

**The Ark Lords**  
**Year 3457 AD (1376 PR)**  
**Alpha Centauri System**  
**(4.4 Light Years from Earth)**

The trip back to the landing strip did not seem to take nearly as long as the journey out to the combination shrine/museum. MINIMCOM was still parked on the airfield with his landing gear extended. As they approached, he lifted his cargo hatch and lowered the ramp. Rome led the way into the ship with Rei and Virga right behind. The two women that had accompanied them also came aboard. It was quite crowded in MINIMCOM's cockpit with the five of them filing in. Rome sat down in the pilot's seat and slid the long-lost slab into MINIMCOM's data reader. The display lit up as MINIMCOM accessed the slab's contents. However, no words appeared.

"Can you read it?" Rome asked worriedly.

"Yes and no," said MINIMCOM. "I can access the internal data however it is heavily encrypted."

"Can you decrypt it?" Rei asked.

"Please!" MINIMCOM objected. "If I had feelings, I would be highly insulted! However, it might take a little while before I find the proper ciphers."

"How long?" Rome asked.

"I do not know," replied MINIMCOM. "I will tell you when I have completed the task. I assure you it will not be long."

Rome spun in the seat and looked up at Virga.

"Is this an inconvenience to you? Do you mind if we just wait here until MINIMCOM decrypts it?"

"We do not mind at all. You can take as long as you want. In fact, you may keep the slab permanently," Virga said.

Rome was confused. "We do not need to keep it," she said. "As soon as MINIMCOM decrypts it and downloads the data you can have it back."

"We do not need it back. You may have it. We will trade you for it."

Rome stood up from her seat. "Trade it for what?" she asked, her eyes narrowing.

"For him," Virga said, pointing at Rei.

"I, I, I do not understand," Rome stuttered.

Virga looked at her with a deadly serious expression. "Our planet is full of pure-bred Vuduri with a particularly strong diploid variant of the 24<sup>th</sup> chromosome. Almost all of our babies are born now with all the traits of the Onsiras. Living machines. We need to correct the genetic errors and soon or we will become the very thing we abhor. That is why we need him, his seed." She pointed at Rei's groin.

"You cannot," Rome protested.

"Oh we can," said Virga firmly. "We have determined that the only way to combat the genetic drift and push our species back toward humanity is to infuse our 24 chromosome complement with the 23 chromosome set of the mandasurte. Half-breed mosdureces, like yourself. The more primitive the better. And what could be more primitive than a living Essessoni?"

"No!" Rome said, moving over to Rei. "You cannot have him. He is mine."

The two women behind Virga stepped beside her and pulled out hand plasma projectors, aiming them directly at Rome's head.

"Perhaps I made it seem as if you had a choice in the matter," Virga responded forcefully. "Let me clarify. We *are* taking him. Your only choice is whether you wish to leave here alive or not."

"No," Rome said, pressing her back up against Rei. "*MINIMCOM*," she thought. "*Can you transport them out of here or disarm them?*"

"*No,*" replied the computer/spacecraft within Rome's head. "*The quarters are too tight to move them without risking harm to you. In addition, just outside, they have some heavy artillery aimed at me. We would sustain serious, possibly fatal, damage before I could get us out of here.*"

Rome whipped her head around and looked out the windshield. She saw row after row of white jump-suited Vuduri holding shoulder cannons, aimed directly at them.

"Rei?" Rome whimpered.

Rei looked down at his wife and draped his arms over her. "Don't I get a say in this?" he asked in English.

"No," answered Virga. "You are the only candidate we have encountered so far. Plus you have proven yourself heroic and rather brilliant. You will make an excellent genetic donor to help us right our path. Your contribution will be invaluable."

"What if I don't want to participate," Rei said. "You can't make me."

One of the two women standing next to Virga dialed up the intensity of her pistol to the maximum position. "We do not need her alive," Virga said, pointing to Rome. "As for you, we do not even need the upper half of your body. We are only after your genetic contribution. Your brain is irrelevant to us."

Rei looked at the pistols. He was familiar with their capabilities since his encounter with Estar back on Earth. He thought for a moment then opened up a channel to Rome and MINIMCOM.

"*Rome, listen to me,*" he said mentally. "*No matter what I say next, do not react. I am going to tell them I'll go with them. I want you and MINIMCOM to leave here.*"

"No!" Rome cried out loud, twisting in place and grabbing onto Rei, pressing her head into his chest.

"*Rome!*" Rei thought sternly, looking down at her. "*Just make a big show of leaving. Use a regular PPT tunnel. As soon as you are through, reverse your course and come back here in full stealth mode. I'll figure out something.*"

Rome looked up at her husband's eyes. "*I can't leave you with her. She, she wants her people to mate with you!*"

Rei put his hand to her chin. "*Rome, do you trust me?*" he asked mentally.

"*Always,*" Rome replied.

"*Then do as I say.*"

Rome lowered her eyes.

"OK," Rei said out loud. "I'll stay. I'll do what you want on one condition." He looked at Virga with a dark expression. "You promise you will let her go? Safely?"

"Of course," Virga replied. "We have no need for her nor any wish to harm her. We are just trying to save the people of our planet."

"OK, then," Rei said. He tilted Rome's chin up toward him. "I love you, sweetheart, but I cannot and will not let them hurt you. This is the only way." He kissed her lightly. Rome

grabbed the back of his head and kissed him far more passionately. She kissed him so hard he finally had to pull her off of him.

“OK, I’m going now.” Rei moved Rome off to the side. “You be good. Have a safe trip and tell Aason that I love him,” he said. He released her and added, “Oh yeah. Thank your daddy for all the flowers and vines.”

Rome looked at him, confused, as tears came streaming down her cheeks. Rei backed off and winked at her after making sure no one was looking. Rome sat down heavily in the pilot’s chair as Virga and the two now-armed guards led Rei along the corridor, past the cargo compartment and down the cargo ramp.

“Go,” Rei commanded Rome mentally. *“As soon as you are gone, circle back and wait for my signal.”*

*“I will do it, mau emir. But I am not very happy about this.”* Rome thought back.

*“Rome, have I ever let you down?”*

*“No,”* Rome replied sullenly.

*“OK then. MINIMCOM, get her out of here.”*

*“As you wish,”* replied the starship. The cargo ramp retracted and the hatch lowered forming a seal. The spaceship lifted off and veered to the left, nose rising at an ever-increasing angle. As soon as he gained sufficient altitude, MINIMCOM ignited his plasma thrusters and blasted off into space.

*“Don’t forget to come back,”* Rei said.

*“How could you even think of such a thing?”* Rome protested. Then she was gone.

Virga drove while the two armed women sat next to Rei in the back seat of the flying cart. Both took care to make sure that their weapons were out of his reach. He looked from one to the other but their expressions were inscrutable. All he knew is that both were pressing their thighs tightly against him, tighter than need be given the amount of room available to them. Rei watched as the stunning countryside, littered with the Crayola trees, flew by as they followed the outermost ring toward the southern part of the city.

In due course, his captors took Rei to the outskirts of the Vuduri city near the southern-most portion of the inhabited region. Rei knew from standard Vuduri design, this was where they placed their living quarters. To his right, the twin towers loomed off in the distance. They came to a stop in front of a long, low building. The building itself was non-descript, standard Vuduri living quarters; which is to say a cross between a row-house and a prison block. The broad, paved street in front of the housing was so wide it could almost serve as a landing strip. As they escorted Rei from the flying cart, he noticed another group of men, dressed as soldiers, holding shoulder cannons standing at the outskirts. It was not very inviting.

Virga and the two women accompanied Rei to the front door of one of the apartments. The door opened automatically as they approached. Once inside, Rei looked around. The room was unlike a standard Vuduri apartment. It actually looked reasonably comfortable with a workstation in the corner, a large bed against the far wall, a sitting area and a doorway which Rei assumed led to a refresher.

“Comfy,” Rei said in an offhanded way.

“This is to be your mating chamber,” Virga said. “We have done our best to fashion it in a manner pleasing to you.”

“You did a good job,” Rei said approvingly.

“We are to perform a test,” Virga said. “I have been selected by the Overmind as the first candidate. I am ovulating right now so it is time for you to inseminate me. Please take off your clothes.”

Rei whipped around to look at her and her two companions.

“Uh, I don’t know how much you know about the Essessoni,” he said, “but we don’t normally have sex in front of an audience.”

Virga looked confused. Her eyes took on a defocused look while she considered Rei’s statement. After a moment, she nodded and held out her hand. One of her companions gave her a plasma pistol and both of the other women left the dwelling.

“We are alone, as you requested,” Virga said, holding the gun up to Rei’s head. “You will now take your clothes off.”

“Uh, OK,” Rei said. Seeing no other option, he reluctantly unbuttoned his brown shirt and placed it on the corner of the bed. Virga stared at his chest and broad swimmer’s shoulders and her eyes widened slightly. He kicked off his shoes then unbuckled his tan pants and removed them, along with his underwear, making a neat pile along the edge of the bed.

Virga looked at him up and down and her arm trembled slightly.

“Are all Essessoni built like you?” she asked hesitantly.

“Some are, some aren’t,” Rei said without a hint of modesty. “I don’t exactly exercise regularly but my job is pretty strenuous.”

“That is not what I mean,” Virga said, looking down at his waist.

“It’s not just there. Essessoni are all-around larger, in general, if that’s what you mean,” Rei said. “It’s in the genes.”

Virga took a deep breath. “Then we have made the right choice,” she said. She removed her soft boots, first one foot then the other. While holding the ray-gun steady, she fumbled around, trying to unclasp her jumpsuit. It took a little doing, being that she could only work with one hand, but eventually her clothing fell to the floor, leaving her as naked as a jaybird. She waited a moment then a moment longer. Finally, she spoke.

“I do not see any physiological reaction,” she said, waving at Rei’s groin. “Do you not find me attractive?”

Rei nodded toward the gun. “Having a blaster pointed at your, um, head is kind of a turn-off, if you know what I mean.”

“But, but…” Virga protested.

“Look, I know what you’re thinking,” Rei said. “You’re afraid I’m going to go all Erklirte on you and you need the gun for protection.”

“Y, yes,” Virga stammered.

“Well, that’s the worst thing you can do,” Rei replied.

“Why?”

“Because look at me. I’m way bigger than you. If I decide to, I can overpower you in about eight tenths of a second, grab the gun and then you have an armed Essessoni running amok.”

“But I have guards outside,” she said. “You would not get very far.”

“Exactly,” Rei said. “So what’s the point? Just lose the gun. It isn’t going to change things between you and me one way or another.”

Virga blinked rapidly while she processed what he said. Finally, she took a deep breath and turned to press the stud on the door. One of the two women reached in and took the pistol from her.

After the door closed, Virga turned back to Rei. “Satisfied?” she asked.

“I suppose,” he said. “But I’m thinking you might not want my genes, anyway.”

“Why?” Virga asked, incredulously.

“Well, when Rome and I were captured by the Onsirar, they injected me with a copy of MASAL’s 24<sup>th</sup> chromosome. You may end up worse off than you are now.”

“You have already had a child. We know this is not an issue.”

“You’re wrong,” Rei said, holding his hands out. “I was injected *after* Aason was born. We don’t know what kind of kid we would make next.”

Virga looked away. Her head tilted down for a moment then snapped up.

“The Overmind is willing to take the chance. And I see what you are doing. You are trying to delay. Please do not make this any more difficult. I do not need to clarify the point I made earlier. You know that we can extract your genetic material in a way which is infinitely more painful. I suggest you cooperate since you do not have control.”

“You’re right,” Rei said, exhaling noisily. “I give up. What do you want me to do?”

“Get up on the bed,” Virga said. Rei complied, knowing full well that Virga was watching him as he climbed up.

After he was settled, she clambered up to take a position at the head of the bed. She flipped over on her back and spread her arms and her legs. She looked at Rei and said, “It is time to impregnate me.”

Rei looked down at her and said, “What about foreplay?”

“What is that?” Virga asked, frowning.

Rei sighed. “No wonder the Vuduri don’t like sex,” he said. “You really have no idea, do you?”

Virga raised up on her elbows. “No, I do not. Please explain.”

“Foreplay is like, it’s like getting in the mood,” he said. “It’s how you get intimate.”

“Why do you need to get ‘in the mood?’” she asked. “This is about procreation, not recreation.”

Rei just shook his head. “It’s biology. When a man is under stress, his sperm loses its motility. It decreases the likelihood that the woman will get pregnant. Most people find if you try too hard, it doesn’t work. On the other hand, if you make a man feel wanted, relaxed, things just go better.”

Virga sighed and sat upright. “What is involved?” she asked, unenthusiastically.

“There are no set rules,” Rei replied. “You talk. You make nice. You touch. Then things just start to happen.”

“What do I do?” Virga asked with uncertainty in her voice.

“I’ll start,” Rei offered. He looked into her eyes. “You have beautiful eyes,” he said huskily.

“I do?”

“Yes. As Essessoni, our eyes don’t glow. You Vuduri, the backglow from your tapetum, it’s stunning,” Rei said. “It’s mesmerizing.”

Virga allowed herself a small smile. “Go on,” she said.

“And you have a killer body.”

Virga frowned at this and recoiled slightly.

“No, no,” Rei said. “It’s a compliment. I’m saying you have a body to die for.”

Virga cocked her head and furrowed her brow. Then she raised her eyebrows and smiled. “So you do find me attractive?”

“Absolutely,” Rei said.

Virga pulled herself up and sat in a cross-legged position. “Then I will tell you, you have a beautiful body too. I have never seen anything like it. Your musculature...It is hard to describe. Vuduri men are so, so...”

“Puny?” Rei offered.

“Yes!” Virga exclaimed. “They are small, like women. But you, you are built like I always imagined a man should be constructed.”

“Sleek,” Rei said, straightening his back and puffing his chest out. “I just want you to know that I understand your predicament and I completely agree with your solution. Interbreeding with the mandasurte or Essessoni is exactly what you need.”

Virga’s smile broadened. “I am glad you agree,” she said.

Rei continued. “What’s happening on Helome is exactly what MASAL told me was his plan.”

“You spoke to MASAL?” Virga asked, in amazement. “I knew that you destroyed him but you actually met him?”

“Oh yeah,” Rei said. “Rome and I had nice chat with him before we vaporized him.”

“What did he say?”

“Exactly what is happening here. MASAL said that he designed the 24<sup>th</sup> chromosome to turn humans into living automatons. He got impatient so he started the Robot War to accelerate the change by thinning the herd.”

Virga gasped. “We had heard about this but I did not realize he admitted this plan.”

“He was quite proud of it,” Rei said. “I think he prattled on too long about it. It gave us time to launch our attack.”

Virga leaned forward. “How did you destroy him? How did you set off that volcano?”

“It was nothing,” Rei said modestly. “Rome and me, we have weapons and capabilities that nobody, I mean nobody, knows about.”

“I do not understand,” Virga said.

“In this case, we used what MINIMCOM called weaponized VIRUS units to dig down, inside of Kilauea. They burrowed down and detonated the volcano. MASAL was vaporized instantly.”

“How did you get them there?”

“I had a pouch full of them. I just sprinkled them all around then ordered them to go for it.”

Virga reached over and took his hand. “Are you saying these are the very hands that destroyed MASAL?” she asked, stroking his palm in a rather sensual way. She curled all of his fingers but one into a ball then inserted Rei’s index finger into her mouth, swirling her tongue around it.

“Yep,” Rei said. He pulled his hand away from her very gently. “By the way, I think you are starting to get the hang of foreplay,” he said.

Virga smiled.

“Now is it time to make a baby?” she asked seductively.

“Well, there is one small problem.”

“What now?” she asked, exasperation creeping into her voice.

“I understand your genetic problem. And I understand your genetic answer. You have the solution right but you are going about it all wrong.”

“How?” she asked. “Why?”

“You made a fatal error in letting Rome go.”

“What? Why?”

“When I said to her, ‘thank your daddy for all the flowers and vines’ that was a code phrase. You don’t realize it but you just declared war on all of Deucado. Mandasurte and Essessoni alike. The mandasurte don’t have much by way of weaponry but the Essessoni sure do. They may be coming back with a strike force that could level your planet.”

“No!” Virga said, straightening up on her knees. “We will defend ourselves.”

“Maybe you could,” Rei said, “or maybe your beautiful world might end up as nothing but dust soon.”

“But I did nothing wrong. We need this,” Virga moaned. “You said yourself that you understand our problem.”

“I do. But think of it this way. Even if you survive their attack, you’ve served notice that this is the last place any mandasurte wants to be. You are willing to kidnap us. As soon as Rome gets back to Deucado, Helome will be declared off-limits. Attack or no attack, you will be embargoed. That means I’m the first and last Essessoni that will ever get to come to this planet.”

Virga gasped.

Rei pressed on. “Every child born of this union will have to breed with his brothers or sisters or cousins. My genes are it. Within two generations, all the recessive elements will come out, hemophilia, mental degeneration, and all sorts of other genetic diseases. Things will get worse, not better.”

Virga’s shoulders slumped. “Clearly the Overmind has not thought this through,” she said.

“That’s kind of their M. O.,” Rei said. “To accomplish your goals, you’re going to require at least fifty donors to create the genetic diversity you need. That chance went to hell when you captured me.”

Virga clutched her chest. Her eyes went down to the bed. In a whisper, she said, “What do we do? We are doomed as a race.”

Rei reached over and lifted her chin. “Look at me,” he said. “You aren’t wrong in what you want. You are only wrong in the way you are going about it. Trust me. Kidnapping is not the right way.”

Virga stared into his eyes. “What is the right way, then?”

“You ask for volunteers,” Rei said.

“Who would volunteer?”

“Tons of people,” Rei replied. “Your planet is idyllic. I know it’s ironic that the closest star system and the closest habitable planet to Earth is even more beautiful than the Earth itself. But it’s still the truth. And the people here are beautiful too.”

Virga gave him a half-smile. Rei continued. “I’m sure there are many, many Essessoni and mandasurte who would be willing to come to Helome and interbreed to create a race of mosdurece. But only if they know they’ll be treated kindly, not kidnapped and imprisoned.”

Virga put her hand on Rei’s. “How would you accomplish this?”

“Just let me go. I’ll go back to Deucado and I promise I’ll recruit the volunteers for you. It might take a little while but once they find out how beautiful it is on this world, you’ll have plenty. But it has to be of their own free will, not by force.”

“How do I know I can trust you?”

“You know who I am, right?” Rei pointed to his chest.

“Of course.”

“Then you know about Rome and me stopping the Stareater. We put an end to the war on Deucado. We destroyed MASAL. You know I’m not just about Essessoni or Vuduri but all mankind. If you can’t trust me, who can you trust?”

She stared at Rei for a long time. A tear formed in the corner of her eye. Finally, in a quiet voice, she said, "You are right. We have no choice but to let you go."

"And that's way better than an interstellar war, right?"

Virga closed her eyes and sighed. "Yes," she answered sadly. She looked up at Rei with puppy dog eyes. "Are you sure you could not just impregnate me before you leave?" she asked.

"No," Rei said. "It's tempting but you want to do this right." He hopped off the bed and started getting dressed. "It'll work out, you'll see," he said cheerfully.

Virga sighed again then got off the bed and dressed as well.

After Rei finished with his last button, he turned to her. "Logistically, when I get back there, do you want me to look for men exclusively or do you want some women, too?" he asked.

"I suspect mostly men at first," she replied with a far off look in her eyes. "But having a few women would provide another avenue toward genetic diversity."

"You got it," Rei said. "So we're good to go?"

Virga nodded cheerlessly. She walked over to the doorway and pressed the stud to open the door. The two of them exited the residence together. The two women guards remained off to the side as Rei and Virga strode forward, past the soldiers holding the Vuduri equivalent of bazookas, their weapons lowered. When they reached the edge of the paved area, Virga guided them toward the flying cart that was parked there.

"I assume you are expecting me to return you to Deucado?" Virga inquired, her foot lightly tapping in place.

"No," Rei said, smiling. "My ride is already here." He raised his arm pointing to the space in front of them. The air shimmered. MINIMCOM appeared out of nowhere, his "roadgrader" cylinders fully extended.

Behind him, Rei heard the rustling of the armed Vuduri, raising their weapons.

"I would not do that," MINIMCOM's voice boomed from one of his EG lifters, temporarily operating as a PA speaker. **"The cannons you see extended from the front of my fuselage are wide-angle, multi-phase PPT throwers. They are capable of leveling a square kilometer in less than one second."** The fanned ends of the extensions pulsed once and began to glow an angry red. A high-pitched noise emitted from the two stalks, rising in intensity.

Virga waved her hand behind her and the soldiers lowered their weapons.

The whirring noise of the cargo ramp extending issued from the back of MINIMCOM's airframe. The sound of light footsteps turned into Rome, coming around the side of MINIMCOM.

"Rei!" she shouted as she came at him in a full sprint. She jumped up in the air and he caught her tightly as she wrapped her legs around his waist, grabbing the sides of his head. She kissed him over and over, squeezing him. After a moment, she pulled her head back and pressed her forehead against his, not saying a word. Rei smiled at her passion. When he was finally able to lower her to the ground, she grasped his hand tightly, intending to never let it go again. The two of them turned toward Virga.

"Clearly you had this planned, yes?" Virga inquired skeptically.

"Did I assume you were intelligent and would see the wisdom of the proper way? You bet," Rei admitted.

"I take it that you will be leaving now," Virga said reluctantly. "You will keep your promise?"

"Absolutely," Rei said. "I meant what I said. I just need a little time but I'm sure there will be plenty of volunteers. I'll come through for you."



“Very well,” Virga said. She looked at Rome. “Please accept my apologies for any discomfort we put you through. While our methods were improper, our intentions were most noble.” She walked up to Rei and stood on her toes and kissed him on the cheek.

“You are a lucky woman,” Virga said, turning to Rome. “Your husband is very wise and very caring.”

“Yes, he is,” Rome gushed. “*And you are all mine!*” she pointed out to Rei using their “cell-phone” link.

“*Let’s go, baby,*” Rei replied mentally, gently pulling Rome along with him, “*before she changes her mind.*”

**Read more in**  
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