



Chapter One

“No.”

“Yes.”

“No.” Lieutenant Jamie Park bit out the word, her spine ramrod straight.

Her captain, Allie Borden, huffed out a breath and crossed her arms over her dark-blue Space Corps uniform. “Yes. And in case you missed it, that’s an order.”

Jamie ground her teeth together and looked out the window into space.

They were aboard the *Divergent*—a starship chock-full of experimental weapons. With Earth facing possible annihilation at the hands of the insectoid Kantos aliens—who wanted to swarm in and devour the planet’s resources and people—Earth needed every single advantage they could muster.

Space Corps had starships, and they also had trained space marines like Jamie.

And now, they also had an alliance with the Eon Empire.

The alien warriors of the Eon Empire were big and badass, and hated the Kantos as much as Terrans did—probably more.

Right now, however, Jamie wasn’t that happy about the alliance. She was *not* liking the order she’d just been given. She kept her face blank. She had a reputation as a badass, and she liked it that way.

She stared hard at the pinpricks of light outside. She couldn’t see the *Desteron*—the warship that was the pride of the Eon fleet—but she knew it was there, hovering off the *Divergent’s* starboard side.

Jamie blew out a breath. “I don’t want to be assigned to the *Desteron*.”

Allie raised a brow, tossing the end of her blonde braid over her shoulder. She was one of the best captains in Space Corps—gutsy, loyal, quick-thinking.

“As part of the alliance, some Terrans are being stationed aboard Eon ships,” Allie said. “And some warriors will be aboard Terran ships. We all need to learn from each other and strengthen our alliance to have any chance at bringing the Kantos down. It’s only going to be for a few months.”

“My marines need me,” Jamie said.

Her team was her family. The one she’d been born into sucked, so she’d been forced to find her own. Jamie had never felt any sense of belonging, not until she’d passed the hellish training to become a marine. Not until she’d fought side by side with some of the best marines she’d ever known.

“They’ll be fine,” Allie said. “You’ve trained them well.”

“I’ll go to the *Rengard*.”

Allie’s eyes narrowed. “You’re assigned to the *Desteron*. You’ll work with Caze.”

Jamie didn’t mind that part of the assignment. She liked the stoic Eon security commander. In addition to that, the big warrior was mated to Jamie’s friend and fellow space marine, Lara Traynor.

In fact, Lara and her sisters had been the spark to starting the alliance with the Eon. Well, technically Space Corps were to blame with their harebrained scheme to get the Eon’s attention, but they’d blackmailed the Traynor sisters into their plan. With the Kantos breathing down Space Corps’ neck, it had forced the bigwigs to make some desperate decisions.

First, Eve Traynor had been sent off to abduct War Commander Davion Thann-Eon. Then, Lara had been sent to steal sacred Eon jewels, and Caze Vann-Jad had been ordered to hunt her down. Finally, Wren Traynor had been sent to hijack the *Rengard*, another Eon warship, commanded by War Commander Malax Dann-Jad.

Luckily for Space Corps, the women hadn't ended up dead, and instead, were now all happily mated to their warriors.

Jamie looked back at Allie. Allie, too, was also mated to the *Desteron*'s second commander, Brack Thann-Felis.

The woman was so damn happy that it made Jamie feel slightly ill.

"Brack is coming aboard the *Divergent*," Allie said. "We need a strong person on the *Desteron*."

"Send Donovan." Allie's second in command was experienced, smart, and steady.

"He's going to the *Rengard*." Allie's eyes narrowed. "Your violent opposition to this assignment wouldn't have something to do with a certain medical commander, would it?"

Jamie forced herself not to react. "No."

"Are you sure?"

Jamie didn't respond. She'd been injured rescuing Brack and Allie from the Kantos, which had resulted in her spending a few days in Medical aboard the *Desteron*, being bossed around by Medical Commander Aydin "Arrogant Know-It-All" Kann-Ath.

She felt a skitter of unease, and again, didn't allow it to show on her face. The man had seen her at her most vulnerable and she didn't like it. Not one little bit. But more than anything, Jamie did her job.

She straightened. "I'll do as ordered, Captain."

Allie rolled her eyes. “Don’t be a pain in my ass, Jamie. Look, I know you’ll enjoy working with Caze and his security team. Select two of your marines to go with you.”

Conceding defeat, Jamie nodded and headed for the door.

“Jamie?”

She glanced back over her shoulder.

“Try to enjoy yourself,” Allie added.

Jamie wrinkled her nose. “Surrounded by big, bossy warriors?”

A smile curved Allie’s lips. “Oh, they aren’t all bad.”

God save her from women in love. Jamie flicked her fingers at Allie in a goodbye and strode out.

Medical Commander Aydin Kann-Ath lowered his gaze to the scanner resting on the bench in front of him. He studied the specimens, grunted, and took a few notes on the screen beside him.

“Good,” he said to one of his medical assistants. “But run some more molecular scans.”

The woman nodded. “Yes, Medical Commander.”

Aydin raised his head and scanned Medical. His bay was filled with top-of-the-line equipment, and his well-trained team was working efficiently. He watched other doctors at work at their stations, several assistants moving quietly around the space, monitoring research experiments. Nothing was out of place and he felt a rush of pride.

They did excellent work here. They kept the crew of the *Desteron* healthy and fighting fit. And they also did very good research.

Getting the post of the medical commander aboard the *Desteron*—the flagship of the Eon fleet—was a huge honor. It went a long way to restoring his family’s name.

His flush of pride soured. His father's father had been the first in their family to be selected to become a warrior. Aydin still remembered the day his grandfather had handed him his combat knife and told Aydin to take the path of hard work and honor.

Unlike Aydin's father. Where Aydin's grandfather had been dedicated and noble, Aydin's father had been lazy, entitled and selfish.

Renan Kann-Ath had failed warrior training, then gone down a path of drinking, partying, and dishonor. He'd ruined their family, left Aydin's mother broken, before finally dying in a back alley on their homeworld.

Aydin touched the helian symbiont on his wrist and felt a warm pulse. When he'd been selected for warrior training, his mother had cried. She'd struggled to support her children in the face of her husband's betrayal, but she had, and Aydin owed her so much. He'd bonded with his helian, attended warrior training, and then gone on to attend the best academies to study medicine and healing. He'd brought honor back to his family.

His work was everything to him. He strode across Medical and into his office. On his desk rested a screen displaying a file on Terran physiology.

He dropped into his chair and frowned.

Terrans. Messy, chaotic, and some of the most infuriating people he'd ever met.

He swiped the screen and a picture stared back at him. Black hair in a tight braid, eyes so dark they looked like old-fashioned ink used by the Eon priests and priestesses. Those shrewd eyes were tilted gently upward at the edges, and the sharp line of her jaw showed a hint of her stubbornness. He was certain her hard head was made of solid metal. Lieutenant Jamie Park was a menace.

His comp screen pinged and he swiveled to touch the controls.

It was a call from his war commander. “Davion.”

“I hope you aren’t dodging our gathering on purpose,” the war commander said.

Cren. There was a party on the bridge to welcome aboard the Terrans who’d been assigned to the *Desteron* for the foreseeable future. Aydin had lost track of the time. “On my way now.”

Davion nodded. “Don’t make me send out a search party.” The war commander’s voice was as dry as desert dust.

Aydin called out a goodbye to his team and exited Medical. His boots thumped quietly on the dark-metal floor. He was a doctor, but he was also a warrior and trained daily. He knew every part of the ship as well as he knew Medical.

When he made it to the bridge, the doors whispered open ahead of him.

The warship’s bridge had several tiered levels. The bridge crew milled around, all wearing typical black Eon uniforms—black pants tucked into boots, with a sleeveless, fitted black shirt that stretched over muscled bodies. A few were still at their posts, monitoring the consoles.

The Terrans all wore dark-blue Space Corps uniforms.

He saw Eve Traynor standing beside Davion.

The war commander’s mate wasn’t wearing a uniform anymore, since her new role was as the Terran ambassador to the Eon Empire. She was also pregnant—although it wasn’t showing yet. Aydin was very excited for the chance to monitor the first Eon-Terran pregnancy.

Beside them stood Lara Traynor and Caze. The big warrior had his arm resting on his mate’s shoulders. Then there were Brack and Allie, the second commander smiling down at his mate.

Brack. *Mated.* Aydin barely stopped himself from shaking his head. The man had always vowed that mating wasn’t for him.

Aydin had never given mating a thought. He was dedicated to his work, busy making his family proud, and didn't need a woman getting in his way.

A part of him was glad that mating rates had fallen for the Eon in recent centuries. It was rare for them to find their perfect match. Most were happy to marry partners they liked or loved, and have children with medical assistance.

Then he saw *her*.

Jamie Park scanned the party like she'd prefer to be anywhere else. Her long hair was pulled back in a tight ponytail, and she wore her Space Corps uniform like it was armor. His gaze ran down her tall, toned form.

His stomach clenched. *Cren*.

She turned her head and spotted him. She lifted her drink.

It wasn't a friendly gesture. It was a taunt. She liked to drive him to the edge. Her few days in Medical when she'd been injured had been...interesting. She'd flouted every order he'd given and proved to be the only person in the galaxy capable of making him yell.

He managed a nod and then moved over to grab a drink from a server.

"Hello," he greeted everybody.

Davion and the others smiled.

"Glad you made it," the war commander said.

"Aydin, let me introduce you to the people assigned to the *Desteron*," Allie said.

He met two male space marines and a female engineer who'd be joining the ship. He nodded politely.

"I need you all to come in to Medical for baseline medical checks," he told them.

They all nodded.

“We want to ensure your health and well-being while you’re aboard the *Desteron*.”

A loud crash made all the warriors and Terrans tense. They spun.

“Shaggy, no,” Eve yelled.

A brown-and-white canine had leaped onto the food table and Fwas currently inhaling all the party food. Eve raced over trying to tug her pet off the table. The animal woofed at her, tail wagging, like they were playing a game.

Brack shook his head. “That animal is a menace.”

Aydin smiled. Shaggy was a creature that Eve had bonded with when she and Davion had crashed on a synthetic Hunter planet, with Kantos hunting them down. The animal was fiercely loyal to his mistress, but Brack was right, Shaggy often caused havoc.

Turning his head, he spotted Jamie leaning against the far wall, scowling. He walked toward her.

“Lieutenant Park.”

She cocked her head. “Medical Commander Kann-Ath.”

“You look like you’re having an enjoyable time, as usual.”

Her glare told him that she hadn’t missed his sarcasm. And it was probably not good that he liked her glare. It seemed Aydin liked getting a reaction from this woman.

“Why did you come over here?” She sipped her drink. “To make my blood pressure spike?”

“To welcome you aboard.”

“Liar.”

He took a sip of his own drink. “As I told the other Terrans, I need you to come to Medical for a checkup.”

Her dark eyes flashed. “You poked and prodded me for days.”

“I *healed* you from critical injuries, despite your inability to follow the simplest instructions for your recovery.”

She growled.

He smiled. She was usually so cool and controlled...but not with him. “How have you healed up?”

“Fine.”

“I promise the check up will not take long.” He paused. “Maybe I’ll have a chance to determine if your stubbornness is genetic.”

“Ass,” she muttered.

“To paraphrase an Earth term Brack learned from Allie, you’re a pain in my ass.”

“I need to unpack my gear.” She brushed past him, her shoulder bumping against his. “Oh, and I’ll teach you another Earth gesture.” She lifted her hand and raised her middle finger.

Aydin fought another smile. This was extremely entertaining. “I can work out what that means without any context. So happy to have you aboard, Jamie.”