

CHAPTER 3

MISSION M01080

Normally I would have made idle banter, chatting with the two Earth girls and finding out who they were, where they were from and why their souls were abducted like mine by aliens. But the landscape, the scenery – every last minute detail of this amazing place had me mesmerized. I stared as I slowly floated towards the entrance at the top of the tower of the grand citadel. Some of the framework supporting the entire city, or the entire continent ship for that matter, had to be made of something that was thousands of times stronger than the strongest formula steel from Earth. There were pillars that were only a foot thick supporting gigantic structures that were the size of the largest buildings in any city where I'm from. It looked impossible, and beautifully designed. The symmetry and complexity would have taken hundreds of years to study, but I knew it was a product of the minds of the knights, whose thought patterns, trillions of times faster than any human ever to live, could hold any number of thoughts in perfect focus at any one time for any length of time. That, plus the ability to manipulate matter, made for some very good engineers.

I could feel the crystals resonating with millions of different frequencies. I could not pinpoint them all, but I could single a few out every once in a while. They were the frequencies of life, and growing things, and thoughts and emotions. They were designed to strengthen the vibrations of all living things. They reflected what was put into them, and amplified it, sharpened it, or focused it depending on the crystal. These crystals grew from what was called the Heartstone, which was formed in the core of stars. From there, the knights trained them with the power of their thoughts, and fed them, and nourished them to the shapes and sizes that they would become.

And I was seeing all of this with eyes one billion times more sensitive than those of humans. I could see light in spectrums humans didn't even know existed. I could pick out any of one trillion colors. I could pick out any detail in almost any range. The same went for my hearing, touch, taste, smell, and an extra sense – perhaps when humans called the sixth sense – was there as well. But it wasn't ESP, or telepathy, or any of the powers I was seeing displayed. It was sort of a warning of things to come, both good and bad. That's the best way I know how to put it. Vasserians could sense everything in existence somehow. Everything. They were blind to none of it. My human mind, however, could not yet interpret any of it.

I could see that the two girls were also stunned at the abilities of their new bodies. I could see it on their faces, even through the Vasserian qualities. Their humanity showed through in their souls, and the windows were their eyes, no matter what amazing colors they were. But they walked with the grace of supernatural beings. Every movement was dynamic. Poised, perfect. Impressive.

"I have a heart," I said. "I can feel it."

"We are speaking English," Kylla said. "But it's not really English."

"It's like an understanding of every language that ever existed," Aquilarr said. "Is this Vasserian?"

"It is," Khelben confirmed. "Vasserian is just a way to use any language you wish, perfectly and more efficiently than any native speaker ever could. It involves telepathy and empathy. Right now you're speaking Vasserian English. It's probably the most effectively you've ever communicated."

“Kind of a smart ass,” I said. “Aren’t ya?”

Khelben smiled. “Yes, I suppose by your home definition, I am a bit of that.”

I could fill thousands of books with the details of what I saw, and every astounding thing that Earth could not possess. I know we were walking at a quick pace, across landscapes, through buildings, floating, then flying when necessary, for many miles into a distant horizon. And we were still on top of one of the smallest towers of the city. We were approaching what they called the Grand Citadel, where the High Council of this particular school resided.

I think a human brain would probably have been insane within the first ten minutes, but my Vasserian brain handled it all quite well. Though I felt astonished, there was no stress in my body because of any of it. I felt powerful. All the energies of this solar system coursed through me, and I knew that they were mine to use if I knew how.

None of us spoke much on that long trip. That would come much later, and billions of light-years away.

When we entered the Grand Citadel, a massive structure the size of several large city blocks made of blueish and white crystal, there was a new individual there to meet us at the archway, stretching two thousand feet above our heads.

The man was lean and tall. Perhaps Khelben’s height — about six foot four. He had a gentle look, and was wearing the fabric-looking garments without armor. Every knight seemed to have a different version of a toga and/or tunic. His clothing was azure blue, like a vibrant tropical water. Upon his right shoulder, draped down across his chest, over his hip and up his back to connect again at the shoulder, was a *palla* as they knew it in Rome. It was a light jewel blue. Across his hips and hanging down his left leg he wore a sash of the same color. His sash and palla looked shiny, like spandex or circus clothes. I knew better than to laugh, or even stare. His exposed shoulder had the number “7” on it in white.

I *knew*, as I could with any mental reach, that this man was a living legend. Aside from already being Legion Seven, he was one of its founders. This was Actura. A Rank Six Alpha Knight of the First Home. Kas went to one knee before him, bowed her head and saluted like a roman soldier, fist to heart and then open hand up by her head.

“Hail, Actura, Lord of Spirit. Here they are,” she said.

His gentle sunset-colored eyes looked us over. As they did I saw they were slowly shifting. Fading from deep reds and oranges to blues of twilight. There was some kind of ancient wisdom there, along with terrible power, and great kindness.

“I see,” he said to me. Without looking I knew I was the only one meeting his gaze. “The High Council awaits you inside, Jared of Earth.”

I nodded. Then he and the other escorts were gone, leaving us with only Khelben.

We walked into the monumental structure, and walked for ten minutes until we stood at the far end, below hundred-foot-high walls at the top of which sat twelve Vasserians. There were eight in orange, two in red, and two in blue, one of whom was Actura. Why walk when you can bend space?

I felt very small. Looking side to side, my companions looked it too. Khelben stood at rigid attention, looking honored to be there.

The other Vasserian in blue had blood red skin, deep yellow eyes, and dark grey hair. I was reminded of artwork of demons. A transparent star hovered over his head. Actura did not have his soul star out, apparently. The red man’s name was Empiranon, and he ran this council. I also knew that one of the knights in red, a man with amber skin, silver eyes and indigo blue hair, was Amour Lauth himself, who ran the school. Those in red bore swords, though I couldn’t see them. I just knew their weapons waited in some other dimension to arrive at their summons. The sentinels, those in orange, bore shields which I could see. Their shields were hung before



their chairs, off the edge of the wall. Each one had a different crest.

All of the Council had their halos up, softly glowing and turning ever so slowly around their heads. They called them Psycho Prisms. And upon those disks of light in iridescent gold lettering was written everything anyone could ever know about those individuals. If one had the time (or was an Alpha Knight), they could read in detail the history of everyone in the room. Vasserians had nothing to hide, it seemed.

“Hail, souls from Earth,” They all said out loud at once. The room did not echo, but their voices carried a profound weight to them. I felt as if I were talking to the archangels in heaven. Maybe I was.

We raised our hands with Khelben, mimicking him. Open right hand, next to the head.

“Hail, High Council of the School of Discipline,” said Khelben.

“We bequeath upon you Mission M...” There was a pause. “01080.”

Khelben nodded. “We accept, Wise Council. With honor.”

“We do?” I blurted out. The girls looked at me in shock but their faces said they were with me.

Khelben looked at me sideways. Annoyed, perhaps somewhat horrified.

“We *do*,” he stated.

I looked up at the mighty council. “Maybe we do not,” I said.

The silence in the room put its hand around my throat, but didn’t squeeze yet.

Most of the Council was frowning. Actura had a poker face. Amour was *really* frowning. I could feel that he meant business. Like the business of ejecting our souls into deep space and not giving us a ticket back home. But, stubborn as my entire family, I wasn’t going to back down. Enough was enough.

“You agreed to come, didn’t you?” one of them said.

“Everything was explained to you, was it not?” another said.

I stepped forward, my head craned back to look up at them.

“I did,” I said. “My companions might have. But everything was *not* explained to us at all.” I frowned back. “Not even a little bit. There’s a whole lot of ‘everything’ around here, and we don’t have much of it.”

“Your life was forfeited when this opportunity came,” a girl in orange said. “If not for this...”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“We give you a chance beyond salvation of merely your body,” she continued. “You will have opportunities of great awareness, depending on how much of this your human brains can remember.”

“Rewind,” I said. “Forfeited?”

“You were contemplating suicide,” Amour Lauth said. “Six months from your time, you almost certainly would accomplish it.”

I looked slowly behind me at the others. Could Vasserians blush? Maybe not when your skin was blue, like mine. I looked back, angry. First, how had they known just how screwed up my life had become? And second, if they knew English so well, and could read minds, he surely knew that was seriously private information.

“We have no time for your self-imposed sensitivity or your moral limitations,” Lauth said. What a hardcase. “We need your aid in accomplishing a mission of great importance in the making of a destiny for an entire race. Hence the ‘M’ at the head of the mission number, which stands for *making*. Time is of import.”

It wasn’t like any of these guys ever dilly dallied anyway.

“Well, first off, Sir,” I said. “Fuck you for outing me.” I paused, expecting to be smitten into ashes, but the knights did not react. Perhaps it was like an insect insulting a human who was playing with it. What did they care? What could I do? Son of a bitch, I hated feeling this way. “Second, I hadn’t quite made up my mind yet, and third, what gives you the right? I agreed with Vashtarr, not you. And even he was vague as hell.”

“For good reason,” Actura said gently.

I stared at him with my Vasserian vision. There was something more to that guy... None of the others had Sevens anywhere on them.



“Why on God’s...” I began. “Why would you choose *us*?” I finished. “We are clearly a liability. We’re twenty steps beneath you on the evolutionary ladder, our minds are still gawking at everything we can see, we don’t know what we can do... it’s just stupid. Is it some kind of joke?” I looked down and grumbled, “This is a bad dream. It’s about the mice. I know it.”

Now Actura grinned.

“You were chosen by our high king himself, not by us,” Actura said. “His wisdom is always best.” He stood up and folded space to tesser down before us. “But if you desire to go home, I will personally summon the Chronos Reactor and send you myself.”

I eyeballed him. “You mean we can go?”

He nodded. A human gesture.

I looked back at the other two. Aquilarr was still. Kylla was shaking her head.

I looked up at the Council. Not a word. They obviously respected the hell out of Actura. He had single-handedly gone over all their heads.

“If we stay, what’s the risk?” I asked.

“Everything,” he answered. “A race could perish. You could all die.”

“And wake up?” I said.

“No,” he said. He said it deadpan. “That might or might not happen. If you die here, your souls must find their own way home. Given the distance, it would be unlikely.”

“I did it before,” I said.

“With the help of the Reactor,” he said. “Jared, there are no guarantees. It’s very risky. You need to understand the seriousness of this.”

“This dream,” I said.

Khelben turned to me like a robot.

“No,” he said.

I swallowed, though my mouth was dry. My Vasserian heartbeat was normal. Habits.

The room was quiet. I heard winds outside, heard rock growing in space. Heard every footfall outside the grand hall.

“You’ll replace us?” I said. “With more able and willing subjects.”

“No,” Actura said.

“There is no one else,” Khelben said. “You are incarnations of the true selves who normally wear those bodies. Only a perfect incarnation can assume the position. Your souls are flawless, much smaller pieces of your true selves, but you are almost exactly the same frequency. It happens only once every million years or more. On Earth, you are the only ones.”

“Why use people from Earth?” I said. “Why not get... better aliens?”

Khelben shrugged. Actura bowed his head very slightly.

“The Vashtarr would have known why,” he said. “But we do not.”

Not omnipotent, I thought. *Not omni anything maybe*.

“Correct,” Actura laughed. “That’s right.”

Damn telepathy. Doesn’t it have a mute button?

“I want to talk to Vashtarr,” I said. “Bring him here right now.”

A few of the Council actually sucked breath.

“He is very far away, on his own missions,” Actura said. “May I help?”

I peered at him. “I dunno,” I said. “Can you?”

“I am his son,” he said.

Oh. I get it now.

After a moment (for effect, not out of need for thought), I nodded. “Okay. What’s mission M01080?” I looked back at my companions. “With your permission, ladies.”

Kylla nodded. Aquilarr was frowning a bit, but nodded.

Above, Empiranon stood and said, “Mission M01080: Go to Ultraverse 9KTV9,765,099,207, Megaverse M77AG655,700,801, Universe 992,726,016,732,711. In sector VR 8978, in galaxy Z129,075,333,919 you will find the system of Muscila — a young yellow star. There abides a species the universe could see evolve further, for they have the potential.” It sounded to me like a pre-recorded speech now, like Mission Impossible (“If you should choose to accept it..”) But Empiranon went on. “They are in a state of war with a neighboring solar system. Save both species if possible, but the sentient race of Muscila must be allowed to evolve.”

“Why?” I asked.

“They have no upper limit,” he said. “Much like your species. But they stand at a precipice. Your mission is to see they survive long enough.”

“Oh. That’s all. Yeah, sure,” I joked.

“You accept. So be it.”

“Now wait,” I said, but it was too late. The Council was tessering away one by one to more important matters. Empiranon remained behind.

“Khelben Hawkstone shall be your escort,” he said. “For surely you will have questions and require guidance.”

As usual, my Vasserian brain processed everything in milliseconds.

“Don’t really trust us completely, do you?” I said.

“That is irrelevant,” Empiranon said. “As long as you accomplish the mission.” Then he tessered out as well.

I looked at Actura. He remained, looking back at me, almost making the same face I was. That *are you gonna poof out too?* face. I just had to laugh. He was way too human.

“They left before I could ask a million questions,” I said.

“You noticed that,” Khelben said.

“I have some questions,” Aquilarr said. Maybe I should call her Avaril. That was her real name. She just had Aquilarr’s body... Mmmm... There I go again...

Actura nodded. He began walking the long path out of the hall. Everyone naturally followed him like it was their own idea.

“How do we get there?” she said.

“We will arrange transport,” he said.

“It sounds far,” she said.

“For humans, it is very far,” he said. “For us, a decent span of time. But we have the means. That is why I am here today.”

“To help us?” she said.

He nodded.

“Thank you,” she said with genuine relief in her voice.

He turned his head as he was walking to meet her eyes.

“You are most welcome, Avaril.”

