



USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

ANNA
HACKETT

EON WARRIORS

CLAIM OF EON

Chapter One

There was nothing like the feeling of standing on the bridge of a powerful warship and knowing you were in charge.

“Trennin, report,” Second Commander Airen Kann-Felis said.

“All scans are clear, Second Commander,” the warrior replied.

Airen stood facing the viewscreen—the familiar, never-ending view of space ahead of her. Behind her lay the tiered bridge she knew so well, full of black-clad Eon warriors at their stations. Her war commander, Malax Dann-Jad, was dealing with diplomatic issues in his office, leaving her in command.

No doubt his new Terran mate, Wren, was with him.

Airen had walked in on the pair kissing, and more, once or twice. She’d learned to knock very loudly. It was impossible to miss the depths of Malax’s love and bond with Wren Traynor. It was a true bonding—one where his helian symbiont accepted his new mate as well. Airen touched the band around her wrist that housed her own symbiont and felt a pulse of warmth.

She had no interest in a man, mating, or bonding of any sort. She’d attempted a few relationships in the past. Her stomach churned. She’d learned very quickly it wasn’t for her. She was dedicated to her career, one in which there were very few female warriors. Her work required all her attention.

Her helian pulsed again. One day, she wanted to command her own warship. She wouldn't allow anything or anyone to interfere with that.

Although, for one fleeting second, she imagined what it would be like to have someone. Someone she trusted soul-deep.

When her belly churned again, she turned her attention back to the viewscreen.

There was a small flash of light on the screen, followed by several more. Frowning, she watched as several small, ragtag starships appeared out of nowhere.

"Second Commander," a warrior said, voice urgent. "Five intercepts in range and closing in on the *Rengard*."

Airen straightened, and studied the ships and their formation.

"Who the hell is that?" a deep voice said from behind her.

That deep, liquid voice shivered through her, and as always, she hid her violent reaction. It belonged to Sub-Captain Donovan Lennox of Earth's Space Corps.

He was one of their new Terran shipmates. Since the Traynor sisters had crashed into the Eon, attempting to get help for their planet, everything had changed. A long time ago, the Eon Empire had attempted first contact with the Terrans, but found them unruly and chaotic. Now, they had a shared enemy, and with several warriors happily mated to Terrans, the Eon Empire and Earth had a budding alliance.

That alliance included mixing their crews. Several warriors were now aboard Terran ships, and some Terrans from Space Corps were now on Eon warships.

That included this man she found very hard to ignore.

Donovan stepped up beside her, gaze on the screen. He was taller than her, with a muscular body, dark skin, and black hair he kept cut very short. Eon warriors wore their hair long, so the

shorter hair was fascinating. His skin was also so much darker than the other Terrans she'd met, and she often caught herself admiring it.

His eyes were a light brown, and he smelled...very good. By the warriors, she sometimes wished she didn't have her helian-enhanced senses.

Airen's hands curled into fists, a clawing need flooding her belly. *No*. She'd felt desire before, or at least she thought she had. Something about Donovan Lennox ignited a wild hunger she'd never, ever experienced before.

Clearing her throat, she tried not to think about the fact that they'd kissed each other senseless in a maintenance conduit a week ago. She'd told him then that it had been an error in judgment. She didn't make mistakes. She'd fought hard for everything in her life, especially her career. She would not risk it for a moment of fleeting pleasure.

Since then, Donovan had listened to her. He'd been polite, competent. The perfect colleague.

She hunched her shoulders. Apparently, she was easily dismissed. She wasn't surprised. She'd had it happen before.

"Space pirates." She focused on the task at hand. "They are usually poorly organized, but sneaky."

Alarms sounded around the bridge.

"Their weapons are hot," a warrior called out.

"Sabin?" Airen said. "Fire a warning shot."

"I'm readying the laser array," Security Commander Sabin Solann-Ath replied.

A second later, the *Rengard* rumbled quietly beneath her feet, and then the laser array fired.

The pirate ships scattered.

The *Rengard* was currently patrolling the edge of Eon space, monitoring for Kantos activity. Their shared enemy—a ravenous, destructive, insectoid species intent on invading Earth and causing problems for the Eon—had been suspiciously quiet of late.

The *Rengard* had recently helped to rescue an Eon Medical Commander and a Terran space marine who'd been on a mission to save stolen helians from the Kantos. Airen kept her expression unchanged, but inside, she felt renewed horror at knowing the Kantos were trying desperately to find a way to disrupt an Eon warrior's bond with their helian.

She'd been bonded with her helian as a child, and couldn't imagine life without it. Helians gave warriors the ability to form armor and weapons at will, enhanced their bodies, healed their injuries. Her helian had been the only living thing she'd ever been able to depend on.

Medical Commander Aydin Kann-Ath from the *Desteron* and Lieutenant Jamie Park had barely survived with their lives, but they had recovered the helians the Kantos had stolen. And they'd fallen in love and ended up mated.

"Look," Donovan said with a frown. "One of the smaller ships has broken away from the group. Port side. He's getting too close."

Get your focus back on the problem in front of you, Airen. "Sabin."

"I see it." Sabin spun and barked orders to his security team.

"Security Commander!" another warrior cried. "Someone's attempting to hack the *Rengard*'s systems."

Cren. "Block them!" Airen yelled.

Pirates were not known for their high-tech abilities. Her muscles tensed. The *Rengard* had a lot of experimental helian technology built into the ship, including a new high-tech and top-secret cloaking ability. They couldn't afford for anyone to get data on it.

“Do pirates usually take on warships?” Donovan asked.

She glanced his way. “No. They usually pick on easy prey.”

“So this isn’t usual behavior?”

“No.” She pivoted. “Dayne, make sure—”

“They got in, Second Commander!”

Airen raced over to an empty comm station. “Get them out!”

“I’m trying,” the young warrior said. “This is...not like *any* system attack I’ve seen before.”

“They’re copying data,” Sabin growled.

“Sassy,” Airen barked.

A second later, a confident female voice came out of the comp station. “You rang, Second Commander?”

“Pirates have accessed our system.”

“What?” Sassy squawked.

Sassy was a helian that was bonded with some Terran technology, creating a sentient semi-artificial intelligence. One that had a unique personality all of her own.

“There!” Sassy cried seconds later. “I managed to push them out.”

On-screen, the pirate ships started to retreat. Airen released the breath she was holding.

“Bring us around,” Donovan said. “Go after the main ship. That’ll stop whoever’s giving them orders.”

It was a good idea. Airen nodded. “Do it.”

A second later, Sabin bombarded the main pirate ship with laser fire. One hit to their engines and the ship exploded.

“Second Commander,” Sassy drawled. “I’m sorry to say this, but the pirates got some data. Several quads of data. It looks like it’s a portion of our information on helian research.”

Cren. This was a disaster. Airen met Donovan’s gold-brown gaze. They both knew this was no simple pirate attack.

“Take them out,” Airen ordered.

There were several barrages of laser fire from the *Rengard*. More ships disintegrated.

But one small ship raced toward the nearby planet.

“The data is on that ship,” Sassy said.

“*Cren,*” Sabin bit out. “The ship’s out of range and in the planet’s atmosphere.”

Airen straightened. They couldn’t let the pirates get away with the data.

“Let me update Malax, then I’m going down. Sabin, you’re with me. Bring one of your security team.”

The security commander nodded.

Donovan grabbed her arm and she felt the zing all the way to her shoulder. “I’m coming, too.”

Donovan Lennox pulled his laser rifle out, checked it, then slung it over his shoulder. Next, he slid his laser pistol into the holster attached to his thigh. He was currently decked out in Space Corps’ most high-tech, black-and-white spacesuit.

“All right, let’s move,” Airen called out.

He turned. *Damn.* Looking at Airen Kann-Felis was never a hardship, but covered in her black-scale, helian armor, with her brown hair in a neat braid, looking ready to take down any badass stupid enough to get in her way, made his pulse kick up a notch. Or three.

She had the most incredible eyes. Like all Eon warriors, they were black, with strands of color through them. Her strands were green—a pale turquoise color.

Sabin Solann-Ath, and a huge warrior called Matton, followed her into the shuttle hangar. Donovan brought up the rear.

He'd been aboard the *Rengard* for almost two weeks. The Eon warship was the best ship he'd ever seen, although he missed his small, scrappy ship. The *Divergent* was full of experimental tech, and the pride of the Space Corps fleet.

Still, as much as he missed his ship, his crew, and his captain and friend, Allie Borden, he was learning a lot from the Eon warriors.

And any time spent around Airen was time he enjoyed.

He'd kissed her, and it had been a hell of a kiss, but she'd shut him down. Still, he liked the way she watched him when she thought he wasn't looking.

Something told him that not many men got under that armor of hers—and he didn't mean the black scales of her helian armor.

He knew she had reservations about tangling with someone she worked with, but he reported directly to Malax, and he wouldn't be on the *Rengard* forever. They didn't have much time to explore this thing between them.

Donovan liked women, but not for the long term. He liked their sweetness, their softness, their smiles and sighs. But everything he'd learned about love meant he'd go nowhere near it. Ever. For his sake, and for the woman's.

He boarded the sleek Eon shuttle. Sabin dropped into the pilot seat, and as soon as Donovan and the others were harnessed up, the security commander wasted no time getting them off-ship. Moments later, they zoomed off the *Rengard*.

Donovan leaned back in his seat, enjoying the acceleration. He'd been born for space. He'd known that as a little boy, with a collection of starships he'd made himself from anything he could scavenge.

"Right." Airen turned in her seat. There was nothing soft about her right now; she was all warrior.

And damn if that didn't make him want her even more. *Shut it down, Lennox.*

He suspected if Airen knew his dirty thoughts, she'd skewer him with the sword her helian could make with a simple thought.

"This planet is uninhabited by sentient life forms, but watch out for the local flora and fauna. It's a jungle world, with unpredictable weather, but none of us will have any problem breathing, so we won't need contained oxygen. We'll track the pirate, recover the stolen data, and leave."

Donovan nodded. Simple.

It wasn't long before they hit atmo and the shuttle vibrated. As they descended, he peered through the viewscreen and saw huge thunderclouds in the distance. Below them lay dense vegetation—in a wild mix of green and yellow.

They landed in a tight clearing, leaves and branches hitting the sides of the Eon shuttle.

Matton opened the side door, and a second later, they all stepped outside. A wall of humidity hit them.

It smacked into Donovan's face like a heavyweight boxer's uppercut. *Great.* He was born and raised in Chicago, and had spent his career aboard starships with regulated environmental systems. He *hated* humidity.

"The pirates landed close to here, to the northeast," Sabin said. "Based on that location, we should split up and come in from either side. Matton and I will head north."

Airen hesitated for a second. “Fine, Donovan and I will veer east.”

“Good hunting,” Sabin said.

Donovan and Airen broke into a jog, slapping at leaves and vines as they moved through the vegetation.

“Warn me if you can’t keep up,” she said.

He stared at the back of her head. “I’ll keep up.”

She set a tough pace, but it was nothing he couldn’t handle. They moved through a dense patch of yellow trees when Donovan spotted something. “Wait.”

He crouched. He saw the edge of what he thought was a footprint in the damp dirt. It was faint.

Airen studied it. “It could have come from a boot.”

He moved in a tight circle, spiraling outward while staring at the ground. A second later, he spotted another footprint. This one was deeper and clearer.

“Good spotting.” There was admiration in her voice. “That’s definitely a boot print.”

“I’m a decent tracker.” He glanced around, and spotted another footprint and some broken vines. “This way.”

They moved together. God, she moved well—fluid and in total control. He could look at her all day.

They hadn’t gone much farther when the rain hit. It started as a few big, fat droplets.

“*Cren*,” she muttered.

Yeah, they’d lose the footprints.

The heavens opened. In seconds, they were drenched. It was raining so hard that it was hard to see.

They pushed on. “Careful.” Donovan felt a tingle along his senses. “The asshole’s close.”

Her brow creased. “How do you know?”

“I feel it.”

“Feel it?” Her frown deepened.

Suddenly, there was movement behind her. Something launched at Airen out of the vines.

Donovan tackled her and they hit the mud hard. She grunted under his weight.

“Up,” she growled. “I can’t fight on my back.”

Donovan swiveled. It wasn’t a pirate. It was some sort of animal.

Rising, he noted that the creature was vaguely humanoid, but much shorter than them. Its body was covered in pale fur, and its large eyes were a blue-green color. It vaguely reminded him of a large, muscular monkey. It also had claws. Long ones.

It hissed at them.

Donovan pulled out his laser pistol. There was a flash of green from beside him and he glanced over to see Airen had formed a sword on her arm. It was long and wicked, and glowing with a faint green color.

Damn, having a helian would be pretty fucking awesome.

Still, sometimes a simple laser pistol did the trick. He fired several times, clipping the animal’s arm. The creature bolted into the leaves.

“I like the sword,” he said.

“Thanks.” She watched the vines, and when the creature didn’t reappear, her sword dissolved away. She pushed strands of her sodden hair out of her face. “I think—”

All of a sudden, a body dropped out of the tree above them and slammed into her.

“Airen!” Donovan yelled.