bob. When she reached us, I thought about her digging a trench starting from Bob’s tail and going counterclockwise to Bob’s clockwise direction. She let out a happy toot and then went to work.

“Damn,” I said. “This is going to go really quick. We’ll probably finish the trench today.”

“Does it require a lot of work for them to follow your orders?” Trel asked. “How does your ability function?”

“I just kind of imagine them doing what I want them to do, and they do it.”

“Can you do something else besides supervising them?” she asked as her mouth twisted into a slight smile.

“Depends on what you had in mind,” I asked with a chuckle.

“To ensure that I am pregnant, you should inseminate me again today.”

“I’d love to, but let’s get everyone tasked with a job. I can try to cut down some trees or gather some ferns while our dinos dig the hole, but you also need to help with the clay jugs, figure out if we can make a tub, build a saddle for Bob, and then help with the cordage.”

“Ahh, Victor,” Trel sighed. “All work and no play for you. Perhaps I should explain to you that performing your mating duties on me is a job that is not to be taken lightly?”

“I know it is important,” I said, even though I suspected there was no way Trel could get pregnant from me. “Let’s do it again tonight after we get the whole ‘survival’ stuff figured out.”

“Very well,” Trel sighed as she slid off Bob’s back. “I will perform the tasks you need me to. When shall I fit the platform building in with all these other tasks?”

“Ugh,” I said as I wiped my palm over my face. “I forgot about those. We’ll really need them if we get attacked. Damn, I wish we had ten more people right now.”

“Then we would need more huts. I actually think I should build another so that you and I can have our own private space.”

“That’s really low on the list.” I slid off Bob and then walked across the clearing with her toward the fort.

“It is high on my list,” Trel groaned. “You were wonderful yesterday. I never thought I’d say this about a male, but I want you even when I am not ovulating.”

“Uhhh, yeah,” I said as I felt my cheeks warm. “I had a really good time too. You were great.”

“Of course I was,” she scoffed. “The amazing thing was how good you were. Just let me compliment you without trying to brush it off.”

“Thanks, Trel,” I said. “I’m glad that you and I are together.”

“Me as well, you’ll be very happy when you see our children. You worry about recruiting more people for our fort building activity, but soon we will not need to worry about that.”

“Uhh, how many will you... ummm make?” I asked, even though I still didn’t believe that she would actually get pregnant.

“My last brood was forty,” she said.

“Forty?” I gasped. “Like four and then zero? Like ten times four?”

“Yes, Victor,” she said as her eyes narrowed. “Why do you seem so amazed? That is how my people give birth. My numbers are a bit above average, but that is because I am a duchess.”

“I just... uhhh... How does it work?”

“Victor,” Trel said with a sigh. “I showed you how it worked yesterday. I’ll show you again tonight, but you really need to pay attention this time.”

“Ha,” I said as I saw her grin. “You are fucking with me. What I meant is how do you have that many children at once?”

“They are born as small eggs and pushed into the corpse of my dead mate,” she said with a shrug. “How do your kind give birth?”

“Just a single birth, sometimes twins happen, but the baby is between six and ten pounds normally,” I explained.

“That sounds incredibly painful,” Trel said. “It is already difficult forcing that many small eggs out of my womb and vagina. How do the women of your world do one giant egg?”

“Okay.” I laughed and shook my head as we reached the gate. “Let’s talk about it later. I’m going to grab our axes and start cutting down trees. You are going to do everything I told you to do. Got it?”

“Yes, Victor,” Trel said, and we parted ways so I could grab our stack of axes. We had eight now, and I carried them back across the field so that I could get to work on the trees. Bob and Hope continued digging the trench while I was grabbing the axes, and I realized that I wasn’t really thinking about their job anymore. It almost seemed as if I could issue them an order and they would just do it until it was done.

I decided to test the theory by focusing on cutting down the trees for a bit. The work was a bit slow without Sheela's swings on top of mine, but I'd gotten pretty good at lumberjacking after a month of using the stone axes, and I soon had the large tree felled.

I turned around to check on the progress of the two parasaur and was happy to find that they had continued the trench digging. Bob was moving about twice as fast as Hope, but they were both somehow maintaining the correct distance from the walls of our fort.

"What do you think?" I asked Sheela as she jogged over to me.

"It is impressive," she said. "Your ability grows more powerful."

"Or I'm just learning how to use it better," I said. "I know two things for sure."

"Oh?" Sheela asked as her golden eyes met mine.

"Yeah, first is that this is going to go way easier than we thought, and second is that I'm going to tame a lot more of these dinosaurs to help."

"We will need more room to house them," Sheela said.

"We'll figure that out," I said. "Just look at how fast they are digging."

If we could just figure out how to get them to chop down trees, we would be set.”

“Hmmm.” Sheela nodded and then glanced at the axe in my hand.

“Anyways, let’s get to cutting. I’m going to guess we need about a hundred and fifty of these. We’ll probably clear half of the younger growth by the time we are done.”

Sheela nodded, and we got back into our tree-cutting rhythm.

The morning passed quickly. Kacerie actually came out with our breakfast and the jug of water, and we spent a few minutes chatting with her while we ate. By the time lunch came around, Sheela and I had taken down our fourth tree, and our parasaurs completed digging the trench around the entire fort. I hadn’t even bothered to look on the other side when they worked, but I got the feeling they were done and then walked over to find them both nuzzling each other. They had made a perfect circle around our fort, and I felt a little amazed that my commands worked so well.

Trel finished the saddle for Bob a little after lunch, and she showed Sheela and me how to tie it around the massive lizard.

“I built this one with two seats and a back storage area,” Trel explained

as she showed both of us the saddle. “I used straight wood pieces that are about four inches in diameter as the side supports. These run parallel to his back ridge and are the platforms for the seats and stirrups. They attach under his belly using this webbing, and they are tied up to his ridges using these pieces of wood as support.”

The saddle had looked complicated when she carried it in her arms, but as soon as she set it on Bob’s back, I realized that it was just like Hope’s, only with two extra support straps on the bottom, and thicker logs on the seat instead of stacks of dried leaves.

“If I had some leather, it would be more durable,” Trel said after she attached everything. “But this should work just fine.” Trel gestured to the platform behind the second seat and then showed where the cordage rope was kept coiled up. “You can tie a basket or pots down here. I’ve got a bunch of the rope threaded through the loops here. So you can carry up to eight jugs.”

“Damn,” I said. “This is great, Trel. We’ll be able to get three days of water in one run.”

“I know,” Trel said. “I’m amazing, and a genius. Don’t forget it.” She smiled as she bragged, and I laughed.

“Oh, and speaking of my genius, I also figured out how to add handles to our clay jugs. The latest batch of four is drying by the fire right now. Galmine and Kacerie are working on the next batch, but I used the last of our cordage. If either you or Sheela can go get more, I can hang out some of the sinew to dry. Or, I can do it, if you two just want to keep playing with your trees.”

“We’ll take a break from chopping,” I said. “Our axes are pretty dull, anyway. We need to make another set of those soon.”

“I’ll take them in so that Galmine and Kacerie can sharpen them after they finish with the clay,” Trel said as she gestured for us to hand all the tools to her.

“Let’s go get more ferns then,” I said to Sheela, and we both grabbed four baskets before we mounted on top of Bob and rode deeper into the redwood forest.

The job was actually a bit harder with Bob than with Hope. The male parasaur could hold more, but getting the baskets up on his high back required Sheela standing up on her tippy-toes while I reached down to snag it. We had the process figured out by the time we filled the fourth basket.

Sheela and I returned to the fort with four times the amount of ferns that we would have harvested with Hope, and it only took us ten minutes extra. The new dino was really helping us, and I felt some pride surge in my chest. I was feeling kind of like a badass when we walked back into camp, but then Kacerie stormed out of the hut and stomped toward me with rage showing in her light blue eyes.

“We need to talk,” she growled at me.

“About what?” I asked.

“Not here,” she said as she gestured to Sheela. “You said I could go out with you and gather ferns, but you went without me.”

“Yeah, sorry,” I said. “You were busy.”

“Can you take me to get water and more clay?” she asked as she crossed her arms over her chest.

“Uhhh...” I started as I stared at Sheela. I didn’t see Trel or Galmine around, and I guessed that both of my lovers were still in the hut. “I was planning on heading back to the lake anyways to get water and tame another dinosaur. I guess you can come.”

“Good,” she said as she grabbed my bicep. “Let’s go.”

“We need the water jugs and a leaf basket,” I said as I stepped toward the hut.

“I’ll get them!” Kacerie said quickly, and then she ran back toward the hut.

“Check it out,” I said to Sheela. I was suddenly suspicious of the pink-haired woman, even though I probably didn’t need to be.

Sheela nodded at me and then sprinted toward the door of the hut while I reached for one of the many spears we kept leaning against the walls. My friend reached the hut right after Kacerie did, and Sheela poked her head in for half a moment. Then she turned back to me, smiled, and raised her thumb up like I’d showed her to show that everything was okay.

“Here,” Kacerie said as she carried the basket and two jugs out of the hut. “The other four we’ve got drying aren’t ready yet.”

“That’s fine,” I said as I walked with her out of the gate. We attached everything to Bob’s back, and then we grabbed a second spear before we mounted him. A few moments later we were dashing through the clearing, and Kacerie was squeezing the air out of my stomach.

I gave her a brief tour of our little valley before I headed toward the lake. First, I showed her the fallen tree beside the river where we got our water. Then I ran up the river and showed her where we normally crossed to go to the lake area. Before I went that direction, though, I ran Bob over next to our old cave so I could climb the hill and give her a view. It was my second time up here today, but I was kind of enjoying the moments where I could oversee my little empire.

“This is our valley,” I explained when we got up to the hill. “There is jungle to the north over this hill. There is jungle and the lake to the east, that small mountain range is to our west, but the ocean is on the other side and the ocean kind of wraps around us on the south past those hills you can see there.”

“So, we are at the bottom left corner of this land mass?” Kacerie asked as she pulled her thick mane of pink hair over her shoulder. I’d never studied her hair closely, but the roots were a darker shade of pink that looked almost red, so I wondered if it was her natural color.

“Yeah bottom left is a good way to think of it,” I said. “We have the ocean to our west and south. You wanna tell me what’s bothering you now?”

“Let’s talk about it when we get to the lake,” she said as she turned to face me. “I want to see it.”

“Cool,” I said as I turned around.

“It’s actually warm out,” she commented. “I don’t know why you always think it is so cold.”

“Ahh,” I sighed. “Slang language from my world. I’m sorry. It means I either agree or think something is good.”

“I get it,” she replied, “but it doesn’t make sense as to why you would say it that way.”

I didn’t answer her. Instead, I just pushed Bob into his easy jog, and Kacerie got too busy holding on to me to bother talking anymore.

We forded the river, cut through the jungle, and then climbed the next hill that would bring us out of our valley and into the lake. I still saw the pillar of smoke in the distance, but Kacerie’s face was pressed into my back, and I descended toward the lake before she could see it. I didn’t really want to keep the information from her, but I didn’t know if I could trust her to keep her cool yet.

“We get the clay from over here,” I said as I steered Bob over toward the finger of the hand-lake. The trikes had left, but the small gang of parasaur were still there.

“Okay,” she said as I slowed down his sprint.

“After we get it and some water, we’ll go to the other side and try to tame one of those parasaur.” I held onto Bob’s reins with one hand and then pointed off into the distance with my other.

“Is it dangerous?” she asked.

“It should be okay, I’ve gotten two so far. I’d like to get one for everyone so we can all ride around if we need to.”

“That makes sense,” Kacerie said, “but I don’t know if I really want to control one of them.”

“You can just ride behind someone else then,” I said as we finished getting down the hill. The spot on the beach where we came out was devoid of dinos, and I made a little loop around the finger part of the lake where the clay was while I kept my eyes on the jungle.

“What’s wrong?” the pink-haired woman asked after I’d circled back

around.

“Just making sure there are no predators,” I said.

“Like those green ones? How could they attack this creature we ride on? He is at least ten times their size.”

“There are bigger monsters,” I said. “They are called carnotaurus. They have horns on their head and are about the same size as Bob. He can outrun them, but if they sneak up on us, they’ll chomp him with their massive jaws. They are like bigger versions of the green raptors, only they don’t have feathers.”

“Ugh,” Kacerie said. “That is terrible. I hate this place. I wish I were home.”

“I’d send you back if I could,” I said. “We all want to go back.” I knew Sheela didn’t really want to return home, but I didn’t bother explaining that to Kacerie.

“We should focus on doing that instead of all this other stuff,” she said.

“When you say ‘all this other stuff,’ do you mean surviving? Cause that shit is pretty damn important.”

“It just seems like you aren’t even thinking about it. I need to get back. My business will die without me, and all my boyfriends will just move on to others.”

“I think we are safe to get down.” I ignored her last comment and then commanded Bob to lower himself next to the spot where the clay was. “The clay is over there. Take the basket and fill it up about halfway.”

“Ugh, I don’t want to do that,” she said as her hands came around my stomach and then ran up my back to touch my shoulders. “Look, Victor, is there anything I can do to change the situation at our camp?”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“The other girls are just really mean to me. They don’t treat me nice.”

“Uhh, what are you talking about?” I twisted around in the saddle so I could face her. The pink-haired woman was absolutely beautiful, but so were Galmine and Trel. A few weeks ago I probably wouldn’t have been able to talk to Kacerie without stuttering non-stop, but now her looks didn’t impress me.

“They just don’t treat me nice. Why is it so hard to understand?”

“Alright, we need to get the clay. Get off.” I pointed down the side of Bob and she slid off after I grabbed the leaf basket and set foot on the beach.

“You don’t see it since you aren’t around all the time,” she said as I set the basket down near the clay and started scooping some in.

“What do they say?” I asked as I tried to keep my face impassive.

“Well, it’s mostly Trel, a bit Sheela and Galmine, but Trel is mean. She thinks she is in charge and wants me to do all the work she doesn’t want to do.”

“Like what?” I asked. “Can you give me specific examples?”

“We are making pots, and she tells me that I have to make them faster and better. Then she reminds me how amazing you are every two minutes.”

“Trel is a bit critical, but she means well.” I shrugged and scooped more clay.

“You just need to see it. You aren’t there. When I just left, she told me that I’d messed up one of the pots, and I didn’t.”

“What does Galmine say?” I asked, and I started to feel a bit like I was one of those guys on that Bachelor TV show where the house full of women

were talking shit about each other so they could get a rose.

“About what?” Kacerie asked.

“Galmine said something to you when you made a jug?” I specified.

“She didn’t say anything. I was talking about Trel.”

“But you said that Galmine was also mean to you.” I scooped another hunk of clay into the basket and turned my head around to check the beach. Bob didn’t look fidgety, but I still wanted to stay alert.

“Not as mean as Trel, but still mean.”

“Can you give me an example?” I was trying really hard not to roll my eyes.

“Just the stuff she says.”

“Galmine? Are you absolutely positive that Galmine says mean stuff to you?” I stared into Kacerie’s blue eyes.

“Yes, they are all mean to me.” She fluttered her eyelashes. “Look, Victor. I appreciate you saving me, I really do. You are handsome and capable. Strong and smart. I just can’t deal with the other women in the camp. They won’t leave me alone.”

“So what is the solution?” I was trying my best not to get mad at her, but I wondered if some of my anger came through, since she waved her hands and kneeled on the ground next to me.

“Nothing major! It will be easy! I just need my own hut, and maybe a pass from you for some of the work stuff. I’m just not suited to making pots or cutting animals or anything. I’m fine making cordage. I’ll just do that all day while I stay in my own hut.”

“Your own hut?” I did my best not to laugh. “You know we don’t have room for that.”

“You have Hope inside the walls, just kick her out and then build me a new hut in her spot.”

I took a deep breath and tried to think of a correct response. Part of me wanted to tell her that she could go fuck herself, but that was just going to strain our relationship more. In reality, I needed her, but not as much as she needed the three women I’d come to love and me.

“Kacerie, I have no problem building you a new hut, but we have a lot of shit to do before we get there. Once we have the new walls built, we’ll have plenty of room.”

“But that’s going to take us six weeks,” she moaned. “I need my own place now.”

“Sorry, we can’t always get what we want.” I shrugged and then put the last scoop of clay in the basket.

“That’s bullshit,” she snapped angrily. “The other women get what they want because they sleep with you.”

“Ahhh, no,” I said as I stood up with the filled basket. “No one gets what we want, or we’d all be home. Everyone is working their ass off to survive. You need to step up your contribution if you want special treatment.”

“Oh, I get it,” she said. “When you say contribution, you really mean that I need to start fucking you also.”

“No,” I growled as I walked past her. “That came out wrong. Hold on, let me put this on Bob.” I tied the basket on the parasaur’s saddle.

“You don’t need to explain, the men from your planet are the same as on mine. Here is the thing, Victor, I’m willing to do what I need to do. I just don’t want you to think that--”

“Stop,” I interrupted her as I turned around. “You’ve got me wrong. You are beautiful, but I don’t really care about having sex with you. Galmine and Trel keep me happy. I don’t really give a shit about how you think the other women are treating you, or how unfair you think everything is. You’d be dead now if it weren’t for me. Now, that doesn’t mean you owe me your life, but it does mean you need to stop whining and just work. You haven’t contributed anything useful to our group since you got here. If anything, you’ve just cost us more time because we’ve had to teach you shit instead of just doing it ourselves.”

“What?” she hissed. “I’ve done plenty in the camp that no one else has done.”

“Like?” I asked.

“Well, I put up with you and Galmine and Trel just having sex all the time. I’m working when you three are using the hut.”

“Fucking shit you are stupid,” I sighed and rubbed my hands over my face.

“Excuse me?” she gasped. “What did you just say?”

“You are stupid, and I’m sick of you. You keep talking shit about my

friends. I saved your ass and then brought you into our home. Now all you do is whine when we ask you to help us and then complain when we use our room to have sex.”

“I can’t believe you are calling me stupid. If I had my *Lance* ready, I’d-
_”

“What? You’d kill me?” I laughed and shook my head. “I risked my life to save you because you had that ability. Now you threaten me with it. That sucks.”

“You are treating me like a second rate citizen. I’m very important in my community. My salon is booked three months out and--”

“I don’t care,” I sighed as I climbed up on top of Bob. I suddenly felt exhausted, and for half a moment I missed my tiny apartment, my Playstation, my Xbox, my cheap ramen noodles, and my shitty job. The sensation only lasted a few moments though, and then I focused on the shit I needed to do next. We had to survive, and I needed everyone on my team pulling at the rope as hard as they could.

“Wait, where are you going?” Kacerie asked when I spun Bob around to point toward the distant herd of parasaur.

“I’m going to go tame one of those dinos,” I said. “Then I’m heading back to camp.”

“Okay, I need to get on.” She stepped toward Bob, but I turned my head down to look at her.

“No,” I said. “You aren’t coming.” My heart was slamming in my chest, and I felt my stomach twist when the beautiful woman’s face paled.

“What?” she gasped. “Why? I’ll die out here if you--”

“Because you just said you’d use your *Lance* on me.”

“No! I didn’t say that. Victor, stop joking around. You can’t leave me here.”

“I can,” I said with a shrug. “You aren’t helping us, and now I’m worried that you are going to try and kill us once your *Lance* powers up. Sorry, I have three people I care about, and I need to protect them and myself. Good luck to you, Kacerie.”

“I was joking! I’m not going to use it on you. Please! Don’t-- Victor! No!”

I had tapped my heels to Bob’s flanks and the large parasaur started

jogging forward on his hind legs. Kacerie's screams became more frantic when I was about fifty yards away, but I didn't turn back to look at her.

"Fuck," I sighed as I tried to force my clenched stomach to relax. Leaving Kacerie out here was pretty much the same as killing her, and I struggled with the decision. Her *Lance* ability was incredibly powerful, and the woman seemed capable of working hard, but she just didn't want to. I wasn't that skilled at understanding women, but the way Kacerie spoke hinted at her personality. She was trying to manipulate me against Trel, Galmine, and Sheela. I wasn't going to put up with it.

Surviving was going to be too difficult without everyone cooperating. I had to worry about building a fort, finding food and water, protecting everyone from dinosaurs, and then whatever other tribal threat might be out there.

I couldn't afford for Kacerie to try and poison us with her words and actions.

But damn it, we really did need a lot of help. The thought of just the four of us again felt like a step backward.

Her screams faded with the wind, and I pushed Bob a little faster so

that I'd put more distance between us. The group of parasaur was in almost the same spot I had tamed Bob, and I circled the shore of the lake so I could make my way toward them. It meant that I was almost on the other side of the small lake as the fingers, and I saw Kacerie's pink hair flutter in the breeze as she kneeled on the distant shore. The sight was a bit heartbreaking, but it would have been more heartbreaking if she'd killed Trel, or Sheela, or Galmine, or me with her *Lance*.

There were only six parasaur in this group. My *Eye-Q* identified one of them as male, but I really didn't need my eye computer to do that. The male had a bright shade of red on his underbelly that was more colorful than the females. He was also a good foot or two taller at the shoulders and much bulkier. This male was actually larger than my steed, so I approached the pack carefully.

"Alright, Bob, who should we adopt?" I whispered as my eyes roamed over the pack. Most of the females crept closer to the male as we approached, and I realized this might be a bit harder riding on Bob than on Hope. The other parasaur hadn't seemed to care that a small female was in their midst, but the larger male was causing them some concern.

I ordered Bob to move a little closer to the group, so that I was about thirty feet from the closest female, and the guardian male let out a low throaty toot that was most definitely a warning.

“Ahh shit,” I said as I stopped Bob from moving any closer. “I think we are gonna be in trouble if we go any closer. Maybe it would be worth fighting if you were bigger than that other guy, but I think you might lose in a brawl. What do you think?”

Bob let out a toot that sounded pretty concerned, and I puzzled through our different options. It might be better to come back on Hope, and I would have to make another trip for water, but I’d just want to bring Bob for that anyway since he could carry more jugs. I could also just make a play for one of the closer females. The male might get mad and charge, but I could then try to tame him. I had only planned on bringing back one more parasaur, but two would be fine. It was just more risky, especially since I didn’t really understand how my *Tame* ability worked. Was there a reset on it? Could I only use it so many times a day, or week, or month? Would it not work on a male that was angry with me because I took one of his females? I thought about another man trying to take Trel, Galmine, or Sheela away from me by

force, and the hypothetical scenario made my stomach clench.

Yeah, this fucker was going to get mad if I took away one of his women, but then I got an idea that struck me as all sorts of genius.

“Hey girl,” I said to one of the closest females. “Why don’t you come over here and say hi? I’m not gonna hurt you. The parasaur I was talking to had moved away from us a bit, but she got curious when I spoke and took a few steps toward us. Now she was about thirty feet away, and I made some soft cooing sounds in an effort to calm her.

“That’s okay girl, you are so beautiful. I love your black dots and brown streaks. Did you just take a bath today? Your scales look fabulous.” She stepped a bit closer with every sentence I carefully whispered, and I started to feel a bit more confidence in my plan.

“Do you like getting scratched?” I asked as I turned Bob to the side so I could reach her. “I’ll be happy to scratch your chin. Come on over here.” I wiggled my fingers and remembered Trel’s giggles.

The female stared at me for a few dozen seconds as if she was pondering my sincerity. She had light brown eyes with swirls of green in them. Her coloring was a little darker than Hope’s and she was about fifty

percent larger.

I wanted to say something to coax her forward, but I held my tongue and just kept contact with her eyes. Just as I was about to whisper something to her, she crept forward with her head down a bit, and she nuzzled her massive head under my outstretched hand.

“Awww. What a good girl,” I whispered as I petted her. My *Eye-Q* gave me an update that she was tamed, and I felt a sigh of relief escape my lips.

She let out a happy toot as I continued to pet her, and then I scratched more up above her eyes. This girl was definitely a lover, and she actually closed her eyes when I moved my other hand around so I could pet her neck.

“I’m going to climb on your back now,” I said after I’d touched her for almost a minute. “Then you are gonna show me your man, okay?” I stood up from Bob’s saddle and imagined the female moving a bit closer to me. The distant male let out a warning toot, but I quickly scurried onto the back of the female and then commanded her to step away from Bob. She did so, and then I lay over her spine while I ordered her to move back toward her male.

The bigger male let out another toot as we approached, but this one

sounded a bit less hostile than the first two he had issued. He'd actually turned away from the female I tamed, so I urged her to continue approaching. Soon we were right up against his left flank, and I reached out my hand to touch him.

“Hey, buddy. How's it going?” I whispered as I patted his side. He was standing knee deep in the water, and I saw a fish as big as a crocodile from my world swim between his massive tree trunk legs.

The male didn't answer, of course, but I just kept petting him. “Listen, buddy, I could really use your help. Can you come back to my camp? I'll bring your girlfriend with us, but we also have Bob and Hope that you can play with. What do you say?”

The male let out a low toot, but it was a tenor to Bob's baritone voice.

“Is that a yes?” I asked. “I'll make sure you get plenty of food and water. What do you say?”

He didn't move while I petted him, and I counted the seconds while my heart slammed in my chest. I felt a lot more confident with my taming ability after Hope, Bob, and the new female, but this guy could just shake his torso and fling me off his girl as if I was a gnat.

I'd been petting him nonstop as I spoke, but the tame message hadn't appeared in my *Eye-Q* after a few minutes. I realized that my attempt hadn't worked, so I let out a soft sigh and stopped petting his side.

"Well, I still wanted to offer, thanks for not attacking me--" The male surprised me by shifting his weight a bit so that he leaned into the female. He let out a long saxophone sounding note, and I reached my hand up to stroke his side again. My action made him huff with pleasure, and then the notice that I had tamed him flashed on my *Eye-Q*.

"Yessss!" I whispered as I patted him with a bit more gusto. "You aren't going to--"

TAME: LEVEL 3 has been reached.

The words scrolled across my vision with a flashing brilliance. I didn't feel any different from the level up, but I had to clench my jaw to keep from shouting out my joy. Would I be able to tame trikes with level 3? I couldn't wait to find out, and I wished I'd thought about taming the two parasaur when I had been at the lake this morning.

"Alright," I said as I patted the male a few more times. "I need names for you two. I've got Bob and Hope. Maybe I need someone else in the

entertainment business.” I tried to think of any married couples that sang or acted together and then let loose with a belt of laughter when I thought of one.

“You’re Sonny,” I said as I patted the male, “and you are Cher. This is awesome.” The two parasauras let out toots that actually seemed to harmonize, and I chuckled some more.

“Alright, Cher, take me back over to Bob. His saddle makes him a bit easier to ride, so I’ll sit on him while you two follow me home.”

Cher followed my orders, and I jumped back on the saddle Trel had made. The three parasauras sniffed each other for a few seconds to get to know each other, and then I twisted Bob back around so we could all walk out of the lake. Sonny and Cher followed me and felt unbridled excitement course through my body.

I was eventually going to have a dinosaur army.

My imagination filled with thoughts of me controlling dinosaurs like some sort of real-time strategy game. I’d be able to ride them into battle or command them from the back of a massive brontosaurus. Hell, maybe I’d get some sort of massive flying bird that I could sit upon while it hovered in the

air above my minions. I'd be able to organize them into squads based on their speed, armor, and attacking style. No one would be able to conquer us because I'd control this entire planet.

My world domination thoughts came to a screeching halt when my eyes saw something moving in the jungle back near Kacerie.

The pink-haired woman was still kneeling on the shore of the lake with her face in her hands. The sight made my heart a bit heavy, and I'd planned on taking my three parasaurs out of the valley through another route, so I didn't have to give her the cold shoulder again, but the movement in the jungle beside her made me reconsider my choice.

It looked somewhat like a raptor, but had a bit longer neck. It was hiding in the jungle and staring at Kacerie.

Part of me knew I was sentencing Kacerie to death. I didn't want to kill the woman, but I couldn't risk her not pulling her weight in the camp, especially after she hinted at using her *Lance* on me. However, that didn't mean I wanted her to get eaten by dinosaurs right now. I still wanted to defend women.

"Let's go!" I growled to the three parasaurs as I kicked Bob's flank.

My mount surged forward across the sand like a rocket ship, and I had to lean forward over his spine to keep the sudden gust of wind from pushing me off the saddle.

Damn, Bob was really fucking fast.

But the creature in the jungle some sixty yards from Kacerie was way closer than me, and I saw it poke its head out of the foliage. It looked kind of like a raptor, only its skull had two long humps on top and its build was leaner. It had white and cream colored feathers instead of green, but as Bob raced forward, I saw that it was actually way bigger than the deinonychus raptors we'd been fighting for the last few days. This stalking dino's head was probably even with my shoulder, and I guessed was about the size of a small pony, instead of a large dog.

I blinked my Eye-Q and read the name that appeared: *Dilophosaurus wetherilli*, male.

"Shit! Faster, Bob!" I shouted as I tried to reach back for the spear on my saddle. I wasn't much of a dinosaur expert, but like any boy, I'd seen all the Jurassic Park movies, and I remembered that the Dilophosaurus was the fucker that spit the acid.

And it looked like he was closing in on Kacerie so he could spit on her.

I was still a good three hundred yards away on the beach, but the stalking dino crept onto the sand, and it was only forty yards from Kacerie. I had no doubt that it could rush across the gap and kill her if it wanted to, but the feathered monster seemed more interested in sneaking. Then the dilo seemed to notice I was rushing toward it, and it turned to me with its head tilted.

“Kacerie!” I screamed as I got my spear out of the saddle sheath. The woman didn’t seem to hear me, or at least she didn’t look up, so I screamed again.

The dilophosaurus turned its head to Kacerie, and then it looked back to me as if it was a bewildered dog. It was the second best outcome I could have hoped for, the first being the thing just running away, and I readied my spear.

“Kacerie!” I shouted again, and the woman finally looked up toward me.

Then she glanced over at the pony-sized dinosaur sneaking up on her and let out a horrific scream.

The terrified screech seemed to snap the dilophosaurus out of its confused stupor, and it dashed toward the woman with an angry hiss. It wiggled across the ground with a movement that almost looked snake-like, but I had already planned on rushing Kacerie first, so I managed to slam Bob right into the flank of the dilo like a snow plow.

The white and cream feathered dino tumbled over with a surprised yelp, but it wiggled out of the way of Bob's crushing feet and tried to dash around toward Kacerie.

I leaned down off the side of the saddle and shoved my spear down at him when he tried to slither around Bob. The tip of my spear punched into his upper shoulder, but the creature sunk away like a mongoose and only a small spray of blood fell upon the sand.

"Kacerie, get--" I started to tell her to get away from the dilo I was tangling with, but as I swung my head over to look at her, I saw a shape come to the surface of the lake right behind her.

It was one of the super crocs that had tried to kill me when I first got to this planet.

"Run toward me!" I screamed as the second reptile emerged from the

water and sprinted toward her. Kacerie turned to see it as soon as she heard the splash, and she leapt back toward me with surprise. She was totally off balance from her head looking one direction while she ran the other, and her feet tripped over themselves as she tried to run.

Sonny read my mind and came to her rescue.

The croc was about the size of a small 80s Japanese truck, but Sonny was a big rig. The parasaur dashed forward on all fours and shoulder checked the croc some twenty feet from where Kacerie stumbled. Sonny's attack actually caused the other dino to fly through the air and flip on his side, but I had to turn my attention away from the battle so that I could focus my spear thrusts on the dilo who was still trying to get around Bob's legs.

This fucking asshole was persistent, cunning, and moved quicker than I would have thought possible given his size. He ducked away from every spear thrust I made, and my best attempts at pinning him down did little more than strike the sand. The issue I had really was that I was too high on Bob, so the dilo could just retreat away from the parasaur's flank to stay out of the reach of my spear.

I made a few quick thrusts to try and predict his movements and got

lucky with my third guess. The sharpened point of my spear tore across his back, but it didn't really sink into his flesh and take out any vital organs. It still pissed him off, and he backed away a little farther than usual. This gave me an opportunity to turn around and see how Sonny was doing. The big parasaur had kicked the croc away from Kacerie, but the monster's jaws were trying to snap around the parasaur's legs. I would have thought that the size difference would have made that difficult, but the croc's maw opened crazy wide, and Sonny almost didn't get his leg out of the way.

I commanded Cher to go after the croc so I could focus on the dilo. The cream feathered snake-dino opened its jaws to caw at me, and I saw that its teeth actually looked less like a raptor's and more like the crocodile's behind me.

"Victor!" Kacerie screamed, but I couldn't really turn my attention away from the fight with the dilo. He kept opening his mouth at me, and I half expected for a stream of poison to shoot out. Nothing did, though, and I wondered if the movie had been wrong about the way the dinosaurs spit acid.

"Victor!" Kacerie screamed again.

"I'm fucking busy!" I shouted as I managed to get another hit on the

dilo. The thing moved really gracefully for its bulk, and it seemed to be getting a better idea of how my spear could move. I kept having to command Bob to back up, spin around, and then swing his tail in an effort to keep the thing away from Kacerie, but the beast was getting smarter.

“There is another monster in the lake!” she screamed, and I turned around just as Sonny let out a trombone blast of pain. A second croc had jumped out of the water and clamped its massive jaws around his tail, and the parasaur was trying to spin and throw him free. Cher was tangling with the other croc and winning, but I could almost feel Sonny’s pain come through in his loud toot sounds.

“Damn it!” I growled as I turned around so I could focus on the dilo. I needed to get rid of this fucker so that I could deal with the crocs in the water, or I needed to get rid of the crocs in the water so I could focus on the dilo trying to get to Kacerie. My brain jumped through a few solutions while I danced with the dilo, but the fucker almost managed to get around Bob, so I knew I had to come up with a plan quickly so that I could win out on this stalemate.

I made another quick glance back to Sonny and Cher. The male

parasaur had gotten his tail free of the croc, and he was trying to push the thing back into the water. The sight gave me an idea, and I changed my orders a bit so that my newest parasaur instead focused their attempts on pushing the crocs out of the water, onto the beach, and grouped kind of close to where the dilo was so that we could present a united battlefront.

Within a few seconds, Sonny and Cher had twisted around the crocs and began pushing them toward the shore. I could only catch glances of their battles out of the corner of my eye while I defended against the dilo, but the two large parasaur seemed to be pretty used to fighting these things. The crocs were soon rolling around on the sand of the beach in an attempt to escape the parasaur's stomps, kicks, and shoulder hits.

"Good job guys!" I shouted with encouragement when it was obvious that the two crocs were trying to crawl away. Unfortunately, as soon as I turned my head away, the dilo sensed the opportunity and did something I hadn't expected.

He clamped his teeth around my spear and yanked the weapon free of my grasp.

I tried to keep a hold of it, but the dilophosaurus must have weighed

around eight hundred pounds, and he'd really put his back into the movement. I instantly moved to grab the second spear, but the fucker was hellbent on eating Kacerie, and he dashed in between Bob's legs before the parasaur could step on him.

I threw myself off Bob's back and fell toward the dilo with my spear pointed down, as I floated in the air for a moment, I wondered why I was risking my life again to save Kacerie, especially now that I had decided to kick her out of the camp.

Then my spear punched through the dilo's spine below his neck, and all I could worry about was the thing trying to turn around and chomp my face off.

"Shit!" I growled as I pushed, pulled, and swung the spear around. I knew I'd hit the creature with a critical wound, but it was still refusing to believe that it was dead, and the thing kept trying to spin on me so that it could rip a tooth or claw through my flesh.

I ordered Bob to move in, and the parasaur brought his massive foot down on the tail of the speared dilo. This stopped the fucker's attempts to lunge at me, but I left the spear in his back so that Bob could keep walking up

the tail. Each step the parasaur took shattered the dilo's bones and spine, and the thing finally let out a death rattle after Bob's feet almost reached my spear.

I turned to Sonny and Cher. Both of the parasaur had pushed the crocs all the way into the jungle, so I commanded them to retreat back to me. They did so quickly, and the crocs wiggled across the sand so they could get back into the water.

Then the dinosaur fight was over, and I turned to face Kacerie. Her face was still covered with tears, but the terror was easy to see in her eyes.

"You saved me?" she asked.

"Yeah," I said with a sigh. "Look. I didn't want you to get--"

"Please Victor!" she begged as she threw herself at my feet. "Please don't leave me out here. I'll do whatever you want me to do. I'll have sex with you, or cook for you, or clean, or do whatever. I'll be your slave. Just don't leave me out here!" It was a bit hard to understand her words through her sobs, but I got the gist of it after she repeated it a second time.

"It's not about you fucking me, or being my slave," I said as looked down at her bright pink hair. "I just don't trust you. You are going to get your

Lance back and then use it on us.”

“No!” Kacerie screeched as she looked up at me. “I won’t. I get it now. You left me alone for five minutes and three dinosaurs tried to kill and eat me. There is no way I’d survive without you. Please, Victor. I want to live. I’ll work for you. I’ll do everything you, or Trel, or Galmine, or Sheela asks. You can have sex--”

“Stop talking about sex,” I interrupted her. “I get it. You don’t need to offer yourself to me. That’s not how I am.”

“I just want to live,” she sobbed. “I’m sorry I complained. You’ll never hear it from me again. I’ll do two guard shifts. I’ll cook every meal. I’ll figure out how to fit in and add to your group. Just please don’t leave me out here. Take me back. I need you.”

“Alright,” I said after I thought about it a moment. “Let’s get back on Bob.”

“Really?” she gasped as if she didn’t believe that I’d actually reconsidered.

“Yeah,” I replied as I helped her stand. “It seems like you realize what’s going to happen now if we don’t work together.”

“I do, yes! Oh, Victor!” she threw her arms around her shoulders and cried into my neck. “Thank you! Thank you!”

“That’s fine. It’s okay.” I patted her back awkwardly and then just wrapped my arms around her narrow waist in a hug. She sighed when I held her, and we stood together in silence for half a minute.

“Sorry,” she whispered when we parted. “You were right to leave me. Thank you for--”

“We aren’t going to talk about this anymore,” I interrupted her. “We are going to get back to camp, and you are going to cooperate with a smile on your face. When the others ask you what happened, you just tell them that everything is great between us. Got it?”

“Yes,” she nodded.

“Good,” I said. “Don’t make me regret this.”

“You won’t,” she said as she held her hands up in a praying position. “I will work as hard as the three of them to make you happy. Thank you again.”

“Get up on Bob,” I said as the parasaur knelt behind me. “I need to go look at Sonny’s tail.”

“Yes, Victor,” she nodded, wiped her nose with the back of her hand, and then climbed up into the saddle.

I walked over to Sonny and Cher and then checked their legs, arms, bellies, and tails for damage. Cher had a few scratches on her legs that were bleeding a bit, but it didn’t look like a major injury. The bite mark on Sonny’s tail was deep, but even though it leaked some blood on the sand, it didn’t look like it had cut into an artery or vein.

“We are going to go a bit slower on the way back,” I said to Kacerie when I climbed up onto the saddle. “I don’t want their cuts to open up anymore.”

“Whatever you want to do, I’m fine,” she said as she wrapped her arms around my stomach. “Just don’t leave me again.”

“Yeah, I won’t if you do what you said you would do.” I ordered Sonny and Cher to run a bit ahead of Bob so that I could watch their injuries, and then the three parasaurs jogged up the hill and out of the lake valley.

“I’m going to make another loop,” I said as soon as we descended back down into our valley and reached the river we normally forded.

“Okay,” Kacerie agreed, and we turned left at the river and followed it

down the edge of our territory until we reached the spot where we usually got water. I crossed the river here and then ran the parasaur around the massive fallen redwood. I intended to keep going around the river and maybe approach the orange bird cave from the other side, but the sight of the massive fallen tree had grabbed my attention, and I felt the beginnings of an idea spin around in my head.

I didn't know what the idea was, but something about the fallen tree was making my brain overheat, so I stopped our little caravan as soon as we reached the end where the roots were exposed. Each strand of the fallen tree's roots stretched through the air as if they were trying to grasp onto the small amount of sunlight cutting through the canopy. I knew the tree was long dead, but the shape of the roots made it look as if it was some sort of terrible Kraken that was rising up from the sea of brown dirt.

"Shiiiiit," I gasped as I stared at the dirt.

"What's wrong?" Kacerie asked fearfully.

"Oh damn." I laughed as the idea fully formed in my brain. "I just figured out how to get the trees down way faster. If this works how I think it will, then we'll finish the new fort wall in two days instead of six weeks."

Chapter 10

“Let’s get back!” I shouted a second before I ordered the parasaur trio to run through the forest.

“What did you figure out?” Kacerie asked, but I told Bob to increase his speed, and the wind filled my ears.

We made it to the clearing half a minute later, and I saw that the crowd of scavengers had almost tripled in size. There were probably a hundred smaller dinos feasting on the corpses, and I saw a few dozen vulture looking birds circling overhead. The sight of the birds worried me a bit since it was a clear indication to anyone watching the sky that there was something dead below them. It could alert an enemy tribe we were here, but then again, dinosaurs were dying all the time, and anyone watching the skyline might not think much of it.

The gate of the fort was closed, and I called out to Sheela, Galmine, and Trel when I pulled up with the three parasaur. They opened the gate a moment after, and I gave them a wide smile as I gestured to Sonny and Cher.

“I’ve got more friends,” I said. “The big male is named Sonny, and the

female is named Cher.”

“Wow, Victor,” Galmine cooed. “You are amazing! They are so big. I love their names!”

“That big one’s tail is bleeding,” Trel said as she pointed to Sonny.

“We got into a fight with three other dinos,” I said as I commanded Bob to lay on his stomach. “These guys took care of the attackers, but check it out. I’ve got more clay, and I think I’ve got an idea that will help us knock down the trees quicker.”

“Oh?” the spider-woman said with a bit of skepticism.

“Yeah,” I said as I commanded Hope to come out of the door. “Sheela and Galmine, get on Hope so you can ride over to the forest real quick. Trel and Kacerie will ride on Bob with me.” There weren’t enough seats for three of us on the saddle, but Trel just kneeled in front of me, and we rode the four hundred yards to the forest while Cher and Sonny followed.

“I really think this is going to work,” I said once we had all gotten off the parasaurs again.

“What is your plan?” Sheela asked.

“Watch,” I said as I glanced at the closest tree that was the right size and shape for our new fort wall.

I imagined the four parasaurs digging up the roots at the foot of the tree, and the four of them trotted over to it quickly. There was a bit of confusion as to where each of them should stand, but I made a few mental clarification commands to them, and they were soon circling the tree like the spokes on a compass rose.

They started digging, and the four women and I watched in silence.

Sonny and Bob moved the quickest and took the largest chunks of dirt out. It was just like they were digging a tunnel, but the way they frantically dug made me think more of four giant dogs trying to bury a bone quickly.

“I get it,” Trel whispered after a few minutes had passed, and the parasaurs hadn’t let up with their task.

“I believe I do as well,” Sheela said.

“Well, I don’t,” Kacerie said. “What are they doing? How is this going to cut down the tree?”

“They are almost done,” I said. “Give it a few more minutes, and you’ll

see.”

“Okay,” she said as she wiped her nose with the back of her hand.

“Were you crying?” Trel asked her.

“No, I’m fine,” Kacerie answered as she glanced at me. “Everything is good. I’m happy to be here. Thanks for asking.”

“Uhhh. Yeah. Fine.” Trel turned to give me a confused look, and I just shrugged and then nodded at the tree.

“I think that’s good,” I said. “Hope is slower than the other three, but I’ll tell them to do it in that direction.”

I ordered Hope, Sonny, and Cher to come back to us, and then I instructed Bob to stand up and push his bulk against the tree. The parasaur must have weight four tons, and the tree began to tip almost as soon as he pushed his shoulder into it. The parasaur had unearthed all the roots, and the tree didn’t stand a chance.

“Timber!” I shouted as it fell over. The women all let out gasps of delight, and I felt my chest swell with pride.

“Sheela, how long would it have taken for us to cut that down?” I

asked her as a smug smile crept across my face.

“Two or three hours,” she said. Her golden eyes were opened wide and her voice sounded excited.

“Yep! Hot damn! This is great!”

“Wow! Victor! This is amazing.” Galmine threw her arms around me, and our lips met for a brief kiss. “You are such a good provider and protector. We will be able to build the fort so quickly.”

“We are going to need a lot more cord a lot quicker,” I said as I turned to Kacerie.

“I will make it,” she said. “I like making cordage. Thanks for giving me the job.”

“I will make some also.” Trel looked at Kacerie with a bit of confusion and then turned to me. “I’ll have you know that I am impressed with you, Victor. I did not think of this idea, and it will really push up our timetables.”

“It should take us only a day or two to topple all the trees we need,” I said. “But then we need to worry about cutting them the right height and getting rid of the roots. I was hoping you had an idea for that.”

“Hmm,” Trel said as she tapped on her lips with her long finger. “We used the fire to do it last time, but--”

“Kacerie, can you go gather some of those ferns over there?” I asked the pink-haired woman as I pointed to the cluster by a tree that was some sixty feet away.

“Uhh, yeah,” she said. Then she jogged over on her bare feet and began working on the branches.

“I’ll tell her about the other tribes,” I whispered to the other three women after I beckoned them to stand closer to me. “But now is not the time. We had a good talk at the lake, and she’s going to cooperate more with us, but I still need you all to keep an eye on her. Got it?” My friends nodded, and then I turned back to Trel.

“The issue with the fire is that it will create smoke that others will see,” the spider-woman continued.

“Yeah,” I said. “We don’t want that.”

“But if you and Sheela have to cut through each of these trees, you’ll become the bottleneck,” Trel continued. “So the fire would be the most efficient way, especially if you really want to get this done quickly. We will

all have to focus on building cordage for the walls since the fire could do an entire batch during the day.”

“Hmmm,” I said. “Sheela, if we had the hundred and fifty-ish logs down, how long do you think it would take for us to cut through them all?”

“Victor, the issue is that you are not really saving time,” she explained. “We will still need to cut off the roots. So, it will be as if the tree is still vertical on the ground.”

“Right,” I sighed. “I get it. So, using the fire to cut through is really the only way. I just don’t want any smoke in the sky.”

I looked up at the circling vulture-like birds. Like California Condors, these beasts had dark brown or black feathers. Unlike the condors, the beasts were each about the size of a Mini-Cooper.

“Hmmm,” I said as I stared up at the birds. “What if we did it at night? They might see the glow from the fire, but we are right in the middle of the forest. They wouldn’t see the smoke if the sky was dark.”

“That is a great idea,” Trel said as she nodded at me. “I should have thought of it.” The spider woman turned to the basket on the back of Bob. “We’ll need to use the clay to ensure the fire stays on track, but if I put the

edges high enough, it will eliminate some of the glow. Yes. This will work.

It's a good idea."

"Hooray for Victor!" Galmine said as she hugged me again.

"I think we have six more hours till sunset," I said as I checked the sun.

"We've got a lot of work to do. I'll control the parasaur and have them topple over as many trees as we can while you all work on getting ferns for cordage. As soon as it gets close to twilight, Sheela and I will indent the first parts of the trunks with our axes so we can make a fire in them. Then Trel will lay out the clay before we set the fire. Tonight we'll all work on more cordage."

"After you inseminate me again," Trel reminded me with a chuckle.

"Yeah," I said as I smiled at her. "That was inferred."

"Victor," Galmine said. "I am happy to gather ferns, and I do enjoy being outside, but--"

"That's too dangerous," I interrupted her, "you need to go back inside the fort. Sheela, get the ferns that Kacerie has gathered so far and take Galmine back so she can work on cooking, pots, and cordage. Bring back all of our baskets when you return, and then you, Trel, and Kacerie can devise a

process for gathering a bunch of ferns.”

“Yes, Victor,” Sheela replied, and I ordered Hope to move closer to the two women so that they could mount.

The rest of the afternoon passed in a blur of activity. The parasaur digging team and I got a bit better at figuring out how to dig out the roots and topple the trees easier, but there was a bit of a downtime when the group walked the distance between a toppled tree and the next target. I didn’t want to push them too hard, so I gave them breaks when I saw their chests heaving with the work. The process was still a million times easier than Sheela and I chopping through everything, and after a few hours, I was actually able to gather ferns with the three women while the parasaur happily pushed over the next five trees.

When I guessed dusk was about an hour away, I stopped the team and did a quick count of the logs. They had downed thirty-four in the time it would have taken Sheela and me to cut down three with sharp axes. This was a massive improvement in our process, and I guessed that we would be done with all the trees we needed the day after tomorrow.

Trel, Sheela, and Kacerie gathered ferns as quickly as they could. Each

of them carried a basket, and Sheela would jump on Hope to shuttle the full ones back and forth between our fort. I lost track of how many trips she made, but I guessed that it had to be over forty.

When the last tree of the day was down, Trel went along each trunk and eyeballed where we needed to start chopping indents for the fire. Sheela and I went to work as soon as Trel laid out a branch to mark each bottom and top spot while Kacerie came behind us and laid out clay dams on each side of the cuts. The clay would keep the fire from burning the wrong way on the logs in addition to reducing some of the light from the flames.

By the time Sheela and I made it halfway through the logs, Trel had finished marking all of them and returned to the first one we chopped indents into. Galmine, Sheela, Trel, and I were pros at starting fires with just a simple wood drill and some tinder, and she quickly got small fires going inside of the clay dams.

By the time Sheela and I finished cutting the notches in the last log, Trel was halfway done with setting the fires, so we swung back and helped her while Kacerie continued with the clay placement. We didn't quite have enough clay for all of the logs, but it would be easy enough to get more

tomorrow.

To say I was excited with our progress would have been an understatement. My mind was reeling with the possibilities of what the future would bring us. We still needed to cut off all the branches, and we would probably need at least three more baskets of clay tomorrow, but what if I tamed four more parasaurs? We might be able to have all the logs felled in two days. Then I'd probably need eight baskets of clay total, but we'd need way more cordage to tie up all the posts. The cordage was definitely the bottleneck now, but it was going to take a lot of time to gather the ferns or dry out the sinew.

"Should we just let it burn all night?" I asked Trel as we set the fire in the last log. "I'm worried the grass could catch on fire. Then we would have a huge problem."

"It will work just like the smaller logs," she said with a shrug. "There is a chance that it could spread, but the clay keeps it in place, and it should burn straight down. We didn't have to pay much attention to it when we did it a few days ago."

"Yeah," I said as I recalled how Trel had first shown us how to do this.

“But let’s make a trip out before we go to bed and in the middle of the night,” she said. “We can bring water just in case it looks like something is getting out of control. This stuff is pretty green, so I don’t believe the fire will spread.”

“Ahh, that reminds me. I need to get more water. Sheela, you up for a trip to the stream?”

“Yes, Victor,” she said. “The new jugs should be cooked by now, so we can take those.”

“Great,” I commanded Bob to crouch down so that Trel and I could mount him, and Sheela jumped on Hope with Kacerie. A few moments later we were back at the edge of our camp wall, and Trel was helping me tie the new clay jugs to the saddle. Six of them fit just fine, and I gestured for Sheela to get on Hope while I rode on Bob.

“I’m going to check on Galmine’s cordage progress,” Trel said. “Don’t forget about my--”

“I know,” I interrupted her. “I’m looking forward to it.”

Trel gave me a wide smile that showed off her fangs, and then she ducked under the door.

“I can ride behind you on Bob if you wish,” Sheela said. She hadn’t jumped on Hope yet, so she had to crank her head back to stare up at me.

“We do not need to bring her since she has no jugs on her saddle.”

“Do we have more?” I asked. “I thought that we had two more for water and then Galmine was cooking another six.”

“I can get them,” she said as she took a step away from me.

“Sheela, wait,” I said, and she stopped in mid-stride. “I’m going to take all the parasaur to the stream either way so they can all have a nice long drink. So the question is: do you want to ride on Bob with me?”

“Certainly,” she said quickly. “He is higher up, and his stride is gentler.”

“Ahh, okay,” I said as I gestured for her to climb up behind me. Her arms found their usual spot around my stomach, and her long blonde hair fell across my shoulders when she pressed her breasts against my back.

We had not talked this morning about our relationship, but I could feel the tension starting to grow between us, and I knew I was eventually going to have to tell her how I felt about her. I guessed she might have an attraction toward me, but I also knew that Sheela took her loveless marriage seriously.

She was an honorable woman, and I was just a guy who she happened to have gotten stuck with.

I tapped Bob's flanks and instructed Hope, Sonny, and Cher to follow us. Sheela squeezed my stomach more when we started moving, and I wondered if I was looking too hard at our relationship. I felt as if she had an attraction to me, but did she really? We hung out all the time together, but the long looks Sheela gave me were probably just caused by a friendly comradery. She had admitted she didn't really like riding on these dinos, so Sheela probably preferred to ride behind me so that she wouldn't have to deal with steering Hope.

The more I thought about it, the more I started to think she didn't really feel anything for me. This belief began to erode my resolve to talk with her, and I felt my heart hammer in my chest. I was going to tell her that I was attracted to her, and then she'd shoot me down. Did I really even need to bother? I loved Trel and Galmine. I loved Sheela as well, but if I told her I felt that way, and she didn't feel the same emotions, it would really mess up our working relationship. There were no sexual harassment lawsuits out in Dinosaurland, but the last thing I wanted was to creep out my best friend.

We made it to the ancient fallen tree while I pondered my options, and a brief moment later we were at the side of the small river. From our perch on Bob's back, it was easy enough to see the terrain and scout for hostile dinos. Sheela and I both glanced around for half a minute, but neither one of us saw anything, and the parasaurs didn't seem nervous.

"Alright, let's do this," I said as I instructed Bob and the gang to go into the water and drink.

Sheela and I each grabbed a newly minted water jug and climbed down from Bob. Neither of us spoke while we filled them, but after we had each taken long drinks we both looked at each other. I opened my mouth to start the conversation, but she spoke first.

"What passed between you and Kacerie?" she asked.

"I explained already," I said with a shrug. "I told her that she needed to get her shit together and work with us."

"Her shit together?" Sheela asked with a shocked expression on her normally stoic face.

"Uhh, sorry. Slang. It means I told her to stop complaining and cooperate."

“She seemed to be crying,” Sheela commented.

“She’ll get over it,” I said as I took another sip from the jug. The new containers were designed a bit better. They had wide bottoms, with narrow tops that flare out at the mouth. Small loop handles made them appear a bit like beer growlers crossed between those old Greek vases.

“You mean, she will overcome her challenges?” Sheela asked with a slight smile.

“Yep, you are getting my slang better.”

“I try to learn,” she said as she bent down to fill up her water jug again.

It was at the point of the day where twilight gives way to night, and I knew we only had another ten minutes before we needed to get back. Part of me wanted to use the time as an excuse not to talk to her, but I realized this would probably lead to another day of me putting off the conversation, so I took a deep breath and tried to calm my heart. My blood pumping muscle felt like it was using my ribs as a punching bag.

“Sheela,” I said, and the woman’s eyes seemed to glow in the near darkness.

“Yes?” Her voice was a whisper, and I wondered if she knew what I was about to say.

“I have feelings for you,” the words came out of my mouth quickly, and I almost wished I hadn’t said them as soon as I did.

“I know,” she replied, and I felt my breath catch in my throat.

“Uhh. You know?” I asked.

“Yes, Victor. We spoke of this many weeks ago at the lake. I see the way you look at me, and Galmine, and Trel.”

“Okay,” I said, and I immediately felt like an idiot. Why did I just say “okay?” What was wrong with me?

“We should fill up the rest of the jugs,” she said, but she didn’t take a step toward Bob. She was still staring at me, and my heart started to punch in double time. I suddenly had a hypothesis about Sheela, but I realized that if I was wrong, there would be no way I could repair our relationship.

“Are you waiting for my order?” I whispered.

“N-n-no,” she stuttered with a surprised facial expression that I couldn’t remember seeing.

“Go fill up the other jugs,” I said, and she moved past me. I didn’t know why I was that surprised by her compliance as our entire relationship up until this point had pretty much been me telling her what to do. The answers to my problems seemed so obvious, but fear of rejection was still tying my stomach up in knots.

Sheela went about the work of filling up the other jugs with her usual intense focus. I walked through the shin-deep water so that I could attach the jug to the saddle, and then I took each one she filled out of her hands so I could attach them. After a few minutes, they were all filled, but our parasaur were still drinking.

“Let’s climb back up,” I said as I jumped back into the saddle. Sheela was in her seat instantly, but I turned around to face her before she could wrap her arms around my stomach.

“Tell me how you feel about me,” I said.

“What do you mean?” she asked, and I saw her bite her lip slightly.

“You know I find you incredibly attractive. You are smart, brave, honorable, and generous. You never quit, and I cherish every second we spend together. I have a feeling you already knew this, but I wanted to say it

out loud so that you knew it for sure.”

“Victor,” she whispered sadly. “I am married.”

“I didn’t ask about it,” I said. “I feel like you are using that as a shield to keep me away, but you also follow my orders, so now I am ordering you to tell me what you feel for me.”

“Oh?” she asked with a raised eyebrow. “You believe you can order me to tell you what is inside my heart?”

I felt my stomach somersault a few dozen times, and I tried to think of a way I could backpedal. I’d messed up, and Sheela had called my bluff. Of course, I couldn’t just demand that she tell me how she feels about me, could I?

“I just did,” I said with way more confidence than I actually felt. I almost wanted to tell her that the answer didn’t matter, or that she didn’t really have to do it, or that I’d be happy with her decision.

But the reality was that none of those were true. I wanted Sheela. I’d wanted her the second I saw her attack the giant croc that tried to eat me. Her slight Australian accent drove me crazy, her stoic mindset made me respect her, and her unbreakable will made me a stronger person. When we first met,

she seemed the Yin to my Yang, but now I realized we weren't opposites, we really just completed each other.

"I feel for you the same way you feel for me," she whispered as she cast her eyes downward. "My admission does not help our relationship, though. My society takes marriage very seriously, and I cannot abandon my-
_"

"I'll fight him," I said. "You said you can remarry if your next husband battles your former?"

"Victor," she said my name with a sigh. "He cannot battle you since we are on different worlds. Even if you could, he would kill you in a few seconds. Your battle prowess has amazed me, but he is nearly three feet taller than you and outweighs you by perhaps two hundred pounds."

"I don't care," I said. "I'd fight him to have you. I don't want you to feel this sadness anymore. I want to love you, and I want you to be able to return my love."

"Victor..." her voice trailed off as she finally looked up at me. Our eyes met, and we held each other's gaze for what felt like forever.

I wanted to keep talking, I wanted to try to convince her that she

needed to be with me, but I'd already made my sales pitch, and I didn't know what else I could say to convince her that I wanted to be with her.

"Your words have given me pause," she whispered as she looked away from me again. "I need time to sort through the conflict inside of my chest."

"Can you help me understand the conflict?" I asked. "I can understand you feel honor-bound to your marriage, but you admitted you would not want to return home. From what you said, your husband didn't love you, and you--"

"I misspoke the other day," she said. "I was upset because of--"

"You can come back with me," I interrupted her. "If we somehow find a way back, you can return to my world and be my wife."

"You are speaking nonsense," she said, but her lips turned upward into a ghost of a smile.

"It isn't nonsense," I said. "I don't want to be without you. Not even for a day."

"I would not fit in your world," she said as she gestured to the thin coat of soft fur on her body. "Just as you would not fit in on my world."

“So?” I asked. “You look close enough. You could wear clothes that cover your skin, then you would pass. Sure you might get a few strange looks, but I don’t care. I--”

“And what of Trel and Galmine?” she asked. “Would you bring them with you back to your world?”

“I love them also,” I said with a shrug. “Galmine might enjoy my world, but it is socially harsher than hers. Trel wants children, and I can’t give them to her.”

“You seem to be trying, though,” Sheela said.

“I doubt it will happen,” I said. “Different species and all that.”

“I see,” she said as she frowned. “Then you and I will not have children.”

“Do you want children?” I asked, and I realized the conversation had suddenly accelerated in a direction I hadn’t intended.

“I want love,” she whispered. “It is foolish for me to say, since most women of my world do not receive it from their husbands, but that is what my heart wants. The heart is greedy though. As soon as I have love, I will

want children.”

“I can give you love,” I said. “I want to give you love. Maybe I’ve already given it to you? You just said you feel the same things for me that I feel for you.”

“And I am angry with myself,” she sighed. “Victor, you cannot defeat my husband. That is the issue. Even if he cannot be here for you to challenge, it goes against my kind’s ways to consider you as an option.”

“Uhhh, really?” I said as I felt my stomach start to knot again.

“You are five times the man he is,” Sheela reached out with her hand and touched my cheek. She held me with her golden eyes, and the air threatened to leave my body. “You are kind and generous. You are hardworking and charming. You are funny and intelligent. You have saved my life dozens of times, and you are only becoming more powerful as you learn to use your *Tame* ability. However, the contest for ownership of me must be accomplished in one-on-one physical combat, and you would not be able to defeat my husband. I’ve admitted my feelings for you even though I know this, and it means that I have tarnished my name.”

“But wait.” I reached up to touch her hand on my cheek. “It’s just that?”

The fight? Or your impression of what could happen? I'm confused. It sounds like you are saying that you can be with me as long as you think I could defeat him in combat. Is that true?" The words almost gushed out of my mouth.

"Yes," she said with a nod. "He is a great warrior though, you will not--"

"Teach me," I interrupted her. "You know how to fight, and you said I have some weird potential. I don't think there is anything to that, but if you teach me to fight, you'll know when I'll be able to beat him."

She stared at me for a few moments, and I forced myself to keep my mouth closed. I didn't know what I would say if she said no, but I knew I wasn't going to stop trying. Sheela obviously had feelings for me, but she couldn't let go of her cultural bonds.

"I will teach you," she whispered, and my heart skipped a beat.

"Awesome!" I gushed. "I'm looking forward to--"

"But you do not have much free time," she interrupted me. "I should not be a priority for you. It does not make sense that you would spend your time learning how to fight from me just so you can defeat a husband who you

will never battle.”

“Then you should just give up the idea and consider yourself divorced from him,” I laughed, and she surprised me by smiling a bit.

“Yes, I realize that I am somewhat foolish. I have considered this for a few weeks, but it is--”

“Wait,” I interrupted her, “back up a second. You’ve been considering this for weeks? Like... you wanted to get out of your marriage?”

“Victor,” she said as she touched my cheek again. “I knew my feelings for you, but I did not know if you felt the same way. I am conflicted, because I respect the laws and ways of my people, even though I will never return home. I suspected you felt the same way about me, but I did not think we could be together, so I did not wish to lead you on.”

“But you wanted me to ask you?” I turned around on the saddle so that I could face her more, and my hand moved to rest on her muscular thigh. A short gasp left her mouth when I touched her, and her eyes turned down to my hand, but she didn’t move to push me away.

“I am not trying to be coy with you,” she whispered. “I am not my own woman. Do you see how I am conflicted? I crave your touch, but please take

your hand off my leg.”

I pulled my fingers away from her, and we looked at each other again. Her eyes actually seemed pained, and she bit her bottom lip aggressively. “We should get back.”

“Yes, Victor,” she whispered, and I turned around on the saddle so that I face forward on Bob. I was about to kick my heels against his flanks and send him running back toward the camp, but I felt Sheela’s arms circle my waist and her body press against my back. I sat there and let her hug me for a moment, and she let out a long sigh as her head rested on my shoulder.

Neither one of us spoke. I just held onto the reins while she clung to me. Part of me wanted to turn around and kiss her, but I knew it would be foolish. She was conflicted, and I wanted us to be together without the complications of her marriage weighing on her soul. Especially when I had two other women that I loved who needed my affection.

There was a flash of light across my vision, and I blinked my *Eye-Q* on. The entry under *Women* now read 3, and I motioned my eye over it and willed the menu to open. Sheela’s name now appeared beneath Trel’s, and I released a long exhale.

“I love you, Sheela,” I said as I brought my fingers up to cradle her hands on my chest. “I’ll work to be the man you need me to be.”

“I know you will,” she whispered. “Thank you, Victor.”

“Let’s go.” I kicked Bob forward and commanded my group of parasaur to run with us back to the camp.

We had a lot of work cut out for us tonight, tomorrow, the next day, and for as long as we probably lived on Dinosaurland, but I had the love of three amazing women, and the path forward seemed illuminated with bright lights. I’d learn how to fight from Sheela, and then we could be together. The beautiful woman deserved to be happy, and I wanted to be the man who brought her that joy.

Chapter 11

“What took you both so long?” Trel asked as soon as Sheela and I returned.

“We chatted a bit while we got the water,” I said as I set one of the pots down beside the fire. Kacerie moved to reach for the jug, but then she froze and looked at me with questioning eyes. I nodded to her, and she took a long drink.

“Now that you are here, everyone else needs to leave so that we can have sex.” Trel made wave-like motions with her black fingers, and the women turned to stare at her.

“Trel, I am cooking a nice meal for everyone. Perhaps we can wait until everyone has finished eating?” Galmine smiled at the spider-woman.

“Ugh. Fine. Let’s eat. This is my last day, so I need all of his sperm. I’m sure you all understand.”

“Yes, I do,” Galmine sighed as she looked across the fire at me.

“How is the cordage looking?” I asked. They each had a small pile of

processed ferns in their hands, but I didn't see any completed ropes.

"That basket is filled with a few dozen," Trel said as she nodded across Galmine.

"Great," I said as Sheela brought the last water jug inside the hut.
"How many baskets do you think we'll need to complete the project?"

"Ha!" Trel shook her head. "We'll need maybe two hundred more baskets filled."

"Damn, that's a lot," I groaned.

"The logs we are using are larger," Trel said. "The perimeter of the new wall will be some eight hundred and seventy feet. However, it will be made with roughly one hundred and fifty logs that are around six feet in diameter. Let's say nineteen feet of cord per single wrap around, but we'll have to do a wrap at the top and the bottom, and I do three wraps per, so each log will require some two hundred and thirty feet of cord to attach to the next log. So two hundred and thirty feet times seventy-five logs is seventeen thousand two hundred and fifty feet of cord. I'm rounding up a bit in my math since the logs are not all perfect and I'm expecting some rope to break during the building process."

“Wow,” I said as I tried to follow her math. “That’s a shitload of cordage, and I can’t believe you just did the math that fast.”

“Victor, don’t you recall me telling you I’m a genius?” She fluttered her eyelashes at me. “I’m a genius. You are lucky to have me as your mate.”

“Yeah, I am.” I smiled at her and then took the plate of food that Galmine gave me. She used a flint dagger to cut the meat off the roasting carcass, and I wondered if that was because Kacerie said something to her about using her fingers.

“How many feet in a mile?” I asked, and I wondered if the translator technology that we all had would let Trel understand me. It seemed to work fine for feet and yards, but this was some different conversions.

“Five thousand two hundred and eighty,” she answered with a frown.

“So we need over three miles of cordage,” I groaned. “Fuck.”

“Well, we don’t need it all right now,” she said.

“We are going to have over thirty logs ready to go tomorrow, then probably eighty the day after. Then another forty-ish the day after that. We pretty much need it all right now. What about the sinew? Can we use some of

that?" I pointed out of the hut to where Trel had hung the pieces of animal sinew against the walls to dry.

"No," Trel said. "It will take them a while to dry, and it's too valuable of a material to use on the wall. We need to save it for bows, saddles, and the support rope for my planned tree fort."

"I just don't see how we are going to be able to make three miles of cordage in three days," I said.

"My original plan was for six weeks," Trel said with a shrug. "That is only four hundred and ten feet a day, which would be challenging, but not impossible for Galmine, Kacerie, and I to do while you and Sheela cut down the trees.

"So we aren't really saving any time now?" I asked. "If you think a person can make a hundred and forty feet a day, Sheela and I helping would only net us two hundred and eighty a day, so--"

"It would be around six-hundred and eighty-four feet a day," she said. "So, it would take us twenty-five days instead of forty-two, but the math is a little fuzzy since it is hard to predict efficiencies or other conflicts. The dinosaurs digging out the trees is still a boon, but we aren't going to be able

to make enough cordage quick enough.”

“There has to be another way,” I said. “The hard part is getting down the trees and digging the trenches, and we’ve got that figured out. We need either a better way to make cordage, or we need a different way to join the logs together when we stack them vertically to form the wall.”

“Hmm,” Trel said as she tapped her lips with her finger. She’d taken a plate from Galmine, but hadn’t really started eating yet.

“Can we use clay to glue them together?” I asked.

“Not strong enough,” Trel said. “I need to use the cordage to hold the pieces together while I attach the next ones on the wall. It helps keep them vertical so that I can line them up in the circle and fill in the trench on either side of them. Just like we did with the smaller wall.

“But what if we don’t use any cordage?” I asked. “The logs in the wall can’t really fall inward because of the circle layout. They can’t be pulled forward because we’ll set them deep in the trench and the supporting dirt fill will make them strong.”

“I’m not sure that will work,” Trel said as she wiggled her lips.

“I made the trench around five feet deep. How long did you measure the logs?”

“Twenty feet,” Trel said, “but that is one of the issues, we need the cords wrapping them to help pull them together since the sides will be uneven. There will be gaps everywhere. Let’s say we don’t use the cordage to bind them to each other. The bases of the trees would...” Her words hung in the air and I leaned forward.

“Did you just figure it out?” I asked.

“Maybe,” she said with a smirk. “So, here is the problem: the trees you are cutting are rather uniform in diameter all the way up, but the base is wider at the bottom, so I was planning on using the cordage to ensure they are tightly held together. However, I could just flip every other tree upside down, and bury it thin end down so that the two sides mesh together in a more uniformed manner.”

“I think I get it,” I said. “You are stacking triangles but flipping every other one, so they mesh and fill in the gaps.”

“Hmmm,” Trel said, and her voice was beginning to become excited. “It creates new challenges though. I will need to pair the trees together and

then match the sides so that they have a closer fit. Ugh, it's going to be really complicated, and it will become harder the more logs I stack. Victor, I think we are better off just focusing on making the cordage."

"We need dowels or something," I said. "Like a way to drive a piece of wood through each log pillar so they are connected."

"Hmmmmmm," Trel mused as she tapped her finger on her lips. "That's a good idea, but there are more challenges to that."

"What kind of challenges?"

"I think it will work, but let me explain the issues. We can use the fire to burn a circular hole through each log. Then we can drive log dowels through holes to connect two logs together. That will join them with enough strength, especially when they are also in the circle formation. I'd need to burn four holes in each log though. Two at the top and two at the base."

"Why two?" I asked.

"I won't be able to bend the smaller logs I use as dowels. I would have to drive a single piece of wood through the width of both logs, so about twelve feet. There will need to be holes to connect each log to the log on either side of it. My measurements will have to be precise, and I'll have to

monitor the fire carefully, so it doesn't burn the hole out too much or too little. I suppose that if it burns too wide, I can fill the inside with clay. That should make the bond strong enough, but if I did a perfect job, we would just hammer in a log dowel through each hole into the next log, and it would be a snug enough fit to keep them joined."

"It seems like it would be an even snugger fit since we wouldn't have to worry about the profile of the rope wrap we use pushing the adjacent logs away," I said.

"Yes. Hmmmmm." Trel looked deep in thought. "I think this will save us some time. It won't hit your two-day time frame, but it should be faster than twenty-five days."

"How long do you think?" I asked.

"Tomorrow you and Sheela will need to chop all the branches off the logs while the dinosaurs dig. Then I'll need to pair up the logs so their profiles fit, then we'll need to drag them into the fort. We can probably fit thirty in here if we leave Hope outside."

"What if we leave her in?" I asked.

"Maybe only ten," Trel said with a shrug. "I'd need them inside so I

could burn the holes at night.”

“You can’t just burn them outside?” Kacerie asked.

“No,” Trel said. “We have to burn those logs out there now because they are too large to bring in here, and the burns we are making are just crude lines. I’ll need to be able to inspect the fire-drills every half of an hour. Ugh. How annoying. I will need my beauty sleep to begin incubating my brood. Five days of sleepless nights will exhaust me.”

“You can teach us how to do it so we can take over,” I said. “But you think it will take five nights?”

“To burn all the holes, yes,” Trel said. “But then we will need to gather the dowels and trim them, then raise the logs in the trenches and hammer the dowels through the holes. I think it will take seven days if we work efficiently.”

“That’s way better than twenty-five,” I said.

“We will need a lot of clay, and we will need it all at night. I’d say four baskets worth will be good, but five would be safer.”

“So we’ll need to make another three of the leaf baskets tonight,” I

said. “We should be able to do it if we stop making cordage.”

“We’ll still need cordage,” Trel said. “I’ll have to use some to bind the pillars together while we hammer the dowels in, but we won’t need the baskets until dusk tomorrow, and we won’t need the cordage until the next day.”

“Okay, good, I’m liking this plan. Good job, Trel.”

“It was you and I together that came up with it, Victor,” she said as her eyes bore into me. “We will create beautiful things together. Speaking of that, everyone needs to leave so you and I can copulate.”

“It is a nice night,” Galmine said as she stood from beside the fire. “I will go work on the baskets for clay outside.”

“I will go inspect the logs we are burning,” Sheela said as she stood.

“I uhhh, guess I’ll help Galmine,” Kacerie said as she also stood. The three women walked out of the hut, and I looked at Trel.

“You didn’t eat any of your dinner,” I said as I pointed at her plate.

“I am hungry for other things now, my dear Victor,” she whispered, and then she pushed her plate aside and crawled over to me on her human

knees.

Our lovemaking wasn't as intense as it was yesterday. Trel was still mostly in control, and she still rode me with urgency, but we spent a lot more time kissing, whispering pleasures to each other, and cuddling. We both climaxed when she was on top of me, and she did her usual inverted hang to ensure that all of my sperm went into her womb. It was kind of a turn on to see how much she wanted my seed, especially after almost of a month of her antagonizing me.

Our second round was doggie style, but we did it standing with her spider legs bracing against me. The position allowed me to fondle her perfect ass while we made love, and Trel really seemed to enjoy it. She let out a long growl when we both climaxed again, and I relaxed on one of our sleeping mats while she hung inverted over my mouth. We kissed for a few minutes while we came down from our euphoria, and then she lowered herself into my arms so we could bask in each other's embrace.

"Our children will be beautiful," Trel said. "They will be brave and intelligent. Our work will be much easier once they are born and reach maturity."

“How long will that take?” I asked, even though I still doubted she could get pregnant.

“Five or so years,” she said. “But they will be able to do work after six months.”

“Damn, that is fast.”

“Is it? How long does it take your species to reach maturity?”

“Uhh, we have both physical and emotional maturity. Most people are physically mature at eighteen years.”

“Eighteen years?” Trel gasped. “Why so slow?”

“That’s just how it is,” I said. “I’m surprised your kind ages so fast.”

“How old are you?” she asked.

“Twenty,” I said.

“Perhaps the measurement of time is different on our world,” Trel said. “I’m six years old in my own time, but our ages seem similar.”

“Could be,” I said. “Probably doesn’t matter. I doubt we’ll be going back. All I know is that I’m happy you are in my arms right now, and I’m glad we have a good plan for tomorrow. We are a good building team.”

“Yes,” she whispered. “I do enjoy this. I am sorry again for being so difficult when we first met. If I’d known how much I would enjoy being your lover, I would have just--”

“It’s fine,” I said as I hugged her tighter. “We have a lot of work ahead of us. I’d love to lay here with you all night and drift off to sleep, but I think we all need to work on baskets and cordage. Let’s go get the others and get back to work.”

“Yes, Victor,” Trel said as she leaned her mouth up to kiss me. Her lips reignited my passion again, and we made love one more time before we went back to work.

Chapter 12

The next day was a whirlwind of constant work.

And that was saying a lot since Trel, Sheela, Galmine and I were used to some pretty grueling work.

We'd finished making two more clay baskets last night as well as a lot of cordage. Galmine's task for the day was to make another basket for clay, craft more arrows, and continue with the cordage. She also had to take care of all the meal preparation. The beautiful woman informed me that she had enough bird for today, but we'd have to get more food tomorrow.

Sheela was our resident axe expert, and she went to work clearing the branches from the trees that we toppled during the last two days. She worked tirelessly with her tools, but she avoided looking at me during most of the day.

Trel spent the day organizing the trees we toppled so that they were aligned to make a tight fit. This meant I had to use Hope to push the logs around, but the other three parasaurs were the better diggers anyway, and the loss of the smaller dino didn't really impede their progress.

Once Trel had thirty logs aligned the way she wanted, she used an axe to start on the spot where she would make the fire holes. To make sure she was setting these correctly, she asked me to make Hope spin them around a bit so that she could eyeball the sides. At first, she asked Kacerie or me to use an axe and trim some of the trunks so they would fit better, but Trel was quickly frustrated with Kacerie's lack of axe chopping skills, so she ended up doing the task herself.

Kacerie was our floater. She helped Sheela clear the cut branches from the trunks, selected branches that might work for dowels and put those in another pile for Trel to inspect, and sharpened our axes during her downtime.

The axes ended being a bit of a problem for us. We had built them like traditional ones with the blade's edge parallel to the handle. Trel's new plan for the wall meant that the logs had to be shaped a lot more, and we quickly realized we needed axes with a blade mounted perpendicular to the handle. That way we could stand on top or astride the log and cut downward to shave the trunk. Trel didn't really know the name of the design, but I recalled the name "adze" from an old boat crafting documentary I once watched on YouTube.

Building our first adze was surprisingly simple. I told Kacerie that she needed to find an arm-length branch with some sort of knot or junction at the end. We had plenty of branches lying around, but the material was still green, and I thought it wouldn't be suitable for a handle. She still found a dried branch on the ground during her other tasks, and it had a junction like I wanted.

I used one of our axes to trim the pieces off the end and then carved a slot by the junctioning piece. A few hours later Sheela stumbled across a rock that would work for the blade, and I pounded into the slot before I wrapped it to the nub of the branch at the junction. The tool ended up resembling the number 7, or like a gardening hoe, and I tested a few chops against the bark of a tree. I was able to get some good leverage with the tool, so I gave it to Kacerie so she could shave the handle and sharpen the stone blade.

I probably had the easiest day of the group. I did chopping and gathering work when the parasaur were busy with the tasks I commanded, but rotating the logs with Hope required most of my concentration. Bob, Sonny, and Cher ended up taking down their sixtieth tree a bit after lunch, and I switched their tasks around so that they focused on pushing the fallen

trees closer to the central spot where we were working. These trees were hard to muscle around because the roots were still attached, but we'd cleared a significant part of the younger growth the two hundred yards from our processing center. I didn't want Trel, Sheela, and Kacerie working that deep in the forest, so I made the dinos do the grunt work of bringing them closer to us.

While the three parasaur moved the recently fallen trees, I attached the dragging harness to Hope and had her pull the logs Trel marked into the fort. The set up worked well since the smaller parasaur could fit through the door, and I had all thirty of the logs Trel marked inside of the fort by the time the sun was low in the sky.

"I just need the clay," Trel said when I returned to our log-processing site with Hope. "All of these trees are marked, and we should be able to get them all burning tonight if you can get me the clay soon. Then we'll be done out here and we can start on the ones inside of the fort."

"I'm on it," I said as I surveyed the site. Sheela and Kacerie were chopping the indents that we would use to lay the fire in, and Trel also had an axe in her hand. I kind of wanted to bring someone with me for safety, but I

didn't want to pull them away from their tasks.

"I'll be quick," I said. "I'll take Bob. Sonny and Cher can stay here for defense. If you guys need to get back into the fort quickly, take Hope." I didn't actually know if Sonny and Cher would defend my friends, but I sent them a thought, and it seemed as if the two parasaur went from munching on the grass and leaves to glancing around the site with an unnatural alertness.

"Got it," Trel said. "Be careful."

A moment later I was back at our camp and attaching the five clay baskets to his saddle. Then I gave Galmine a quick kiss, updated her on our progress, and then turned to leave.

Before I could exit, Jinx nuzzled against my leg. I reached down to pet the little guy, and he surprised me by jumping into my arms.

"Aww," Galmine gushed. "He loves you so much. You should take him with you."

"Hmmm, yeah. I think I will." The cat-sized chocobo-looking dino weighed a bit under twenty pounds, so I couldn't quite keep him on my shoulder like a parrot, but I could just carry him up onto the saddle.

I took Jinx out of the fort and then commanded him to run up and perch on the front of Bob's back. He let out a confirmation chirp and then did as I asked.

A few moments later, my little pal and I were riding across the clearing past the piles of corpses that sat at the edge of our clearing.

The smell was all sorts of terrible.

We'd been a bit lucky all day, since the wind was blowing from the direction of the forest where we worked, but now that I moved to the edges of our domain, the scent of dead dino corpses was almost overwhelming, and I had to fight against my gag reflex. There were tons of scavengers feasting on the bodies, but the only big dinos were the vulture-like ones I'd seen yesterday. There weren't any carcasses near our work site, so the creatures hadn't bothered us. I just hope the smell didn't bring something massive and dangerous to our clearing.

The sooner we had these walls up the better.

Jinx let out an angry squawk when we rode past a group of white feathered dinos that looked like forty pound versions of him, and I guessed the creatures were his distant cousins. They looked up at us when we passed,

but they were too busy chomping on a rotting body to care about our passage.

Just to mix things up a bit, I took a slightly different path toward the lake. It wasn't the shortest way, so it meant I spent a bit more time in the jungle, but I was worried that my consistent habit might be something an enemy could track, and I didn't want to get caught off guard by someone waiting to ambush me.

Maybe I was paranoid, but the distant smoke in the jungle hadn't been caused by a dinosaur, so I knew there were other tribes out there.

Passage through the jungle was slow, and the crowded trees felt a little claustrophobic, but I was soon cresting the hill toward the lake. The smoke in the distance was now gone, but I still spent a few moments at the edge of the slope with my head just a bit above the top so I wasn't making much of a profile.

The trikes were back at the lake, but the spot where the parasaur were normally at was vacant. I saw a trio of red feathered raptors on the far side of the water, but they looked as if they were smaller than the green ones that we had been fighting, and they were a good ten minute run from where I would pick up my clay. Other than those two groups of dinos, the lake was deserted,

so I crested the hill quickly and pushed Bob down the other side.

“We have to do this quick,” I said to Jinx as soon as Bob got to the edge of the finger part of the lake where the clay was. I paused for a few moments before I got off and paid attention to the two dinos’ heads. Neither one of them seemed nervous about their surrounding, so I commanded Bob to kneel, and then I untied all the baskets.

Bob took a quick drink from the edge of the lake while I scooped the clay into the baskets as quickly as I could. I decided to tie each one back on the saddle as soon as I finished, instead of filling all five and then doing the job. It was a bit less efficient, but I didn’t want to leave everything behind if I had to run. I didn’t know why I felt so nervous, but it was probably because I was out here alone, and it was getting close to dusk.

By the time I filled the fourth basket with clay, I’d started to calm down a bit. Jinx was a good watchdog, and he seemed happy enough to run around the beach and attack a group of small frogs he found. I soon had the fifth basket of clay tied up on Bob’s saddle, and I called my buddy back to me so we could go back home.

“But before we go...” I said as I turned to look at the trikes. It looked

like the same male and two females that I'd observed for the last three days. They were two lake-fingers over, and it would only take me a few minutes to ride over there.

My Tame ability was a level three now, and triceratops had three horns. Perhaps it was a stupid justification, but I felt confident I could tame one of the giant dinos, and I hadn't really felt that way when I was level two.

"What do you think, Jinx? Can I do it?"

The blue bird let out a chirp that sounded a lot like "Sure, Victor. You are the fucking man. Go get some new dinos!" So I tapped my heels on Bob and steered him around the finger parts of the lake.

As I got closer to the trikes, a small sliver of doubt began to worm into my stomach.

These things were huge. Yeah, Bob, Sonny, and Cher were huge, but the smallest trike female was about three to four feet taller at the shoulder than Bob, and it was just as long. The horns looked to be almost as long as I was tall, but that could have just been me exaggerating a bit because they looked so fearsome.

The legs were thick, broad, and the front foot ended in distinct toes that

looked like horse hooves. The rear legs were even bulkier than the front and more toe-hooves. Each of the hooves was just as large as my chest, and I imagined that the beast's shits were probably bigger than me.

"Maybe this isn't such a good idea," I said as I fought against my fear. The male of the group probably outweighed Bob by five times, and I guessed it would have no problem pushing one of its horns through my mount's chest. Parasaur really didn't have any weapons besides their size, and they looked like children compared to the squat and powerful triceratops.

If I fucked this up and got impaled, my friends would never know what happened to me. Maybe they would figure it out, but they would have a really hard time surviving.

I pushed the negative thoughts out of my head and focused on my task. There was one female in the water, but the male and second female were standing on the beach and munching on algae. The male was the closest to me, and there wasn't really a way for me to get around him. I'd either have to tame him first, or I'd have to wait for him to wander away so that I could go after one of the females.

"That will probably just piss him off," I muttered as I looked at the

male. He looked like the kind of guy who would cut a fool who messed with his women, so I took a deep breath and prepared myself to go for the big score first.

“Hey big fella,” I said as I urged Bob toward the male. He was looking out over the lake, and he didn’t turn around as I approached. That could have been good, or it could be terrible since he might get scared when he finally noticed me.

“You are one handsome fella,” I said as I urged Bob a bit closer. My steed didn’t seem to think this was a good idea, but I quieted his fears by rubbing my hands on his neck.

“Your scales look really good, and your horns are all sorts of magnificent. No wonder you have two ladies, I’m honestly surprised you don’t have more babes hanging out with you.” I was some thirty feet from him now, and the creature’s size was becoming more impressive. He was practically a house with horns and an armored crest.

“I’ve got a good camp the next valley over,” I said as Bob crept closer. “You’ll like it. You can bring your two friends with you. I promise to give you plenty of food, water, and some fun stuff to do. Right now we are

building a wall. We could really use your help. What do you say?"

The trike snorted and stomped his foot. I felt my chest constrict when he turned to glance at me, but then he shifted his beaked mouth back to the algae he was eating and seemed to pretend like I wasn't there.

"Yeah, I know," I whispered as I tapped my heels against Bob's flank. "Being bored sucks. What do you do all day? Just eat algae? I've got something way more fun for you to do. You should come back with me. We'll have a great time."

The trike snorted, stomped, and then shook his crested head like he was a dog that was adjusting his collar. Bob wanted to stop moving forward, but I knew the trike's movements weren't aggressive. He was just getting used to me being there.

"That's a good boy," I said as I rested my hand against his scaled flank. His back seemed fifty percent wider than Bob's, and it was going to take Trel a shitload of cordage to make a saddle.

"Let's go, buddy. I want you on my team."

Triceratops horridus tamed.

I almost shouted with joy, but I didn't want to scare the two females, so I commanded the male to keep eating while I circled around on Bob. The closest trike female was a bit skittish around me and edged closer to her male, but I was confident in my ability now, and it took me only a few complimenting words to get her tamed.

"Damn, I'm on a roll," I whispered as soon as the update message came across my *Eye-Q*. I wondered if there was a limit to how many dinos I could keep tamed, but I didn't know a way to test it other than just taming every single dino I came across. But if there was a limit, could I untame dinos to get access to others? I didn't want to waste all my slots taming the orange birds if I could only do a maximum number that never increased.

I slowly rode Bob through the water toward the last trike. This female surprised me by turning toward me. She lowered her horns a bit and let out an aggressive sound that reminded me of a truck engine firing up. It was apparent that she was about to attack, so I did the only thing I could think of doing.

"Stop," I ordered. "You are coming with me now."

I was a good twenty feet away from her, but the tame message still

scrolled across my eye. The words kind of shocked me because I hadn't touched her, or said any soothing words. I'd just told her in a commanding voice that she was coming with me, and the female instantly fell under my control.

Was I getting more powerful? Or was that just how my ability worked? Were all the nice words unneeded? Could I just control dinos from afar with a quick order and press of my will? I was excited to test it out, but that would have to be done tomorrow or the day after. I had to get back to camp now since we still had plenty of work to do.

"Alright guys," I said, "Let's head back. I gotta think of names for you three on the way. Just follow Bob's lead and we'll take you to your new home."

The three trikes let out snorts of agreement, and we began our trip back toward the fort. It was obvious that the trikes couldn't run as fast as Bob could, so I slowed his speed down to about half so they could keep up with him. As we made our way up and out of the lake valley, I glanced back over my shoulders to check on their progress. One of the times I looked, I saw the male slam into the side of a tree with his shoulder. The tree was probably

four feet in diameter, so a bit smaller than the ones we were currently working on, but the tree snapped off at the base as if it was a toothpick.

Holy shit. These guys were going to make fort building so much easier.

Trel, Sheela, and Kacerie looked up from the logs when I approached our work site, and I stopped my new trikes right at the edge of the clearing.

“Well? What do you think?” I said as I gestured back over my shoulder. “The big male in the middle is named Tom. The one on his left with the red marks on her crest is named Nicole, and the one with the brown streaks on her face is named Katie.” I laughed as I said their names, but there was no way my friends would know the actors I was referencing.

“They are impressive,” Sheela said as her eyes glanced at the new dinos. “They will really help us build.”

“Victor, you know I love you,” Trel started, “but I think you might have an addiction to collecting dinosaurs.”

“Hey babe, if collecting dinosaurs is wrong, then I don’t want to be right.”

“Babe?” Trel asked with confusion.

“Uhh. It’s another word for a significant other.”

“Not a child then?” she asked.

“No, it can be used both ways, but I have all the clay we need. Let’s get to work on burning these logs. The sun is going to set soon, and we’ll have to start working on the ones inside the fort. I’m going to go take the parasaurs to the river for a drink, since they haven’t had any water today. I’ll leave the trikes here to protect you all.”

They helped me unload the baskets from Bob’s back, and I issued the protection order to Tom, Katie, and Nicole. The trikes seemed to follow my commands just like the group of parasaurs did, and I was again struck by the possibilities of what my ability could do. Would I really be able to command them like an army? Part of me was afraid to find out, since I didn’t want us to get attacked anytime soon, but a darker part of me wondered if I could command some sort of massive dinosaur army.

It was a weird thought, especially considering that I was just a dog catcher back home.

Memories of my job, parents, shitty apartment, and the party with Lacey occupied my brain on the way to the river. Since my parents had died,

I hadn't really mattered to anyone, even myself. Now my life was filled with danger, but I had two beautiful women who were my lovers, and another woman who admitted that she had feelings for me. These women needed me to protect them, and I had been given a powerful ability to control the animals on this dangerous planet. I recalled Lacey's pool party and let out a slight laugh. I'd cared so much about what all those women there thought about me, but now I didn't care about anything in my old life.

Just yesterday I'd talked to Sheela about coming back with me, but now I realized that I was like the beautiful cat-woman: I didn't want to return home. I didn't want to go back to my job, or my shitty apartment. I didn't want to go back to being the man I was. Here I could control my own destiny. Maybe I had that power back on Earth, but it had seemed impossible to change my fate. Yeah, if I went back now, I'd push to go back to school and become a vet, and I'd ask out every single pretty girl I saw and be fine with rejection, but I didn't want that anymore. I just wanted Trel, Galmine, and Sheela to be happy.

I wanted to be King of Dinosaurland.

Bob wasn't that thirsty since he drank at the lake, but the other three

parasaur were parched, and they pushed their faces into the river for what felt like ten minutes. I decided that we needed more water breaks tomorrow, and I wondered again about building some sort of aqueduct to get water from the river to our camp so we didn't have to make daily trips. We'd just made a bunch of water jugs to avoid this problem, but the dinos were still going to need to rehydrate every day, so I wasn't really saving that much time.

The water problem spun around inside of my brain while we rode back to the camp. I figured there must have been a way to pump the water out of the river and get it across land. The Romans did it, so there must have been a method. We hadn't figured out how to smelt metal yet, but I had a bunch of dinosaurs I could use for tasks, so there had to be a way I could either harness their power, or figure out some sort of pump that could push the water to us.

Trel, Sheela, and Kacerie were almost done setting the fires on the logs I'd pushed down today. I helped them finish up, and we all made it back inside of the camp walls as the sun finally set. Galmine had dinner ready for us, and we all ate in an exhausted silence. There was still more work to do though, so after we scarfed down our meal, we exited the hut and used the clay to prep the hole marks that Trel had made in the logs.

I figured it was close to midnight by the time we finished setting up all the fires, and I could tell that the women were beyond exhausted. No one complained about the work, and I felt my chest swell with pride when I thought about how much we had accomplished today, and how much more we'd get done in the next week.

"I'll take first watch," I said. "You can all get some rest. We'll just do two shifts tonight. I'll ask Galmine to take the second one."

"Victor, you need your rest as well," Sheela said with concern.

"Naw. I just commanded the dinosaurs all day, you all did way more chopping and hauling. I'll be fine."

"You still did plenty of work," Kacerie commented, but then the pink-haired woman covered her mouth up with a yawn and shrugged. "Yeah. Sleep sounds good. I'll see you all in the morning."

"You'll keep an eye on the logs?" Trel asked as she gestured to the thirty smoldering posts.

"Of course," I said. "When Galmine comes to relieve me, I'll show her what to look for. You did a good job teaching us how to set up the clay walls, so I'm confident we won't have a problem."

“Alright, Victor. Come lie next to me when you finally do rest.” The dark-haired beauty gave me a brief kiss, and then she walked into the hut.

That just left Sheela and I alone, and the cat-woman studied me for a few moments before she spoke. “You are taking too much on your shoulders.”

“We all are,” I said with a shrug. “I’d ask you to spend a few moments teaching me some fighting moves, but I saw you trying to keep your eyes open while we set the clay up.”

“You are mistaken,” she said, but her mouth upturned into a grin.

“Will you train me tomorrow?” I asked. “I want you to be mine, Sheela.”

Her golden eyes glowed in the firelight, and she bit her lower lip slightly.

“Yes, Victor,” she whispered.

“Good, now go sleep. I’m not going to go easy on you with the work tomorrow, and I don’t think you’ll go easy on my training.”

“Thank you,” she whispered, and then she walked into the hut.

I inspected the logs again, but found the clay to be holding back the small fires we had started. I added a few wood flakes to one that seemed to be burning slow, but there wasn't much else to do but walk about the small space inside our hut. My team of dinos all slept right outside of our wall, and I realized that we might not really need to keep watch anymore. I'd used Sonny and Cher to guard my friends when I went to get clay, and then I'd used Tom, Nicole, and Katie to guard later. Would the dinosaurs be able to do the job while I slept? The idea was intriguing, so I commanded Katie to wake up. I sensed her rise from her slumber, and I gave her an order to protect our walls from any enemy dinosaurs and give out a shout if she saw something large and dangerous.

I used our ladder to climb up the interior of the wall, and I saw Katie glancing around the clearing while she lay next to Tom and Nicole. It would probably be a bad idea to keep her awake the whole night, but I could easily cycle between the dinos so that they shared the duty. My head soon filled with the vision of a massive fortress with an army of raptors running around the perimeter. It would be impossible for another tribe to attack us if I had a bunch of dinosaurs guarding our walls.

“Victor,” Galmine asked from below, and I climbed down the ladder.

“Hey, beautiful,” I said before I gave her a kiss.

“You should rest. I can watch all through the night. I was just sitting inside the hut all day making cordage. You were all working so hard.”

“Naw, I’m fine,” I said. “I have plenty of energy.”

“Oh, you do?” she asked, and her emerald eyes glowed from the firelight.

“Yeah, I do,” I whispered, and then I turned my head around toward the camp.

“There is a spot over there,” she whispered as she pointed to the far wall. “We will be closer to the fires, but I don’t mind their heat, or yours.”

“Let’s go,” I said as I took her hand and led her over to the grass.

A few moments later I was naked, and we were making deep relaxing movements against each other. Love making with Galmine pushed all my other thoughts and worries out of my brain, and any tension I held in my muscles faded away. After we orgasmed, I held her in my arms and traced her smooth skin with my fingers. My eyelids had actually grown heavy, and

she told me to go back to the hut and sleep for the rest of the morning. I regretfully parted from her and then put back on my clothes before sneaking into the hut.

Trel was asleep near the door, but her arms were opened, and I was able to crawl into her embrace. My movement disturbed her sleep slightly, and she muttered my name before her arms wrapped around me. My eyes drifted closed almost instantly, but I had a few seconds to review all the bad ass shit I'd gotten done today.

Things were moving in the right direction, and we just needed to stay the course. As long as we didn't get attacked for the next five days, we'd be good.

Sleep took me, and my consciousness faded into a pool of blackness.

But then I was startled awake by the roar of what sounded like a carnotaurus.

Chapter 13

I gasped and rolled out of Trel's arms as the spider-woman was also waking.

"Wha?" she started to ask, but the deafening roar sounded again, and her black eyes opened wide.

Kacerie and Sheela shot to their feet, and they ran behind me as I rushed out the hut door. It was dawn outside, but the sun had just crested the mountains in the east and was spraying a fire-like light across our fort walls.

Galmine was trying to walk quickly toward us, and her green eyes told me everything I needed to know.

"Sheela! Get your arrows!" I shouted as I ran to the ladder.

A second roar sounded, slightly off-center from where the first one had, and I heard Katie give out a loud bark of alarm. This was the first one I'd heard out of her, and I guessed that it meant she had just gotten visual on our attackers.

I dashed up the ladder and prepared myself for the worst.

It was still worse than I expected.

Two carnos were at the northeast side of the clearing. They had just stepped out of the forest, and the morning sun caused their eyes to glow a malevolent red. Another pair of carnos was more to our direct east, where we had our log clearing area set up. These two were a few lengths out of the woods, and it looked as if they were trying to skirt around to the south side of our fort so that they could flank my crew of dinosaurs.

I didn't like these odds one bit. The carnos were just a hair smaller than Tom, but that meant they were the size of Bob and larger than Hope and Cher. They were still smaller than my triceratops, but there were four of them.

Then I heard another set of roars, and I turned around to look west. Three carnos were at the edge of the trees there, and I felt terror descend from my heart and chill my stomach.

"Fuck," I growled as my brain tried to come up with a plan. Now this was seven against seven, and I had to worry about protecting our base. The walls were high enough to keep the carnos from just stepping over, but they'd be able to lean in a bit and maybe make a half-assed chomp at us if we hid

inside. It would be dangerous if we just had one attacking, but I figured we'd be able to fall back against the adjacent wall and shoot arrows at anything this size that tried to invade. Seven of them meant that they could circle the fort, and we'd have nowhere to retreat.

I needed a way to take these fuckers out before they even got to our walls, but they were coming at us from three sides, and I realized I was going to have to split my team up to engage the enemy. The trikes were my only real offense. Their horns would easily rip through the bodies of these carnos, but I worried that their horns would get stuck. If that happened, then the carno they had impaled, or the second carno in the group could get a bite on them. As soon as I lost one of my trikes, I'd be out a third of my offense, and it would be easy for the carnos to overwhelm us. The parasaur could kind of fight, but all they had going for them was size, strength which came from that size, and speed. Hope didn't even have the size and strength when compared to the carnos, but I knew from experience that my faithful mount could outrun one.

Then I got an idea, and my strategy fell into place around it.

I paired Hope and Nicole together and sent them toward the two carnos

in the northeast. I paired Cher and Katie together and sent them charging toward the two carnos advancing from our worksite. The three big boys, Sonny, Bob, and Tom, ran around the north side of the fort and sprinted toward the three carnos approaching from that direction. My first orders were simple, and I mentally tried to push them to each of the groups as quickly as I could.

The parasaur was to run around the carnos and distract them while the trikes kept them from advancing toward our fort.

I didn't know how well each group would follow my instructions, so I focused my attention on Hope and Nicole first. The parasaur was galloping toward the two massive carnivores, and they actually seemed to look a bit surprised that their prey was charging. I imagined Hope darting to the side of them at the last second, and my heart jumped into my chest when the closest carno shot forward to bite her.

Hope dodged to the side as if she was a pro football player and then twisted to the left of the carno. The beast tried to jerk its massive maw around so that it could bite her again, but its teeth closed on empty air.

I still heard the snap of its jaws from almost two hundred yards away.

“Go Hope! Go!” I hissed under my breath as the parasaur kept running toward the forest, she turned right at the tree line and angled back up north toward the cave where the orange birds were.

The carnos turned around to follow her, and I almost let out a shout of joy. Their backs were to the fort and Nicole, so I knew that my strategy could work.

As long as Hope could keep up her speed.

I turned back to the east and commanded Cher to dodge out of the way of the carnos just like Hope had. The bigger parasaur female was a bit less graceful than Hope, but she still twisted her massive body away from the carnos a moment before one bit at her. Cher’s dodge took her to the left of the leftmost carno that faced me, and it tried to turn around just as the one who attacked Hope did. However, the second carno also made a lunge for Cher as she sprinted by, and the two carnos ended up slamming their heads and upper bodies together. The giant predators growled at each other, and I saw a perfect opportunity to try the second part of my plan.

While the carnos were distracted by each other and were turning to chase after Hope, Katie the triceratops charged up behind the one on the left

and rammed her horns into the carno's ass.

The massive predator let out a screech that I was sure dinos all the way by the lake could hear. It tried to turn around and bite at Katie, but the trike's horns were buried all the way into the carno, and it couldn't twist its body around.

The second carno had sprinted after Cher, but then stopped and turned around to look at its friend. It seemed confused as to what it should do, but then it turned back toward the trike. The carno began to jog back toward its struggling friend and my trike, so I quickly adjusted my commands. This carno wasn't even looking at Cher. It was focusing completely on the trike, so when the female parasaur shoulder checked it, the carnataurus went down like a skinny referee getting tackled by a two hundred and fifty-pound linebacker.

As the second carno went down, I turned my eyes quickly to the boy squad, they were still sprinting around the fort, so I glanced over to Hope. She'd outpaced both of the carnos, and Nicole was holding her ground between them and our fort. I wanted to have the red-crested trike get in there and do some damage like Katie, but I knew that Hope wasn't big enough to

pull off a play like Cher just did, so I needed to drive off the east group of carnos. Then I could send Cher and Katie to help out Hope and Nicole.

I shifted my focus back to Katie. The trike still had the first carno impaled with her horns, but she couldn't really pull free without risking a bite. The other carno was rolling on the ground trying to squirm to its feet, so I knew I had a few seconds of freedom to mount an offensive. I commanded Cher to run back a bit, and then I told her to sprint forward and slam her shoulder into the carno that Katie impaled.

The maneuver worked way better than I had planned. The carno was occupied with its attempt to free itself from Katie's horns, so it didn't even notice Cher until the parasaur was right next to her. The hit knocked the carnotaurus free of the trike with a tidal wave of blood, bone, and screams. The big predator obviously had a mortal wound, and it crumbled to the ground as if it had lost muscle control in one of its legs.

The other carno had gotten to its feet, and it snarled at Cher. I commanded the parasaur to run away before the carno could snap at it, but their enemy didn't give chase. Instead, it turned back to Katie and dipped its head down a bit so it could bite her face.

I instructed the trike to backpedal a bit, and she did so as the remaining carno stepped toward her. The predator was ignoring Cher, probably because it didn't think the parasaur would try to knock it down again, and it seemed like a perfect opportunity to show this fucker who he was underestimating.

Cher was sprinting around the rear of the carno, and I ordered her to rush toward the asshole's back. The parasaur picked up some frantic speed as she tore across the grassy field, but the carno's attention was totally focused on Katie.

I commanded Katie to dart forward as if she was attacking and then quickly back away again. The carno took the bait, leaned down to snap at the trike, missed, and then let out a roar of frustration.

Then Cher slammed right into the fucker's back and knocked him flat on his face.

The carno let out a surprised shriek, but it didn't last long. Katie charged forward with her horns down in "fuck you, asshole" position, and they punched through the carno's skull like a kabob stick through a tomato. The carno didn't even let out another screech; it just started twitching death spasms.

I commanded Cher to stand on the chest of the dying carno, and then Katie yanked her horns out. As soon as they were both free, I sent them after the carnos chasing Hope and turned my attention back to the boy team of Bob, Sonny, and Tom.

The males were rushing across the clearing toward the three carnos. Bob and Sonny were running abreast of each other, and Tom was bringing up the rear. They looked like a reverse triangle galloping across the open field, but the two parasaurs were much faster than the trike, so Tom was being left behind a bit.

The three carnos to the west of the camp exhibited the same sort of confusion the other groups had. Parasaurs were supposed to be prey. They were supposed to run away, and the carnos were supposed to give chase. The big horned eating machines didn't really know what to do when their food attacked, so they kind of bunched together as they slowed their run.

I gave Sonny and Bob the command to split so they would run around the carnos, and the predators seemed to regain their senses. The ones on the end tried to dart forward and snap at the two parasaurs, but I'd ordered them to run around with enough space, so the carnos' chomps just closed around

air.

The two predators on the sides turned to chase after the parasaurs, but the one in the center had his eyes on Tom, and he stepped toward the trike with an angry roar. I ordered Tom to fall back a few steps, but then I imagined him just keeping his horns pointed at his enemy so that the carno's teeth couldn't get past the trike's armored crest. Tom was much larger than the carno, so I imagined that he'd be able to protect himself for a minute or so while I figured out how to bring Bob and Sonny back around.

The carno rushed forward and tried to bite Tom, but the trike pulled his head back and then slammed a horn into the attacking dino. I saw the tip tear into the side of the carno's cheek, but it coiled back with a hiss that seemed to indicate it wasn't as much hurt as annoyed.

Bob and Sonny had quickly outpaced the other two carnos, and I commanded Bob to slow his sprint dramatically while I pushed Sonny for more speed. The pair of carnos angled their run so that they were heading right for Bob. This was what I wanted, and I told the parasaur to accelerate just enough so that he stayed fifty feet ahead of them. They gave chase, and I mentally commanded Sonny to swing back around toward Tom. It was going

to take about ten seconds for Sonny to come to his friend's aid, so I turned back around to check on Hope. The smallest of my parasaur was giving the cave filled with the orange birds a drive-by, and the creatures were filling the air with angry screeches. They shut up as soon as the carnos came close, though, and the sight would have made me laugh if I wasn't still really fucking worried about this whole battle turning around at any moment.

Katie and Cher had arrived to stand next to Nicole, so I commanded Hope to dash toward them.

I shifted my attention back to the boy team just in time to catch Sonny slamming into the side of the carno that was harassing Tom. Just like with the other group, the carno hadn't expected to be broadsided by a parasaur, and it tumbled to the ground like a blown over tumbleweed. The devil-horned predator snarled and thrashed on the ground trying to get up, but Tom was already circling around toward the beast's back. The carno realized the trike was trying to angle in for an attack, and it turned to snap at Tom, but then I commanded Sonny to step in closer, and the carno got distracted by the enemy that had just knocked it over.

As soon as the carno had its attention focused on Sonny, Tom charged

forward with his head leveled and punched his horns through the predator's skull.

Now there were only two carnos left in the boys' group and two with the girls' group.

I spun my focus back to the females in time to see Hope run past the wall of Cher, Katie, and Nicole. Hope's chest was heaving with heavy breaths and I commanded her to slow her run as soon as she was past the line of the other dinos I had tamed. I instructed Cher, Katie, and Nicole to charge toward the two chasing carnos, but I switched up their formation a bit differently than the males. I put both Katie and Nicole in the front so that the two female trikes could put their horns into play first, and I had Cher follow some forty feet behind them.

This pair of carnos weren't as stupid as I thought they would be. I thought they would just charge right into the trikes' horns and get turned into ground beef, but they knew what they were up against and skidded to a stop. My trikes were still running at full speed though, and they closed the gap before the carnos could really run away. If anything, their decision to try and escape ended up leaving their sides and backs exposed.

Nicole and Katie tore into them like needles through a pin cushion.

The carnos let out twin screams of agony, but there was nothing they could do to escape. Nicole's left horn had probably ripped apart the spine of the carno she'd impaled, and Katie's horns passed through the right flank of her carno and were coming out its stomach. Guts and blood spilled everywhere across the grass, and the two trikes began to shake their heads like bulls with their horns caught on the corpses of matadors. The carnos wailed again, and then their bodies tore open with an explosion of red blood.

I commanded the females to run over to the males, and I turned my attention back to the last two carnos. They were still chasing after Bob, and I commanded him to circle around so he'd lead them in a wide circle that would take them back to Tom and Sonny. My parasaur complied, and the pair of carnos followed.

"What is Bob doing?" Trel asked me, and I gasped with surprise. My lover was perched on the wall right next to me, and I hadn't even noticed her. Sheela was also standing on the same rung of the ladder as me, and one of her arms was wrapped over my shoulder while her other clung to the wall. I hadn't even noticed either of them, but I guessed that it was because I was so

focused on the battle.

“He’s going to circle around,” I said as I returned my attention to Bob’s long gait.

“It looks like he is running away from--”

“I’ve got this,” I interrupted Trel. “Watch.”

Bob was sprinting across the edge of our clearing in a clockwise direction. It really did look like he was running away from Tom, but the male triceratops was racing toward the apex of Bob’s loop, and both Nicole and Katie were heading there as well.

“Ohhhh,” Trel whispered under her breath. “I get it.”

“Let’s see if this works,” I said as Tom joined up with his two women, Katie and Nicole, as they moved up north. The trikes were slower than the carnos and the parasaur, so I had to kind of adjust their trajectory as they sped toward the north cave.

Bob was getting too far ahead, so I slowed his speed a bit. This gave the carnosaurs an excited boost of speed, and I had to make him run a bit faster so they didn’t nab him. I needed them to be just close enough, so they

tunnel visioned on Bob's tail, but not so close that they could bite him. I just didn't want them to notice the trikes charging at their flank.

The distance between the parasaur's pursuers and the trikes closed, and I held my breath with anticipation.

Impact.

The two carnotaurus never saw what hit them.

Tom, Nicole, and Katie slammed into their flanks like a train with a spikey snow plow on the front. The carnos actually lifted off the ground and slammed into the wall of the ramp below the orange bird cave. One of the carnos let out a surprised scream, but the other one who bore the brunt of the nine horns seemed to flop over dead instantly. The pair was crushed against the wall like ground beef under a spiked hammer, and the trikes continued to push the carnos into the wall until I gave them the command to shake free and come back to the fort.

"Wow," both Trel and Sheela said in unison as they looked at me.

"We did it," I said as relief flooded my head, chest, and stomach. I realized I was shaking a bit and my heart was racing.

“No, Victor,” Sheela said as she shook her head. “We did nothing. It was you and your ability with these creatures that saved our lives.”

“Well, we all worked to build this wall,” I said. “And we’ll all...” my head was really spinning, and I felt Sheela’s arm tighten around my shoulder.

“Are you okay?” Trel asked, and her words bounced around in my head strangely. My skull kind of felt like it was overheating, and I really wanted to sit down.

“I think so,” I replied, but I felt really nauseous, and the ground was starting to vibrate beneath me. I felt like I was car sick, and I kept waiting for the ground to stop moving.

But it didn’t, and I felt myself falling.

I heard Trel, Sheela, and Kacerie shout my name, but they sounded really far away. It was like I was sinking into a pool of warm water, but then it became like ice, and I couldn’t stop shaking.

Then everything turned to darkness.

Chapter 14

I woke up to fingers stroking my face.

I moaned since the fingers felt wonderful, but the sensation was contrasted with the worst headache I'd ever felt. It was like a hangover on steroids, and it felt as if my brain was trying to break out of my skull like a baby dino being birthed from an egg.

"Owwwwwww," I sighed as I raised my own fingers to my temple. I suspected the person rubbing my face was Galmine, and her gasp of joy confirmed my belief.

"Hurry! Victor is awake!" She shouted, and it felt like someone had just screamed inside a megaphone they had pressed against my eardrum. I groaned with agony, but this also hurt, and my cry turned into a rather unmanly sounding whimper.

It was probably the worst pain I'd ever been in. That wasn't saying a lot since I'd never suffered from any sort of severe physical trauma, but I also couldn't imagine a pain more severe than what I was feeling.

But I had work to do, so I needed to get my ass in gear. The fort wasn't

going to get built without my dinos doing the labor, and my dinos weren't going to work if I wasn't awake to direct them.

"Did you say he's awake?" I heard Kacerie say from the direction of my feet, and I pried one of my eyes open. My cornea got a view full of bright fire, and another lance of pain speared through my brain.

"He is," Galmine whispered. "Can you go get Trel and Sheela?"

"Yep!" Kacerie said, but I couldn't get my eyes open in time to see her leave.

"What's happening?" I whispered. My mouth felt like sandpaper, and my throat felt like I hadn't drunk water in a month.

"We don't know, but it appears you fainted after the attack," Galmine said. "Everything is fine though! We are all safe, and your dinosaurs are relaxing outside of our gate."

"How long have I been out?" I asked.

"Most of the day, you were still breathing, but none of us really knew how your species recovers."

"Shit," I said. "We've got stuff to do." I tried to pry my eyes open, but

the firelight was still too bright, so I could only get them open for a few seconds before I had to close them again.

“You should just relax,” Galmine said, and her fingers moved to rub my temples. It was the perfect spot, and I let out a loud moan as the pain in my skull began to release.

“He’s awake?” I heard Trel say, and I cracked open my eyes to see the dark-haired woman walk into the hut.

“Hey Trel,” I said, and I felt her clawed hands grasp my left palm.

“I was worried,” she hissed. “You shouldn’t do that to me.”

“I’m alright,” I said. “I dunno what happened. I just felt like shit all of a sudden and then I was laying with my head in Galmine’s lap.”

“You must have overextended your ability,” Sheela said as she stepped into the hut. “It was a difficult battle, yet you got through it without any of your dinosaurs becoming injured.”

“Yeah,” I said. Maybe I should have been happy, and I was, but the pain in my skull was preventing me from feeling anything but the desire to just sleep again. “What is the status of the camp?”

“The logs we pulled inside the camp last night have been burned successfully,” Trel said. “Sheela pulled them out today while you were resting, and we’ve got the next set ready to go when the sun sets.”

“How did you pull the old ones out and bring the new ones in?” I asked.

“Hope let me ride her,” Sheela said. “But she seems very tired now and is resting out with the others. I also believe they need water, but the other dinos don’t seem to be responding to me when I try to ride them.”

“It’s a good thing I’m awake then,” I said as I finally forced my eyes open. “I’ll take them all to get water. They saved our ass this morning.”

“Yeah, but it was because you told them what to do,” Trel said, and she wore a proud smile on her full lips. “I always knew you had great power. I thought so when we first met.”

I laughed a bit as I sat up. The movement made my head hurt more, and I reached for one of our jugs of water. I drank almost the whole jug, and my skull started to feel a little better. The four women all gawked at me when I drank, and I let out a short laugh when I finally lowered the jug from my lips.

“I’ll be okay,” I said. “Just feels like I drank a bottle of vodka and chased it with a kick to the head.”

“What is vod--”

“It’s an alcohol made with potatoes,” I said as I tried to stand. My head spun a bit, but Sheela was instantly by my side, and I leaned up against her shoulder so I could stand.

“Perhaps you should rest more,” she said. “You are obviously not recovered.”

“Do you guys have enough clay to burn the holes in the logs tonight?” I asked, and they all shook their heads.

“So I need to take all the dinos to get water, and we need clay. Do we need to hunt for food also?”

“No,” Sheela said. “I’ve cut some slabs off the large horned dinosaurs that attacked us this morning. We might want to tow the bodies farther away from our camp, but we have food for the next few days.”

“Alright,” I said. “That’s one thing off our plate. Let’s load up the jugs and baskets we need to fill on Bob, and then I’ll make a trip to the lake. Who

wants to go with me?”

“I will,” Kacerie, Sheela, and Trel said at once.

“I don’t feel good about leaving Galmine alone,” I said.

“I will be fine, Victor,” she said. “If we close the doors, then nothing can get in to attack us.”

“We just had seven apex predators attack our fort,” I said.

“Yes,” she said with a nod, “but having an extra person, or two, or even ten wouldn’t have helped save our lives. The only thing that saved us was your taming skill.”

“Maybe I should just leave some dinos here to patrol, and then I can make a second trip for water.”

“The sooner you leave the sooner you can return,” Galmine said with her cheerleader smile. “Just hurry back. I’ll tie the gate closed after you leave.”

“Alright,” I said. “Let’s get going. Trel, I’m glad you are coming, because we need to talk about building an aqueduct either from the lake or the river.”

“Hmm, that is an interesting project. It also makes me feel as if I have become a plumber.” The spider woman sighed, and I let out a laugh.

“You aren’t a plumber, Trel. You are a problem solver, and one of our next problems is getting running water to our fort so we don’t have to leave it twice a day.”

“We’ll talk about it more when we get there,” she said, and the five of us walked out of the hut with our baskets and jugs.

The new set of logs were laid out inside of the fort, and I saw that the team had already marked the spots where we needed to burn the holes. I ensured Galmine latched the door closed behind us, and then Trel, Kacerie, Sheela, and I jumped on our dinos. Trel and I rode on Bob, and Sheela and Kacerie rode on Hope. The rest of the dinos followed behind us, and we raced over to the lake valley.

My headache was still pretty brutal, but the fresh air and pace of Bob’s run helped my brain clear a bit. We made it over to the lake without any issue, and we slowed our steeds down by the spot where we normally gathered clay. The only other group of dinosaurs was on the far side of the lake where the parasaur usually gathered. However, these weren’t parasaur,

they were a pair of giant brontos with necks that stretched up into the sky like roller coaster rides.

We sat on our mounts for a few moments to study the thunder lizards, but the massive creatures didn't seem to notice us, or they didn't care, and we soon got to our clay gathering.

"I'd love to tame one of them," I said as I glanced across the lake. I didn't feel confident that my *Tame* skill was strong enough to work on one and messing up would probably mean I'd be flattened into a pancake.

"We'd need to build our walls around the perimeter of our entire clearing," Trel said with a dry chuckle.

"Something to work toward," I said. "Imagine riding on top of one. We wouldn't need a tree fort, their backs are just as high, and I bet they can run as fast as the trikes."

"They are powerful," Sheela said as she scooped up clay into one of the baskets.

"They are scary," Kacerie said. "Everything on this planet is dangerous."

“You are lucky Victor saved you,” Trel scoffed. “You would have gotten--”

“I know,” the pink-haired woman interrupted. “Look, I’m really thankful to Victor, and you, and Sheela, and Galmine. I know I was a pain for the last few days, but I’m going to work to help you all survive. I was one of the best hairdressers in my city, maybe even my world, so I’m just trying to come to grips with the fact that I’m never going back home. I don’t have the skill set that you or Sheela have. I want to get better and offer something unique to you all. I want to be part of the team. Okay?”

Kacerie’s words caught Trel off guard a bit, and I saw the spider-woman’s lips pull to the side. Neither of them said anything more for a few moments, so I turned my head toward the lake to make sure nothing was sneaking up on us. It looked clear, so I grabbed a full basket from Sheela and then ordered Bob to step out of the water some so I could tie it to his saddle.

“Well, we do need grooming,” Trel finally said. “My hair is normally far more beautiful. I’ve grown used to the odor of our bodies, but we all need baths and a way to wash our clothes. It isn’t as important as a new fort, but we’ll eventually need to clean ourselves and upkeep our appearance.”

“Hmmm,” Kacerie said as she looked down at the clay she was scooping up in her hands. It covered up her forearms, and she froze for half a moment. “Huh. I think I know of something I can do.”

“What’s that?” I asked.

“Soap,” she replied. “I’ve never made it, but I know what goes into it. I bet I could figure it out.”

“You can make soap?” Trel’s voice seemed to quicken with excitement. “Really?”

“I think I can,” Kacerie said. “It’s just animal fat and lye. There must be two or three hundred pounds of fat on each of the giant dinosaurs that Victor killed. I’ll just need to heat it up to render it and then combine it with lye and maybe something for scent and texture.”

“But lye?” Trel asked urgently. “How do you make that?”

“It’s wood ash,” Kacerie said. “Like I said, I’ve never done it before, but I can try it. Too bad we don’t have any metal pots or pans, but I could probably heat the water enough in a thick clay pot. I think I just need to put some wood ash in water, heat it, and then take the lye off the top. Then I’ll mix it with the rendered animal fat and whatever we come up with for scent.”

“This is of interest to me,” Trel said quickly. “I will help you make it.”

“Yeah,” Kacerie said as she nodded to herself. “I think I can do it. Then we can all clean ourselves, our clothes, and our cookware. It will help keep us from getting sick.”

“Ohhh,” Trel moaned. “I can’t wait. A bath with soap and warm water sounds divine. Did I tell you that I am a duchess? I had ten servants who would wash my body and then massage the finest oils into my skin.” Trel let out a long sigh and then looked off into the distance as if she was daydreaming.

“I like the idea, Kacerie,” I said, “but we have to build the fort walls first before you start playing with it.”

“Got it,” she agreed, but her beautiful face now wore a wide grin. “Once we have soap, I’d be able to shave that beard off you, and I can cut everyone’s hair.”

“You’d be able to shave this off?” I asked as I ran my hand through my beard. I didn’t really have access to a mirror, so I didn’t know exactly how long it had gotten.

“Yes, shave his beard off,” Trel said. “He has a handsome face. I want

to see it all the time.”

“These stone knives are really sharp,” Kacerie said as she reached into the pocket of her jeans and pulled one of the blades out. “I could easily shave your face with it. I’ve done it with thousands of my male clients.”

“Sounds good,” I said. “Kacerie, I think we are starting to figure out a role for you, and it is an important one. Sanitation is critical for survival.”

“Yeah. I think I like the idea.” The pink-haired woman smiled at me again, and her pale blue eyes glittered. We stared at each other for a few moments, and then she looked back down to the clay basket.

“Speaking of baths and showering,” I said as I grabbed another basket and tied it onto Bob’s back. “Trel, we need to get water to the camp. How do we do it?”

“Not from here,” she said as she gestured to the lake. “It’s too far away. Didn’t you say that the river where you normally get water is closer?”

“Yeah,” I said. “It’s still about a mile away though. The lake is like three.”

“And it’s also over a hill,” Trel said. “I’d like to see the river. I think

the flowing water could help us.”

“Help us move the water a mile?” I asked.

“Yeah,” she replied as she tapped on her lips with her black finger.

“There is no energy in this lake, it moves, but not quickly. The river should have energy that we might be able to use. I’ll need to see it again. Just so you know, I have no idea about plumbing, but I am a genius, so I’m sure I’ll figure out something.”

“I think you will,” I said as I grabbed the last basket. “Let’s get the jugs filled up and then go--” my words caught in my throat as I spotted movement on the other side of the lake. It took me half a second to realize what was going on, but as soon as I did, I let out a gasp of surprise.

“Do you see those raptors?” I asked as I nodded across the lake.

“Where?” Trel and Kacerie asked.

“They are in the trees,” Sheela hissed and the other two women gasped.

It was difficult to see them since the dinos had feathers that were black and dark red, but once I identified the movements, it was easier to pick them out of the jungle. There was a group of maybe eight of them I could see, and

they appeared to be sneaking up on the two brontos.

“Why do they think they can attack those big long-necked ones?” Trel asked. “It looks like they are much smaller.”

“They are bigger than the green feathered dinos,” I whispered, and then I saw one of the raptors emerge from the trees.

My estimation of its size had been spot on. The green deinonychus raptors were about as large as Great Danes, and maybe weighed two-hundred pounds, but these new raptors were nearly as big as a horse, and even though they were all the way on the other side of the lake, it was obvious that their claws were longer than my arm.

“I still don’t see how they expect to take down the--”

“Let’s get out of the valley and get water from the river,” I interrupted Trel as I commanded my gang of dinos to exit the water. It was too far away for my *Eye-Q* to identify the new species of raptors, but I was getting a sinking feeling in my stomach, and my instinct was telling me I didn’t want to be anywhere close to the battle that was about to go down.

“They are so small though,” Trel said. “The big ones will just step on them.”

“Maybe, but let’s fucking go.” My voice was a growl now, maybe because of my headache, and Trel nodded before she got up in the saddle with me.

Then the raptors attacked the brontos, and I couldn’t look away.

I had first counted eight raptors hiding in the jungle, but over twenty poured out of the trees and sprinted toward the two brontos. The massive dinos were standing hip deep on the shore of the lake and didn’t seem to notice their attackers at first, but that changed as soon as the raptor in the point position reached the long tail of the smaller bronto I guessed was the female. She let out a bellow that seemed to shake the ground when the raptor latched onto her tail, and the male swung around his head to face the wave of attackers.

Half of the raptors were swimming through the water toward the long-necked dinos, but the other half were on the shore and seemed to be angling around to get on the other side. I guessed this was to keep the brontos from trying to get back on the shore easily, but I wasn’t quite sure.

“The larger one is--” Sheela started to say, but her words were interrupted by what sounded like a cannon blast going off. The male

brontosaurus had flicked his massive tail around like a whip, and one of the swimming raptors evaporated into a puff of red mist.

The female emulated her mate's movement with her tail, and the first raptor that had latched on was launched into the trees of the jungle some two hundred yards away. There were four others to take his place though, and I saw their front arm claws hook into her legs like ice climbing axes. The female tried to stomp them off, but the water was making her movements slow, and the raptors brought their foot claws into play. They raked their feet against her legs and both brontos let out frustrated screams.

The male swung his head down low across the female's feet and knocked two of the raptors off, but a new group was now attaching to his legs, and he began to move like a bucking horse. The raptors wouldn't come free though, and that whole side of the turquoise lake began to turn dark red with gallons of brontosaurus blood.

The female flicked her tail again, and she killed one of the raptors on the shore, it wasn't one of the fuckers digging into her leg though, and she let out another screech of agony.

The male bronto tried to swipe his head across his mate's legs again,

but another group of raptors had swam to the spot, and two of them jumped out of the water and caught onto his face when he brought it lower. They stuck like spider-monkeys, and the male thrashed his head around violently in an attempt to dislodge them. One of the raptors flew off, but it looked like he took one of the bronto's eyeballs out, and the larger dino's face leaked out gallons of blood. It fell from his skull like a waterfall, and it sprayed across the lake like a sprinkler when he shook his head.

The battle was horrific, and I shook my aching head to bring myself back to what really mattered: getting the fuck out of here as soon as we could.

"Let's go," I said as I commanded the team of dinos to race away from our side of the lake. I doubted that these new larger raptors cared about us since the two brontos would probably feed them for a bit, but it was obvious that this pack was way more dangerous than the group of carnos I'd just killed.

These raptors were going to finish eating those brontos, and then they were going to need more to consume. Unfortunately, our camp was only three-ish miles from the lake, and we had seven rotting carnotaurus bodies

near us.

We needed our new walls built yesterday.

I led our dinos into the jungle first and then pushed them up the hill. The path was a bit longer than I would have liked, but I didn't want to risk the raptors seeing us going up the open hill. We were soon cresting the slope that led into our valley, and I directed our caravan of dinos down along the river until we reached the spot where the massive rotting tree was overturned.

"This is where we normally get water when we don't need clay," I explained to Trel after we had arrived.

"And our fort is that way?" she asked as she pointed into the trees.

"Yeah," I confirmed.

"Does it go uphill, or downhill or...?"

"It varies," Sheela said. "I would say that our fort is actually at a higher elevation."

"Hmmm," Trel said as she looked at the river, the shore, and the closest trees.

"Let's get the jugs filled," I said as I commanded Bob to sit on the

shore.

All the other dinos had filled up on water at the lake, but I set Tom, Nicole, and Katie to guard us against anything that might come at us from the trees. I doubted the larger raptors saw us, but I wanted to be careful. There were no second chances in Dinosaurland.

Sheela, Kacerie and I filled up the water while Trel surveyed the river and shore. We had six jugs to fill, but it only took a half a minute with the three of us.

“You just take it from the river?” Trel asked, and I saw her blink her eyes to use her *Eye-Q*.

“Yeah,” I replied. “We try to go as deep as we can, but it’s just like the lake.”

“The lake is even worse. We are lucky that no one has gotten sick. I haven’t been paying attention to our water issue. Ugh.”

“I know,” I said. “But this is the best we can do.”

“I can make a filter. Maybe something that has three or four stages.”

Trel bit her lip and nodded her head as she thought about the problem. “We

can get rocks, sand, finer sand, and I'll make a funnel with clay that will be mounted on a tripod pedestal. We can pour it into the top of the funnel and then the water will drip down into a secondary jug. Then we can take that jug of water and pour it into a system of finer sand and gravel. It should get rid of most of the pathogens and viruses."

"When I first got here, I worried that I couldn't drink anything without boiling it."

"Hmmm," Trel mused. "I don't think we'll have to do that. I need to play around with the clay, but I should be able to make an ultra-fine filter with the material. It can have pores so small that only water molecules can fit through. It will take a long time to filter, but I can make a tank with a lid on top of it. Then we can pour the second stage water into the vat and drink that water when it slowly drips into a final tank."

"Add this to the list after building the fort," I sighed.

"We have been lucky so far," Trel said with a sigh. "All it takes is an animal shitting upstream a few minutes before you gather water, and we will all become sick."

"Good point," I said.

“We should have some clay left over after we start the fires in the logs,” Trel continued. “I’ll play around with some funnel designs. It won’t take that much time, even if we just get the first two stages of filters working in the next few days, it will be much safer. If we want to grow our tribe, we’ll have to be able to provide clean water consistently.”

“Yeah, I agree,” I said. “And that’s also why we need the aqueduct. What do you think? Can you build one?”

“I know how to build a pump that will use the momentum of the river to push water uphill,” she said as she gestured up to the trees. “My first thought is to have the pipes go up into the trees and then flow through the canopy to us. The advantage would be that it will be harder for dinosaurs to break, but the disadvantage is that the wind twists the branches, and we might have pipes break. I think the best option would be to make pipes and bury them deep in the ground.”

“So a mile of pipes?” Kacerie said. “That sounds like a lot of work. We’d make them out of clay?”

“Yeah,” Trel said with a shrug. “I’d have to figure out how to craft some sort of template, and we would have to figure out a way to join each

pipe piece together. I'll need some sort of glue, or each piece will need to be finely crafted so that they fit together snugly. I'll also have to create check valves so we can inspect the line."

"Check valves?" I asked with concern. This was beginning to sound really complicated, but I was the one that wanted the work done.

"Yeah," Trel huffed. "Let's say we lay a mile of the clay pipe, and for some reason, the water stops coming. I won't know where the issue is, so we'll have to either find a spot on the ground that is flooded with water, or we'll have to dig up the full mile again. If I put a check valve every hundred or so feet, I can just open it and see if water comes out. If it does, then I know the break happened closer to our fort, and I can save a lot of time repairing."

"Damn Trel," I said with awe. "You are so smart."

"I am a genius," she said with a laugh. "I've told you many times. Of course, I don't quite know how we would effectively build these pipes. We will need a lot of them and the check valves. I can have the filters figured out in a few days, but getting the water from the river to our camp will be much harder. I haven't even talked about making the pump. It needs to be made out of metal, or I need to figure out how to make a clay that can take a lot of

pressure. That is the only way it will work.”

“But there is a way?” I asked.

“Yeah,” she said.

“Then we’ll figure it out. I have faith in us.”

“I do too.” Trel smiled at me, and for half a moment I forgot about the horse-sized raptors butchering brontos only three miles away from us.

“Is there anything we can take from the shore here that will allow you to make the filter when you return?” Sheela asked pragmatically, and Trel and I blinked as we looked away from each other.

“Ohh, grab some of those larger leaves growing out of the water on the shore.” Trel pointed at what looked like lily pads, only they were the size of my chest. “Then put some of the larger sand inside of three of them. Bah, I’m excited about the idea so I’ll help you collect some.”

The spider-woman leapt down from Bob’s back and then frantically began scooping up sand from the shore of the river. Sheela and Kacerie grabbed more of the lily pads, but I stayed on top of Bob and gave another glance around the river shore. The trikes didn’t seem to be alarmed by

anything, but I still wanted to be able to race away if we needed to, and the new breed of super raptors was making me paranoid.

“I need some finer sand,” Trel said as she held up her leaf. “Sheela, have you seen any sand better than this? The stuff at the lake was actually coarser, so that’s not going to work.”

“The ocean to our west or south has fine sand,” the cat-woman replied. “I journeyed there once. It is about six miles away.”

“I can make a trip and grab some,” I said. “As soon as the walls are built.”

“Hmmm, you and your walls,” Trel said.

“Uhhh. Didn’t you just see those raptors butcher two giant dinosaurs? We need walls right fucking now.”

“Yeah,” she said with a sigh. “Alright. I suppose this will be the best I can do for now. Let’s take it back to the camp, and I’ll puzzle through it for a few hours. Then we’ll burn the logs and start on the wall tomorrow.”

“Alright,” I said. “Everyone mount up and let’s get back home.”

Trel climbed up Bob’s back easily, and then Sheela and Kacerie

jumped on Hope. We rode home beside the massive fallen redwood and cut between the ferns. I realized that the forest of super tall trees was actually a blessing. Yeah, our valley was protected by hills on all four sides, but anyone standing on the south, east, and west peaks wouldn't be able to see our camp clearing because of the redwoods. The north side was the only place where we were really exposed, but it also meant that we'd have a good location for a guard station one day.

We made it back to our camp without a problem, and Galmine untied the door so we could all enter. My head was still killing me, but there was plenty of work to be done, and I couldn't afford to take any more time off. Trel and Galmine busied themselves with a new water filter funnel design, so I had to figure out what the rest of the team was going to do.

The pair of dead carnos by the work site needed to be moved, so I made Bob and Sonny work together to roll them around our camp and to the far west side of the clearing. It took them about an hour to do, but the commands I sent to them were making my head throb, so I didn't want to risk ordering them to work quicker.

The sun was getting low in the sky by the time I got the second pair of

carno corpses pushed over to the west side, and my brain felt like it had rolled around in sandpaper. I really wanted to sleep, but Sheela and Kacerie had started setting up the clay on the logs inside our wall, and I wanted to assist them.

“You need to rest,” Sheela said as I dropped down from the ladder and grabbed the adze.

“I’ll be fine, we need to get it all ready to go so we can hit it as soon as the sun--” the words caught in my throat as I caught sight of something in the air to our north. The sun was casting an orange glow to the sky, and a thick plume of smoke was visible on the other side of the hill.

“Ahh, shit,” I said, and both Kacerie and Sheela turned.

“It looks far away,” Sheela said.

“It’s a fire?” Kacerie asked.

“Yeah,” I replied, and it felt like my shoulders were each carrying a hundred pounds.

“Isn’t that jungle over there?” the pink-haired woman asked. “How is jungle burning?”

Sheela and I glanced at each other, and then I turned to Kacerie. “There are other survivors, and we think they might be attacking each other.”

“Shit,” Kacerie said as her blue eyes widened. “What do we do?”

“We need to build the wall,” I said as I brought my fingers up to rub my temples.

“But if they are using fire, can’t they burn through our wall? Do you know who these people are? Do you know why they are attacking each other?” Her voice sounded a bit frantic, but I could understand her concerns.

“We can only do what we can do,” I said as I returned my eyes to the distant plume of smoke. “We’ll build our wall, we’ll build our defenses, and we’ll try to save others that come. Eventually, we are going to have a run in with another tribe. I’m just hoping it will lead to peace.”

“But... what if it doesn’t? What if they attack us?” she asked.

“I’m willing to live and let live,” I said, “and I’ll strive to cooperate with others, but if they attack us, then we’ll kill them.”

Chapter 15

I slept like a dead man that night. I told my friends to wake me up for my shift, or at least in between shifts so I could instruct the trikes to keep watch, but morning seemed to arrive the second Galmine wrapped her warm arms around me. In fact, when I woke up, everyone else was out of the hut working already.

We needed to take down another sixty trees, but we also had to begin pushing the prepared vertical logs into the ground. The night of full rest did wonders for my headache, so I was able to command the parasaur to dig out and push down the trees, while the trikes worked to help lift up and steady the logs we had already cut and drilled with our fire technique. Their horns worked perfectly as support beams, and I figured out a great way to hold the heavy logs vertically so that Trel could drive her dowels through the holes we'd burnt out.

In some ways, our new method that used dowels instead of cordage was way easier. The dowels were simpler to pass up to Trel when she was standing on the top of the logs, and we didn't experience any actual rope

breakage from strands accidentally wound incorrectly. While Trel hammered the top dowels into the holes with a hardened log, I did the same to the bottom pieces with my own makeshift hammer. We quickly had ten logs erected, and I realized we were moving much faster than I had thought.

While Trel and I worked on the wall, Sheela and Kacerie chopped the fire lines in the trees that the parasaur brought down. It meant that our two teams were working some three hundred yards or so apart, but I sent one of the trikes over to them as protection since Trel and I only needed two to help with our wall.

The whole day we worked, we kept our eyes on the distant smoke to the north.

I'd resisted the urge to ride Bob up the hill and see what was going on. I knew what I would see: the jungle on fire in the distance and little evidence of any real danger close to us. I knew the sight wouldn't do anything to alleviate my fears, so I had to focus on the only task which would, and that was building the improved wall.

Breakfast, lunch, and dinner was a hunk of carnotaurus. The meat wasn't as good as the orange bird, but it was a thankful break, and I took all

the dinos for a quick drink after we ate our midday meal. The water helped their performance significantly, but I noticed that the parasaur were starting to lose a bit of weight. On the flip side, they were also looking pretty muscular, and I wondered if there was a better balance between exercise and rest. I was probably pushing them too hard, but there would be plenty of time for them to rest as soon as the wall was built.

We just needed a few more days.

“This is going faster than I expected,” Trel said when we finished putting our fiftieth log up. “We only have ten more with holes that we can put up today.”

“Ugh, so burning the holes for the dowels is our new bottleneck?” I asked.

“Yeah,” she replied as she lowered herself down the wall on her spider legs. “I didn’t plan for the trikes when I first made my estimate. I have an idea though.”

“I like your ideas,” I said as I gestured for her to step into my arms and kiss me.

“Hmmm,” she sighed after we had kissed. “I like your lips. Yes, I have

decided that I'm glad I didn't kill you."

"You just decided that now?" I chuckled. "Speaking of that, where is the raptor corpse you needed for you--"

"It is behind the hut, wrapped up in my webbing," she said. "My poison is somewhat like acid. It has destroyed all the bacteria and is liquefying the meat and bones. Also, it isn't just my brood. It is yours too, sweet Victor."

"Uhh, yeah," I said as I smiled at the beautiful woman. I actually wanted to ask her how she produced the silk she used for her clothes, but I figured it could wait until tonight. "Let's talk about the logs though, since that is a pressing issue, and our brood really isn't."

"Ahhh, Victor," she tisked. "You still do not think I will give birth to our children?"

"I'm willing to try as much as you want to," I said. "But I know different species can't breed. Sorry, Trel. I love you, but I just don't think we can--"

"Shhhh," she said as she covered my lips with her finger. "Just let me take care of everything. It is my job. Honestly, you aren't even supposed to

be alive right now, so I don't want you to worry about it."

"Uhhh. Yeah. Okay. I guess. Soooooooo about those logs? We have a bottleneck."

"We can be done the day after tomorrow if we take a risk and burn the holes in the group we have waiting to be processed in the forest. Pulling them inside of the fort is limiting us to thirty."

"What is the worst that can happen?" I asked.

"One of the holes doesn't burn correctly, but the last two batches have been fine, and we haven't needed to make any nightly adjustments. Even if one or two burn incorrectly, we'll still save time. We can just push down more trees."

"What else bad can happen?" I asked.

"The forest can catch on fire," Trel said with a shrug. "Again, we've been fine for multiple days using the fire to do our top and bottom cuts. I don't think we'll have an issue, and we'll have the wall built the day after tomorrow. We could get it done even faster if you wanted to burn it during the day."

“No,” I said. “Not during the day. Let’s burn at night. Okay, you’ve convinced me. We’ll burn the top and bottom cuts as well as the holes tonight. It means we’ve got four hours of work to do in an hour before the sun sets, and I need to take the dinos for another drink. I’ll leave the trikes here with you, Kacerie and Sheela, and then make a second trip while a trike and the parasaurs guard you.”

“I’m sure we’ll be fine without your dinosaurs for a few minutes,” Trel said.

“Nope,” I replied. “Remember those raptors? I’m not going to feel safe until our wall is built. Also, we need to talk about the door when I get back.”

“I’ve got some ideas for that,” Trel said. “We’ll talk when you get back.”

Trel and I rode on Nicole’s horns to where Sheela and Kacerie worked. We updated them on our plans to burn the holes in the trees as we also cut the lines, and I gathered up the dinos to head for more water.

“Victor, can I accompany you?” Sheela asked as Nicole lowered her head so that Trel and I could get off her horns.

“Of course,” I said as I commanded Bob to kneel so I could mount

him. The cat-woman climbed up to the saddle, wrapped her arms around my waist, and then we set off toward the river.

The trip to the water was quick, but I kept my attention on the ground and thought about digging up a long trench to lay down a clay water pipe. It was going to take a lot of work, and even thinking about the job was making me exhausted.

For first, then we could work on everything else. Running water wasn't going to matter if carnotaurus and raptors attacked us.

"I suppose we should have brought some water jugs to fill up," I said to Sheela once we made it to the river and my team of dinos started drinking. I'd left Tom and Katie at the work site, and had brought Nicole, Sonny, Cher, and Hope in addition to Bob.

"We have six more jugs full," Sheela whispered into my ear. She hadn't let go of my stomach even though we weren't running.

"I'm just paranoid," I said.

"But we are alive," Sheela said. "That may be the reason why."

"Yeah," I said as I closed my eyes. Her breath was hot against my ear,

and I leaned back into her embrace. I half expected her to let go and put some space between us, but she just seemed to hug me tighter, and I felt her face lay against my shoulder.

“It seems you like hugging me,” I whispered, and I could feel my heart start to race. We’d talked a bunch about our relationship already, but I knew that the loophole for us being together involved me training to fight a battle against a husband that I would never meet.

Sheela didn’t answer. She just let out a long breath and moved her hands up more so she was touching my chest.

“I haven’t been able to train with you,” I whispered. “I will after the wall is built.”

Sheela didn’t speak. Instead, the beautiful blonde woman began to purr as if she actually was a cat. The motion caused my spine and chest to vibrate pleasantly, and I felt my erection straining against my pants.

“I feel like you might have changed your mind,” I whispered, but Sheela didn’t answer.

What had changed since the last time we spoke? Was it me commanding my team of dinos to defend our camp against the seven carnos?

Was it one of the decisions I'd made about building the camp? I didn't know for sure, but it seemed obvious that Sheela's affection had overwhelmed her desire for me to train and fight her husband.

Or maybe I was reading the situation wrong.

Either way, I decided to find out.

I commanded Bob to leave the water, and he walked to the shore of the river. My other team of dinos followed my commands to set up a guarded perimeter around us. Bob knelt on the ground so that we could get down, but Sheela's face was still pressed into my shoulder. She hadn't said anything yet, so I wondered if she guessed what I was going to do next.

"Sheela, get down from Bob," I whispered after I'd turned my mouth into her blonde hair.

"Yes, Victor," she replied, and then she sighed as she released her hug and slid down Bob's side.

She stood on the soft grass a few paces from Bob's leg, and I jumped down so that we faced each other. Her golden eyes met mine, and I could see her nipples pressing up against the tattered material of her bikini top.

“Sheela, take off your clothes,” I said, and her eyes opened a bit wider.

“Yes, Victor,” she whispered as she reached around her back. Her bra fell clear of her chest, and she moved her hands so she covered her nipples.

“Your bottom?” I asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Yes, Victor.” Her eyes didn’t move from mine as she took her hands away from her magnificent breasts.

She slid her fingers down to her bikini bottom and shook her hips from side to side a bit so that she could shimmy out of it. Then she stood with her hands at her sides as her chest heaved with excited breaths.

“You are beautiful,” I whispered, and a small smile spread across her lips.

“Thank you,” she lowered her eyes at last, and a slight blush came to her cheeks.

“Lay down on the grass,” I said.

“Yes, Victor,” she replied and then she followed my orders.

I took a few steps so that I was standing at her feet. Her hair was spread out beneath her head like the dawn light coming from the sun, and her

feline eyes seemed to burn with an internal fire.

Her body was trembling, but I knew it wasn't from the cold.

"Spread open your legs," I said.

"Yes, Victor," she replied, and then her muscular legs opened to show me her womanhood. I'd have expected her to be really hairy down there, but her light layer of fur seemed to recede a bit so that the skin around her lips was smooth.

I knelt down between her open legs and lowered my face to her.

I didn't really know that much about oral sex, but Sheela had admitted she had only been with one lover, so I guessed that I'd probably blow her mind with my meager mouth skills.

I was correct.

She gasped when my tongue first touched her, but it only took half a minute for her gasps of surprise to turn into low throaty moans of pleasure. Her hands gripped my hair to pull me more into her, and her hips began to buck when I brought my fingers in to play with my tongue. Her orgasm came quicker than I expected, and her powerful legs almost ripped my head from

my shoulders when she clamped them around my neck.

“Did you like that?” I asked after her body had stopped thrashing.

“Y-y-y-yes, Victor,” she panted. Her eyes were closed now, but she bit one of her fingers and let out a long throaty moan after she finished answering my question.

I was kneeling between her legs now, and she was more than ready for me. Her eyes opened wide again when I unbuckled my belt, and she sat up a bit so that she could watch me slide into her.

Then both of us were moaning.

For a bit, Sheela and I were lost within each other. There were a million things we both needed to worry about, but the only thing I wanted to focus on was her next climax and what I needed to do to bring her there. I still wasn't that experienced with sex, but I could read the surprised expressions on her face when I did something she liked, so I just kept doing that until she reached an orgasm. I lost track of the time, or how many times she climaxed. We changed positions a few times until I had her on her knees while I entered her from behind. She really enjoyed this position, and it allowed me to grasp her hips and muscular waist while I thrust into her. She

let out a growl of ecstasy when I climaxed inside of her, and then we both collapsed on the grass exhausted.

“Victor...” she muttered into my ear as our arms wrapped around each other.

“Yeah?” I asked.

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

“I will go with you back to your home,” she said. “If we ever can go back. I will be your woman. You are the strongest man I have ever met.”

“I’d like you to come with me,” I said, “but we can stay here if you’d prefer. I just want you to be happy.”

She didn’t answer. Instead, she just kissed me with surprising passion and then moved to put her skimpy outfit back on.

“Yeah,” I moaned. “I guess we should get back. The sun is about to set.”

“Trel will be angry,” Sheela replied as she smiled at me.

“She’ll be fine. She likes you, and I don’t think she’ll mind sharing.”

“Perhaps,” Sheela said with a shrug. “Maybe I do not care if she is mad.”

“Sheela,” I gasped sarcastically. “Are you finally going to tell Trel to fuck off?”

The blonde woman let out a light laugh, and we both climbed back into Bob’s saddle.

A few minutes later, we were back at the camp. Trel and Kacerie shot us worried looks when we returned, but I waved my hands in a way that indicated I didn’t want to talk about the reason we’d been away for so long. Sheela jumped off Bob, and I left the group to guard my three friends while I rode Bob with the other two trikes to get water. The trip was uneventful, and I returned to find the team putting the last bits of clay on the logs.

“Damn, you all have gotten fast at this,” I said.

“Of course!” Trel beamed at me. “It is actually Kacerie. She isn’t as stupid as I first thought.”

“Hey!” the pink-haired woman shouted from where she put the clay on the last log.

“That’s a compliment!” Trel shouted back. “You are almost as smart as me!”

Kacerie narrowed her eyes at the spider-woman and smirked before she went back to her task.

Sheela was starting the fires on the logs, and I walked with Trel as she moved to the other side of the log.

“What about the door?” I asked as Trel handed me one of our fire making hand drills.

“I’ve got a good solution,” she said as we both set our drills next to the tinder in the chopped out nook of the log. “The logs we are using for the wall are six feet or so in diameter, and my circle design will ensure that they all support each other. However, the door will become the weak part. I’d like to use ten foot wide vertical posts for the entryway. We’ll cut notches in the bottom and then lay a horizontal support beam in the ground--”

“In addition to the dirt?” I asked as I spun the drill in my hand. All of us were practically magicians with the drills by now, and my tinder began smoking in less than ten seconds of me spinning the rod in my hand.

“Yes,” she replied. “It might not be needed, but I want to ensure any

horizontal pressure on the door archway will be transmitted to the rest of the wall. I'll do the same thing at the top of the twin posts. I'll take another large log and then set it horizontally between them as a brace. The idea is that any pressure on the walls will continue to push through the entire structure instead of being halted by the gap in the door. That will give it strength."

"Sounds like you are a genius," I said as I grinned at her.

"Of course!" she giggled before she blew on her tinder. A few seconds later and our wood was burning, so we lit some branches on fire and moved to the next section while we continued our conversation.

"What about the door?" I asked. "You just told me about the arch. We need something to keep dinos, and maybe other people, from coming inside. Are you going to do another horizontally hinged door like you did for our first wall?"

"No. That isn't going to work anymore." Trel frowned. "The dinosaurs you have just acquired are too tall. I need to do doors that can be swung on vertical hinges. Ideally, we need two large doors so you can get even larger dinosaurs inside."

"Can you make it big enough to fit one of those brontos in?" I asked.

“Oh, Victor, you are so cute sometimes. You really do think I’m a genius, don’t you?”

“Of course,” I said. “I’ll bring the dinos, you figure out how to house them. We are a team.”

“We will need one of those bronto dinosaurs to be able to raise a frame big enough to fit one inside of the door,” she said. “Or I need to build some sort of crane to lift up a log that tall. What I currently have in mind will work with some cord pulleys and your trikes as muscle. Any higher will be more difficult. Not impossible, just more difficult.”

“Got it,” I said. “So how do we build two giant doors on vertical hinges?”

“I have two ideas,” she said as we used our burning branches to light the next logs on fire. “They can both work together, but I will let you decide which we should work on first.”

“Okay,” I said as my cut caught on fire. “One idea is that we do not even bother with a door. Instead, we dig a trench around the entire fort and leave a dirt bridge leading out from our entry.”

“I’m not following you,” I said.

“Look back at our current walls,” she said as she gestured to our camp. “Imagine how hard it would be for aggressive dinos to attack us if there was a six or eight-foot trench around our wall.”

“Hmmm,” I said as I tried to imagine it. “It would be like having an extra six or eight feet of wall.”

“Exactly,” she said. “Our enemies would have to run down the slope into the trench, then climb up the slope to our walls. Meanwhile, we could rain arrows or spears down upon them.”

“If we dug the trenches too deep, wouldn’t that risk the wall posts coming out at the bottom?” I asked.

“We’d put a bit of space from the slope of the trench and the wall,” Trel said. “Maybe three feet or so. But remember that our new wall is joined by dowels. Once we have the door arch erected, there will be no way an enemy can just pull down one of the posts. Even if they dug to the root of our wall, they are all forced together with the dowels that lock between them.”

“Makes sense,” I said as we walked to the next log to burn. Both Sheela and Kacerie had moved next to us so that they could hear Trel’s plans, and we all went to work on lighting the next log ablaze.

“We’ll leave the ground alone at the door, so it makes a land bridge across the trench.”

“The design will filter any group that attacks us into one area,” Sheela said. “I like the idea.”

“Agreed,” I said as I thought through the layout. Trel was pretty much making a “moat” around our castle. And while there wouldn’t be water in the trench, leaving the land raised and leveled at the gate would give us one point where we could leverage our defenses. “What about the gate?”

“That’s a bit of a challenge,” Trel said. “Initially, I thought we might not even need a gate.”

“What?” I asked with surprise.

“We have the group of trikes,” she said as she gestured to Tom, Nicole, and Katie. “And you seem to be on a dinosaur acquiring kick, so I imagine you’ll get more. You’ve taught them how to guard us, so I thought we could just leave a pair at the opening. Nothing will get past their horns, and we’ll be able to come and go easily when you just command them to step aside.”

“Hmmm,” I said as I thought through her plan.

“I do not like the idea,” Sheela said.

“I figured you wouldn’t, and I’ve reconsidered after what I saw at the lake. Those dark raptors are monsters, so we are going to need a door, and the trikes, and maybe a secondary wall that I will have to think through. Walk over with me to the dirt here, and I’ll show you what I was thinking.”

The three of us followed Trel to the side of the burning logs. We had a pile of wood there we were using to help build the fires, and she grabbed a few smaller branches and began to lay them out on the ground.

“Two doors for the gate. Each door made of three thicker vertical posts. We’ll use the dowel method to fill in the space between them with smaller vertical posts that will only extend down half the length of the three thicker posts. Across the back, I’ll tie horizontal logs for more strength.” Trel laid out more logs as she spoke and the design made sense to me.

The design looked a bit like the letter “H” but with one extra vertical post on the side and horizontal posts tied to the face of the door pointing outside.

“How will it stay locked?” Sheela asked.

“Those three posts. We’ll dig holes that they set into. Then we’ll just

pull it up and out of the holes when we want to open it, but I'm not liking the design."

"Why not?" I asked.

"It's going to be heavy," Trel said with a shrug. "Each door will probably weigh a few hundred pounds, so I can only make it about eight feet high with posts four feet in diameter. We are going to have to muscle it up and out each time we want to leave. I might be able to craft a pulley system that uses the header of my frame, but that's only going to help a little with the weight. The issue is that you are the one leaving most often, so we can't count on dinosaur power to move them open and closed consistently."

"Do you have any other ideas?" I asked as I puzzled through the problem.

"Plenty," Trel said, "but they all need metal. Or more time. I can improve on the design in the next few months, but if you want a gate on this fort the day after tomorrow, we either have to do this heavy twin door design, or you are going to have to keep the trikes as sentries."

"Let's go with the doors first," I said. "If they become too hard to move, we'll just use the trikes, and I'll see if I can tame a few more. We'll

have to make them guard in shifts, but I can tell I'm starting to wear them all out with the building."

"I'll get to work on it tomorrow after we finish preparing the last group of fallen trees," Trel said, and we went back to work burning this batch of logs.

We finished a bit after the sun had set. I was still a bit worried about leaving all these smoldering logs burning inside of a redwood forest, but I realized I didn't have much of a choice. We needed to do this to alleviate the potential bottleneck. Trel and I could put these sixty logs up in the trench tomorrow while the parasaur pushed down the final group of fifty-ish. I felt as if I'd gotten rid of all the possible bottlenecks in our process, and the original plan of six weeks was going to take us just two more days.

We were all exhausted though. It had been a month since Sheela and I took a day off, and even our break of lovemaking at the side of the river had been an exercise. The team ate dinner in silence, and it was apparent that each of us was lost in our own thoughts.

"You are all doing a great job," I said after we finished eating and decided who would take which watch shift. "We just have two more days of

this, and then we can take a bit of a break. We probably won't ever be able to relax, but having this new fort wall up is going to give us a lot of protection and space. Then I'll get more dinosaurs and we can work on some comfort projects."

"I am looking forward to that," Trel said, as she lifted up a clay funnel to show me. It was part of the water filter design she had crafted with Galmine. "This will be ready for finer sand after we get the wall up and trenches built. Then we will have clean water."

"Looking forward to it," I said as I turned to Kacerie. "And your soap."

"Me too," the beautiful pink-haired woman smiled at me and then her eyes opened wide with surprise.

A glowing light filled her skin as if she had a spotlight aimed at her. Trel, Sheela, Galmine, and I gasped when a loud popping gun-shot sound cracked.

The light from Kacerie instantly faded and the woman let out a long exhale.

"Ahhhh," she sighed with pleasure.

“What was that?” I asked, but I already guessed the answer to my own question.

“That was my *Lance* recharging,” she said as her eyes narrowed.

“Ahh. That’s sooner than expected?”

“Yeah,” she whispered as she turned to look at Trel. Then Kacerie turned to look at Sheela.

There was suddenly a lot of tension in the hut.

“Well...” Kacerie said as she set down her empty plate. The woman stood up gracefully and then flexed the fingers of both her hands as if she was preparing to play the piano. “I guess it’s my watch.”

“Yeah,” I said as I felt a bit of relief pour into my stomach.

“Alright, I’ll wake you up for the second one, Victor.” Kacerie smiled at me, and then she stepped out of the hut.

Trel, Sheela, and I all let out long exhales as soon as she left.

“What’s wrong?” Galmine asked as she picked up Kacerie’s plate.

“For half a moment there, I thought I’d have to bite her,” Trel whispered.

“Same,” Sheela whispered.

“Huh? Who?” Galmine looked around the hut with confusion, and Jinx let out a chirp.

“Kacerie,” I whispered even softer than Trel and Sheela. “She just got her powers back, and we were worried that she might use them on us.”

“Really?” Galmine’s emerald eyes were open wide. “But Kacerie is so nice, she’s been so helpful. I wasn’t worried at all.”

The three of us laughed, and then we all leaned down so we were laying on my sleeping mat.

“Galmine, don’t ever change,” I said. “I love how you are.”

“Don’t worry, Victor,” she said as she crawled over to me. “I will be who I am for you always.”

The gray-skinned woman came into my arms and lay on top of me while Trel moved over to lie against my back. I turned across the fire to look at Sheela, and then I gestured for her to join us. The blonde woman nodded and stepped around the flame to lay opposite of Trel. The three of them cuddled near me made the hut incredibly hot, but I didn’t care. I’d have to

wake up for my watch shift in a few hours, and the feel of my lovers' warm bodies against me while I slept was worth all the work I'd done so far in Dinosaurland.

Chapter 16

The next morning went exactly as I planned. The holes we burned in the logs were all perfect, save for one that Trel said had burned a bit too wide. We ended up using the remainder of our clay to fill the gap between it and the dowel and still used it for the wall.

Scavengers that had feasted on the corpses of the waring birds for the last few days moved onto the corpses of the carnos. The pile of those bodies was all the way on the other side of the clearing though, so we didn't have to worry about any of the small dinosaurs being near us. I'd actually thought about burying the carno bodies, but it would have been a giant hole, and taken time away from pushing down the trees. I had to balance us getting the wall built with the threat of scavengers.

I still worried about the new species of raptors, and the dark smoke in the distant north. The smoke plumed in the air less than it had yesterday, and I finally took Hope up to the nearest crest of the north hill with Sheela. We got off the parasaur some thirty feet from the top of the ridge and crawled the rest of the way to the top of the slope so that we wouldn't accidentally be

seen. It really didn't matter though, the smoke was significant, but it seemed to be thirty or maybe forty miles away. It looked like it was near the coast of the beach, but it was too hard to tell.

"A wooden wall isn't going to stop flames," I said to Sheela as we watched the distant smoke.

"No," she said. "Perhaps we can use some of the clay to fortify the walls?"

"That's a good idea," I said. "It would be like stucco. I'll add it to the list, but I'm worried we are going to run out of clay from our spot. We could use mud, but I don't think it will be as strong."

"We could also use stone," Sheela suggested. "We'll need to find a quarry and cut some."

"That's a lot more work," I said, "but we might have to do that. Let's go back to camp and work with what we have. The new walls will stop those raptors and keep our dinos safe. We can finish tomorrow if we push hard enough today."

We rode Hope back down to our camp and continued to build. The parasaur pushed down more trees, Sheela and Kacerie chopped the branches

off and set the cuts for the burns. Trel and I used Katie and Nicole to lift up the logs in the wall while we hammered in the connecting dowels. We'd all become efficient at our tasks, and we'd ended up raising forty-four logs before it was time for lunch.

The women took a break inside the smaller fort while I took the dinos to get their lunch drink. The trip was quick, and I returned to find them cooking our second to last chunk of carnotaurus. We'd be good for tonight, but tomorrow I'd have to get the wall up and also hunt for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Trel and I finished erecting all the available logs a few hours after lunch. It was around the time the parasaur pushed down the last tree we thought we would need. The wall was about three-fourths built, and it looked all sorts of badass. The posts we'd sunk into the trenches didn't wiggle at all when I had Tom do a test lean into them, and they were a good fifteen feet tall. We ended up finishing our fort work for that day a few hours ahead of schedule, and I started to feel like everything was falling right into place.

Then I remembered that we needed to make another clay run.

"I will go with you," Sheela said.

“Me too,” Kacerie said.

“It might be dangerous,” I said. “I’m just going to take Bob, get in, and then get out as fast as I can.”

“That is why you need help,” Sheela said in a way that made me think I wasn’t going to be able to argue with her.

“You’ll need me also,” Kacerie said. “If you do get attacked, I can take out the first two raptors in an instant.”

“Yeah,” I said. “But we only have two spots on the sadd--”

“We can cram together,” Kacerie said. “It only takes us ten minutes or so to ride there. We can all sit on each other’s laps.”

“Take Kacerie,” Trel urged. “I’ll stay here and work on the stand for our filters. Just be quick, or Galmine might worry.”

“Ahh, just Galmine will worry?” I winked at her, and she gave me a quick kiss before she handed us the leaf baskets.

Sheela and Kacerie put the baskets on Bob’s saddle, and then we all climbed on. Kacerie ended up sitting between Sheela and me, but there was just enough room on the saddle for all three of us. I turned the parasaur

around toward the northeast side of our valley, ordered the rest of my dinosaur pets to patrol around the fort, and then set off toward the lake.

We made it to the other valley without issue, but I paused near the top of the ridge so that we could carefully study the lake. The water in the main part of the lake was no longer the beautiful turquoise, it was now a dirty rust color that almost made it to the smaller finger lakes closest to us. The area where we got our clay was clear of dinosaurs, but there must have been thirty of the dark red and black raptors lounging on the beach beside the two carcasses of the brontos. Each of them was half eaten, and I was thankful the wind was blowing from the south so that we couldn't smell the corpses.

"Sheela, what do you think?" I asked.

"They look lethargic," the cat-woman said. "Half of them are resting and the other half are rutting together. I doubt that they will be looking over to where the clay is, but even if they do see us, I doubt they will give chase because of the ample food they already have."

"Okay," I said. "Here is the plan: We'll ride directly down there and I'll have Bob crouch near the clay. Kacerie, you are going to stay on his back while Sheela and I scoop. You'll keep an eye out around us and then tie the

baskets when we give them to you. Everyone got it?”

“Yes, Victor,” they said in unison, and then I commanded Bob to run down to the side of the finger where the clay was.

We took the direct route that led down the hill without putting us in the jungle. It meant that the raptors could see us if they bothered to look over in this direction, but I kept my eyes glued to the group across the lake, and none of them seemed to notice us.

Bob skidded to a stop right next to the clay, and I jumped off his back the moment he lowered himself. Sheela and I started flinging clay into the baskets five seconds later, but I kept glancing up toward the other side of the lake.

“I’ll watch them, just go!” Kacerie hissed, and I turned my head back down so that I could focus on putting as much clay in the basket as possible.

As soon as my first one was full, I heaved it up and ran the fifteen feet back to Bob. Kacerie helped me set it on the back part of his saddle, and I sprinted back to the clay while Sheela lifted hers up to Kacerie.

My arms were burning from scooping so fast, but I ignored the pain and forced myself to scoop the clay faster. My second basket was soon full,

and I ran it over to Kacerie as Sheela took her second over. We each only had one more to do, and I felt a bit of relief fill my stomach. We were going to be able to get away. Then tomorrow the wall would be built, and we could wait a few days before coming back here.

Then I heard a screech drift toward us from the other side of the lake.

“Shit!” Kacerie hissed.

I didn’t bother looking up, I needed four more scoops to fill up the basket, and I got them done as Kacerie whispered to us.

“They see us! Shit! Go! Go! Hurry!”

Sheela was already dashing back to Bob, and I followed right behind her as soon as I put my last handful of clay in the basket. Kacerie was still trying to tie the fourth basket down, but she gave up and grabbed Sheela’s before taking mine. As soon as I could, I jumped back up into my seat and then turned to face the other side of the lake. There were a group of four raptors sprinting around the lake’s edge, and they were letting out angry squawks that cut through the still valley air.

“Tie them down!” I growled as I glanced over to see Sheela and Kacerie struggling with the baskets.

“I’m trying!” the pink-haired woman hissed frantically. “If you go now, we’ll lose them!”

“Fuck!” I growled as I turned back to the raptors. It took about a minute for me to push Bob around the lake, and I guessed that the four raptors chasing us could go just as fast.

Maybe even faster since they didn’t have three people riding on their backs.

“Come on!”

“Go!” Sheela and Kacerie shouted in unison, and I commanded Bob to speed away. My big friend didn’t need much encouragement, and he tore away from the shore of the lake as if his ass was on fire. We sprinted up the hill and then wrapped around into our jungle quickly, but I still heard the sounds of the raptors screaming behind us.

We reached the first river, and I debated my options as I wiped the wind-sting from my eyes. I knew our pursuers were fast, but I wondered how well they could track by smell. If I took Bob straight back to our camp, would the massive raptors be able to follow us? That would be a nightmare since I didn’t think I’d be able to win a fight with four of them and keep all my dinos

alive. The battle could set us back a few days.

It could even mean that the entire pack learned of our camp, and then it would just be a matter of time before they killed us.

Instead of heading straight back, I could push through the river a bit, take it downstream, go in and out of it a bit, and hope the raptors lost Bob's scent. The risk with the plan was that they could just catch up to us, and that would also be a tough battle. Thankfully, Kacerie had her two *Lances* ready, and Sheela had her *Critical Strike*, but it would still leave one of the fuckers fighting against Bob, and I didn't think my big buddy would get out of that unscathed.

But it was still the least risky of our options, so I decided to go with it.

I pushed him into the river and urged him to plow through it as fast as he could. I didn't know if the parasaurus understood exactly how my plan was supposed to work, but he took to swimming with the current faster than I thought he would, and we were quickly away from the spot where we normally forded the water.

The walls of a ravine closed in around us as Bob swam downstream, and I strained my ears to hear the sound of the chasing raptors.

“They are getting closer!” Sheela hissed, and I cursed under my breath. I didn’t see any way we could get out of the river in the next two hundred yards, so I was now betting on the raptors not thinking we went into the water.

“Kacerie, get your *Lance* ready,” I said.

“I’m ready,” she said over the roar of the water. We all gasped when Bob’s head briefly disappeared under the waves of the river, but he popped back up a few seconds later, and then let out a loud toot of distress.

“Shhh! Bob! Come on, man!” I doubted that the raptors could hear him toot over the water, but I didn’t want to risk it.

I just needed him to keep swimming for a few minutes, get past the walls of the ravine, and then we could run on the shore for a bit.

A wave surged over a boulder and soaked my shirt, but none of the water got on Kacerie and Sheela. I glanced back to make sure that the baskets were okay, and it looked like the water wasn’t getting close to them.

We waited silently while Bob swam with the current, and I prayed the raptors wouldn’t figure out where we went and chase after us.

“I think we have lost them,” Sheela said after what felt like ten minutes, and I let out a sigh of relief.

The river fed out of the ravine, and we came to a spot where Bob could get onto the shore. I steered him out of the water and then ran him down the east side of the river for about a mile. I actually went about a quarter mile past the spot where the fallen redwood tree was, but then I doubled backed into the river, and then let him get a drink before I pushed him back to camp.

I dropped Sheela and Kacerie with the clay at our workstation in the forest and then commanded the trikes to come patrol the surrounding area. As soon as Tom, Nicole, and Katie were in place, I ran Bob back to our fort and then ran inside to talk to Trel. She was getting her clay funnel on top of a tripod of long poles of three inch diameter wood, but she turned to me with a questioning look.

“We were seen by the raptors,” I said. “They followed us into this valley, but we lost them in the river.”

“Ugh,” Trel sighed.

“Yeah,” I said. “We need to finish the wall tonight, or we might not have a tomorrow.”

Chapter 17

“Are you sure they’ll keep searching for us?” Trel asked me as we both walked out of the fort and got onto Bob.

“No,” I said. “They might give up and go back into the lake valley so they can just eat the rest of the two brontos, but four of the fuckers chased us at least two miles, and they wouldn’t have done that unless they were interested in hunting us down.”

“Even if we start burning the logs right now, it will still take six or so hours for them to finish,” Trel said before I commanded Bob to run back to the work site.

“We have to make it go faster,” I said as soon as we reached the site. “How do we do it?”

“Ugh,” she groaned as we got off Bob and jogged over to where Kacerie and Sheela were setting the clay. “There is a way, but it’s risky. Also, aren’t you worried about potential enemies seeing the smoke?”

“We’ve got two or three hours before sunset,” I said. “I’m more worried about the raptors. What’s this other way?”

“The sap,” Trel said as she pointed to one of the closest giant redwoods. “It will burn quick and hot. If we can get the fire started with it, and then add some slowly as it burns, I think we might push the timetable up. We won’t be able to do it with all the logs, but if we do it with twenty, then we can work them into the walls while the others burn. Then we’ll save some time.”

“Victor, do you really wish to work out here once darkness falls?” Sheela asked. “The raptors could sneak up on us then.”

“I’m worried about that, of course,” I said. “But if they find our camp tonight, they are going to do some damage to our dinos, then we won’t be able to build tomorrow. This needs to happen now. Are you three with me?”

“Of course,” Sheela said with a quick nod.

“Yep! Let’s get it done,” Kacerie said.

“You are a slave driver,” Trel moaned, “but life will be more relaxed with the wall up. Then you can pay more attention to me instead of worrying about getting attacked. I will work through the night if needed.”

“We need a way to grab this sap,” I said.

“Someone needs to collect it quickly,” Trel said. “And they can’t touch it. Since they won’t be able to bring their hands close to the fire. We might need to collect it with a stick or something.”

“I will go get a plate,” Sheela said. “Then I will ride around on Hope, get as much as I can, and return. Which logs should we burn first?”

“These,” Trel said as she gestured to the stack. “We’ll start on the others first, but they’ll be done last.”

We went to work with a frantic energy. Sheela jumped on Hope and darted away while Kacerie continued to lay clay. Trel and I began to burn the logs after Kacerie, and the pink-haired woman managed to stay ahead of us since we had to set up the fire for all the holes and vertical cuts.

Sheela returned some half hour later with a surprisingly massive glob of sap sitting on one of our plates. It was about skull size, and I saw that she had used one of our other plates to scrape it off the trees and onto her platter. Trel showed her how to place it on the log, and then we carefully set it afire. The sap burned far hotter than I expected and we actually had to take a step back from the log because of the heat.

It also produced a thick plume of black smoke.

“You sure you want to do this?” Trel asked me.

“Too late now,” I said as I stepped back more from the foul smelling fire. “The sun is almost down, so maybe no one will notice. Let’s keep moving.”

“You got it,” Trel said. She and Sheela went to work on the first batch of trees, and I continued on the original plan of lighting the remaining ones.

The sun was just a sliver of orange on top of the western mountains when we finished lighting all the fires. It meant that anyone looking in our direction would have only seen the smoke for less than an hour.

“Okay, we are in luck,” Trel said when I circled back to her and Sheela. “This is burning much faster than I thought. We’ll be ready with this first batch of logs in a few minutes.”

“That’s great!” I said as I commanded the parasaurs to approach us and get ready.

“Sheela is going to get more sap and put it on the rest so that we speed it all up,” Trel continued. “I know how you hate bottlenecks. I think we’ll be able to get the logs in the trench with zero downtime.”

“Trel, you are amazing,” I said.

“Oh I know,” she laughed. “But I wouldn’t be this brilliant if you weren’t always pushing me to design and build new things. Sheela, Kacerie, and Galmine also help.”

“Are you actually giving me credit for something?” Kacerie snickered.

“If you want to make me happy, you’ll have some soap made tomorrow.”

“Oh, I’ll get right on that.” Kacerie gestured to the pile of flaming logs and rolled her bright eyes.

“Good!” Trel said as she clapped her hands together. “Have I told you before that I am a duchess? I need to have regular baths.”

“Sometimes I can’t tell if you are joking or not,” Kacerie sighed. “But yeah, I’m looking forward to making some soap. Tomorrow or the next day.”

“That log looks ready,” I said as I pointed to one of the first ones Sheela had put sap on. “It’s still smoking, but let’s get it over to the trikes.”

Sonny followed my orders and rolled the log over to the trench. It stopped smoking by the time it got to the wall, and he was able to position it

in a way so that Katie and Nicole could get their horns under it. Then the trikes lifted it up, and Trel and I went to work hammering our dowels into it.

The next log was ready as soon as we were done with the first, and the rest of the night blurred into an almost endless process of hammering in dowels, fetching logs, lifting, and hammering in more dowels.

The darkness became thick, but my eyes adjusted to the light of the twin moons, and we kept working.

My shoulders started to shake with exhaustion, but I forced myself to keep hammering, and we kept working.

My mouth burned with hunger, and I could sense that the other three women were skating on the edge of exhaustion, but I told them all to drink water, and we kept working.

Then we were setting in the thick logs that would make our new fort's entry, and I realized we were almost done.

"The one on the top will be tricky," Trel said as she blinked and rubbed her fingers across her sleepy eyes.

"I'll have Bob and Sonny lift it up," I said as I ordered the exhausted

dinos to move over to the last thick log. I'd been thinking about how to do it and figured that it would be best if the parasaur pushed it onto the trike's lowered horns first. Then I had the trikes lift up their heads together so they brought the log up like a moving shelf. Then the two parasaur would roll the log the rest of the way up the vertical pillars before it slid into place at the top.

The plan worked flawlessly, and we all let out a long sigh of accomplishment.

"Now the doors," Trel said as she pointed to the rectangular frames she had already crafted.

"Sheela, let's lift them in place," I said, and we both moved to the first door. We were both beyond exhausted, but we managed to muscle the first one into place together. We hadn't dug out the holes for the posts to slide into yet, but the door looked like it would work. We moved the next one into place, and then Trel asked us to secure them with four logs that braced the whole ordeal.

"Is that it?" Kacerie asked as soon as we had pushed the last brace up.

"Yeah," Trel said. "That's it."

My vision flashed, and I blinked open my *Eye-Q*. *Structures* now said “3”. It was good progress, but I wondered what our camp would look like when it said “10” or “100”.

“Good job, team,” I said as relief flooded my stomach. “Now we’ve got about an acre and a half of space. We can build a farm, more huts, a--”

“Bathhouse,” Trel interrupted me.

“Yeah, sure. I feel a lot safer now. I hope you all do too.”

“Yes,” Sheela said. “Thank you for pushing us, Victor. We are all safe because of you.” The cat-woman smiled at me, and I gestured for her to come closer so I could hug her. She did so, and our lips met for a lasting kiss.

“Hey, when did that happen?” Trel asked. “And where is my kiss?”

“Come here,” I said and the obsidian-haired beauty stepped into my chest so she could kiss me.

“Well, I’ve just got hugs,” Kacerie said as she opened her arms to me. “You have saved my life a bunch, and I feel like we really have a chance.”

“Get in here,” I said to her as Trel and Sheela stepped aside for the pink-haired woman. Kacerie threw her arms around me and then surprised

me by actually grabbing my chin and kissing me. It was a quick movement, but her tongue explored the inside of my mouth a bit before she broke it off.

My *Eye-Q* flashed again, but I didn't need to check it to know what it would say. Kacerie had been a bit of a rocky start, but she was committed to me now. I was hoping our friendship would develop more, but first, I wanted to sleep for two days.

"The dinos need water, but they will have to wait until tomorrow morning," I said. "Plan for tomorrow is just hunting and getting water. It will be a light day. Cool?"

The three women agreed, and we walked the hundred feet back toward the entrance of our smaller camp.

We'd almost made it there when half a dozen beams of light filled up the night sky in all directions.

"Shit," I said as I turned my head around in an attempt to judge how far away all the pillars of light were. They were all different colors. Red, blue, orange, pink, green, and purple, but there was a pillar of light to our east that was silver in color.

This one looked as if it was maybe only a mile away.

“Victor, I know what you are thinking,” Trel groaned.

“We need to go,” I said as I commanded the exhausted dinosaurs to stand.

“No! It’s late! You’ve been working all night! There will be more of them.”

“How hard would this have been without Kacerie?” I asked as I gestured to the wall. “We have big plans. We need more people. I need to make a run for it.”

“I will go with you,” Sheela said.

“So will I,” Kacerie said. “You saved me. I want to save someone else.”

“Fine!” Trel stomped her foot. “I’ll go--”

“You don’t have to,” I said as I mounted up on Bob.

“Maybe I want to? You’ll get into trouble without me.”

“Alright. Grab your spear. Kacerie and Sheela on Hope. Trel’s with me. Those four raptors might have gone back to the lake valley, but they could be around. Also, the people that just arrived on Dinosaurland would be

confused so they could attack us first and ask questions later. Get ready to fight. Kacerie, you use your *Lance* first, then Sheela will use her *Critical Strike*, and then I'll bring Tom and Bob into play, we'll leave Nicole and Katie guarding the door. Got it?"

The three women nodded, and then I helped Trel get into the seat behind me. We made the quick trip to the new gate, jumped off our dinos, lifted the doors away, and then climbed back on our mounts. I commanded Katie and Nicole to stand abreast at the entryway and guard, and then we rode as quickly as we could toward the silver pillar of light.

I prayed that we weren't too late, but I also prayed that we'd be able to help the new arrivals without any sort of violence.

I pushed Bob into the lead of our pack as we darted through the massive redwoods. The wind carried the scent of pine needles, mud, and new dew. I'd never felt as free as I did when riding on the back of a dinosaur, but this quick recovery mission was bringing me a sensation I hadn't felt since I'd saved Kacerie. It was as if a part of my soul was shouting a war cry, and I kind of hoped we would run into something that we could fight. It was a ridiculous thought for sure, but I was in command of five massive dinosaurs,

and three capable warrior women.

I wasn't exhausted anymore.

I wanted to flex my muscles and claim these new arrivals for my tribe. I wanted to dominate and control my territory. I wanted to prove that I wasn't just Victor Shelby, dog-catcher and loser. I wanted to be Victor Shelby, King of Dinosaurland.

Shadows danced across the ground of the forest. The canopy of trees couldn't keep all the moon and starlight out. The silver beam of light was getting closer, but I didn't quite know how long it would last. With Kacerie, it had vanished just as soon as she stepped away from it, but I hadn't paid attention during my own arrival.

Then the light vanished, and I let out a curse. I still had a guess as to where it was located, but it was going to be a bit harder finding the person in the darkness.

Then I heard the shriek up ahead, and I gritted my teeth.

"Go, Bob!" I shouted. The parasaur let out a long low toot that sounded like a Viking war horn, and I heard Hope, Sonny, and Cher echo with their own long toots. Bob pushed his head down lower, raised his tail a bit, and

Trel let out a yell of surprise as the parasaur kicked it up to ludicrous speed.

We hit the river where we would normally cross to head to the lake. I saw two figures with their backs to us and the rushing water. The moonlight illuminated them perfectly, but my eyes couldn't really focus on the arrivals because I saw four dark shapes herding them. It was the four raptor fuckers that had chased us out of the lake valley.

I was close enough for my Eye-Q to identify them as *Utahraptor ostrommaysorum*, but then Bob was plowing through the water, and we were almost on the other side of the shore.

"Kacerie!" I shouted, and the sound of two sonic booms hit my ears a second after twin beams of light disintegrated the pair of raptors on the left. A moment after the blinding flash illuminated the river, I heard Sheela grunt, and I felt the air hiss as a spear flew by my head. The weapon slammed into the head of the leftmost raptor still standing, and it tumbled backward. That just left one more, but the big asshole wasn't prepared for a charging parasaur. The *Utahraptor* might have been the size of a horse, but Bob was as big as two elephants standing in a line, and the darkly feathered bastard screeched when my pal clipped him with his shoulder. The raptor went down,

and Trel's spear hit him right in the stomach as we passed.

I'd already sent the "plow" command to Tom, and the trike had his horns leveled. I twisted my head around so that I could see the battle, but there really wasn't one. The raptor tried to get up, but Tom's horns shish kabobed him. Raptor number four let out a screech, but it turned into a death rattle almost instantly, and his body twitched as Tom raised his head to display the featured trophy. I sent him the command to get rid of it, and the trike twisted his head to the side violently. The raptor was flung free and finished its death twitches on the ground some fifty feet away.

I turned Bob around and commanded the dinos to walk toward the two figures. A half moment later we stood around them, and I got a good look at their features.

They were both women as far as I could tell. The one on the left caught my eyes first. She looked almost human, except that she floated two feet off the floor as if she was some sort of psychic superhero powering up for battle. Her hair also floated upward as if she was actually swimming in liquid instead of air. The hair was long and the color of mercury with bright white highlights. Her skin was also a gleaming color, like the white gold or silver of

a new piece of jewelry. Her eyes were red, but it was hard to tell their exact shade in the light of the moon. She was barefoot, and her human-looking feet pointed toward the ground as she floated. The silver-woman wore a tight-fitting suit with the stomach and the underside of her boobs exposed. Her stomach was seriously toned, and I had no doubt that she could keep up with Sheela in a sit-up contest.

The other woman looked less human. Her skin seemed to be a pale green, with scales, and multicolored gemstones on her forehead and the bridge of her nose. Her face appeared human; other than the scales, gemstones, and large reptilian eyes. Her mouth had full lips, her cheekbones were elevated and rounded, and her neck arched as if she was used to posing for magazine covers. She stood on two slender legs that also looked human in shape, and her graceful arms were also of similar human proportion. Her ears were long and pointed like a fantasy elf, and she wore dangly earrings on each one. She wore a tight-fitting pair of what resembled black yoga pants, and a frilly jacket with a deep V-neck to show off nice looking breasts. She did have a long mane of green hair that fell down one shoulder, and dozens of flowers were braided into the length.

Were the overlords behind Dinosaurland only abducting beautiful women? Yeah, they were alien, but I couldn't deny that they were both crazy hot. Even the one with scales and reptile eyes held my interest. She could have easily have been a supermodel wearing cosplay makeup.

The two women stared at me, the dinosaurs, and my friends for a few seconds. I couldn't quite read their alien facial expressions, but it looked as if they were terrified, or confused, or in shock.

I knew the feeling.

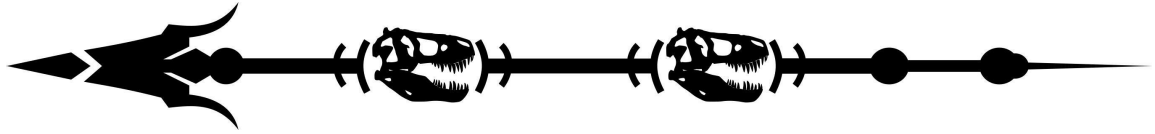
I opened my mouth to speak, but the floating silver women spoke first.

"Who are you?" she said as she pointed at me. Her voice had a beautiful ethereal quality as if she was singing every word into a cave, but only recording and playing back the last whispers of the echo.

"I'm Victor. Come with me if you want to live." I realized that my voice totally sounded like Arnold Schwarzenegger, but that was okay.

I was becoming a badass.

End of book 2.



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