



Chapter One

He jammed the weapon under the Edull's neck, just below the black leather mask covering the alien's face.

"This is a new design of mine," Maxon Shaye drawled. "A vibrablade. Right now, the edge doesn't feel too sharp, does it?" He rammed it harder, and the Edull jerked against the bindings holding him to the chair.

The alien heaved in a breath, and it rasped through the valve in the mask. His dark eyes were wild, silver pupils glinting.

"You'll tell us everything you know," Maxon said. "Or I'll turn on my new weapon, and the vibrations will make this blade slide through your skin like it's sand."

"Maxon." The deep voice held a hint of warning.

Maxon's imperator, Magnus Rone, stood nearby, his arms crossed over his muscular chest. One of those arms was cybernetic, designed by Maxon, himself.

Magnus Rone was a cyborg. The House of Rone was filled with lethal, deadly cyborgs. Maxon didn't have any cybernetic limbs or obvious enhancements, but he was a cyborg too.

"You'll tell us everything about your *drakking* arena, and where to find Bellamy Walsh, or I'll put this through your head." Maxon moved the blade from the alien's throat, and pressed the tip of it to the Edull's temple.

The alien's raspy breathing was fast now.

"It'll slice through your skull and brain so easily—"

"Maxon," Magnus said, again.

The sharp stench of urine hit Maxon's senses. The Edull had lost control of his bladder.

Satisfied, Maxon stepped back. Tension thrummed through his body, leaving him angry, unsettled, and edgy.

"Jax, Mace, find out what he knows," Magnus ordered.

The two other cyborgs stepped out of the shadows.

Jaxer was the second in command at the House of Rone. He stood tall, with a lean, muscular body, cobalt-blue eyes, and an intricate tattoo that was more than it seemed on one arm. Mace was big, his body all hard muscle, and he looked like the brawler he'd been before he'd become a cyborg.

Maxon swiveled and strode to the door. He flexed his shoulders, trying to ease the tension.

The drakking woman had him messed up.

He slammed into the adjoining room. Two other elite cyborgs, Toren and Acton, stood near a large table. The men's heads lifted. Toren's long, blond hair drifted around his face, while Acton's face was cool, his cybernetic hands pressed to the table's surface.

Maxon knew every little thing on the table. It was all their data on the Edull's desert city of Bari Batu, and on the battle arena the metal scavengers had built.

The sand-sucking Edull built giant battle bots, and used captive slaves to drive them. A battle to the death on the arena's track.

He gritted his teeth and looked at the data. There was a map that had been obtained by another cyborg, Seren, and the House of Rone's champion gladiator, Xias. The Edull ally hadn't handed it over willingly, but Seren and Xias weren't afraid of a good fight.

The rest of the data came from Bellamy Walsh.

Maxon closed his eyes. In his head, he could hear her voice. She'd fought alongside him, as they'd battled the Edull together in the desert.

The woman from Earth had short, blonde hair, tattoos in a multitude of colors on her toned arms, and a compact body. She'd been strong, irritating, and overconfident.

Well, you're good at weapon design. Not bad at flying, either. Shame about the grumpiness.

Her words echoed in his head. The infuriating woman had *kissed* him. Maxon had felt like he'd been hit by an electric stun weapon.

Then she'd been snatched by the Edull again. Her fingers had slipped through Maxon's, her green eyes filled with rage and fear.

He slammed a fist onto the table.

Magnus strode into the room. "Maxon, are you all right?"

Blowing out a breath, Maxon shook his head. "*Drak*, no."

"You appear very emotional," Acton noted.

Maxon flicked a glance at the cyborg.

Acton had always been the most cyborg of them all. He'd only very recently started feeling emotions, after falling in love with a pretty woman from Earth called Sage. Before, Acton had been cool and emotionless, and now, he wasn't.

Drak, all his fellow cyborgs had been cool and emotionless. Rescuing all these women had changed them. Most recently, Toren had struggled to deal with a deluge of emotions, and then he'd fallen in love with Simone.

Several females had been rescued by the House of Rone. It had all started with Ever Haynes, who was now happily mated to Magnus.

Since meeting Ever, Magnus had...come to life.

The pair had a daughter now.

Things Maxon would have had, long ago, if things had been different. He slammed a door in his mind shut on those thoughts.

Bellamy was the final woman from the crew of the *Helios* ship from Earth who needed to be recovered. The ship had been attacked by Thraxian slavers, and they'd been sold to the Edull here on the desert planet of Carthago.

Other humans had been taken from a space station, and been rescued by the gladiators of the House of Galen. But Magnus had taken the lead on the *Helios* survivors.

Quinn was now mated to Jax and had become an invaluable member of the House of Rone. Jayna, Sage, Simone, and her daughter, Grace, were now all part of the House as well.

Only Bellamy remained a prisoner.

“The Edull value Bellamy’s skills,” Magnus said. “They won’t kill her. We’ll get her back.”

The woman was a mechanic, and good with her hands. She’d gained the Edull’s trust, but then she’d tried to escape and help the House of Rone. So, while they might not kill her, there was every chance they’d hurt her.

“As soon as we get intel on exactly where in the arena she is, we’ll infiltrate,” Magnus said.

Maxon grunted.

He didn’t like people much. His fellow cyborgs were fine, but people—overrun with wild emotions—couldn’t be trusted. They were generally aggravating.

Once, before he’d had his internal cyborg parts added, he’d been more social, he’d wanted...

Well, it didn’t matter what he’d wanted.

Right now, he had a driving need that he didn’t understand. All he knew was that he wanted Bellamy Walsh rescued.

After that, he wanted to get back to his weapons workshop, back to being the meticulous Weapons Master of the House of Rone, and to be left alone.

“Let go of me, you raspy-breathing asshole, or I’ll break your arm into tiny little pieces.”

Her captor dragged her across the ground, ignoring her threats.

Asshole.

As her captor pulled her out of the tunnel and into the stands of the battle arena, Bellamy Walsh heard revving engines. She winced at the bright lights. They’d kept her locked up alone in the dark for the last few days, thanks to her “uncooperative” behavior.

She hated the motherfucking Edull with every cell in her body.

She was dragged between some benches—thank God she kept cutting her hair short so they couldn’t drag her by that—and tossed to the ground in front of a group of Edull.

She saw black robes step in front of her and her stomach clenched. She looked up.

Fucking Vossol.

He was the Edull in charge of the battle arena. He was smart and cruel, and wore a red mask, unlike the other Edull, who had black ones. The pricks couldn’t breathe the air on the planet of Carthago. She wished she could rip all their stupid masks off.

“Vossol, the Earth slave does excellent work for us,” another Edull murmured. “She’s fixed several inoperable engines, added parts to bots.”

Ignoring them, Bellamy looked at the track. They were conducting a training run. Three huge battle bots were speeding around the track.

No one would die today, but on race night...

She looked back at Vossol and glared. She'd seen too many innocent people lose their lives in this place.

"She has become a little...disruptive of late," the Edull finished.

"Well," Bellamy drawled. "When you abduct and enslave people against their will, is it so surprising that they get pissed?"

The Edull kicked out at her, but she dodged.

Incandescent fury unfurled, churning inside her. In the beginning, she'd toed the line when she'd first come to the battle arena, gained their trust, and helped other captives when she could.

She'd seen so many die. Her hands clenched into fists. So many she hadn't been able to help.

Then just a few days ago, a fellow *Helios* crewmember, Simone, had come to rescue her.

Along with the House of Rone.

Cyborgs. They'd been amazing and fierce. Bellamy had fought alongside them, with a gorgeous, surly beast of a man.

Then the Edull had snatched her back.

The House of Rone would come for her again. She was sure. But months of captivity had worn the edges of her hope pretty ragged.

"She's become too problematic," Vossol rasped.

She hated that deep, hoarse voice. She glared at him again. He hadn't seen problematic yet, but she could show it to him.

"The word is that the House of Rone want her, and to destroy what's ours." The silver pupils in Vossol's dark eyes burned. "Our agents in Kor Magna have gone missing."

Bellamy fought back a smile. If there was one thing she'd learned about the Edull, it was that they liked power. They never took on a stronger opponent directly. And they hated losing.

“Those cyborgs have you shitting your pants, don’t they?” Bellamy said.

Vossol moved fast. He grabbed her by the neck and dragged her up, then slammed her against the wall.

Ow. The back of her head hit the metal wall, and she bit her tongue. She tasted blood. The Edull weren’t as physically strong as most people, but Vossol was an exception.

The alien pushed her upward until she was scrambling on her toes. His gloved fingers tightened on her neck.

“The House of Rone is asking questions, searching for a way to find her. They are also scaring off our allies and customers in the capital city.”

Bellamy tried to draw a breath but couldn’t. Black spots blotched her vision.

“Our ticket sales for the next race are down,” another Edull said.

“And some competitors have pulled bots out of the race,” another added.

“All because of you.” Vossol’s eyes felt like they were boring into her. “One useless Earth female.”

Bellamy spat at him.

His fingers clenched harder, and she choked and struggled.

Can’t. Breathe. But still, she lifted her chin and glared. She wouldn’t show him any weakness.

All her life, Bellamy had gritted her teeth and persevered. Apart from her grandmother, she’d basically been alone her entire life. Anything she’d wanted had been denied, or she’d fought for it, tooth and nail.

Her vision blurred, the lack of oxygen making her brain foggy. It wandered. To shaggy, brown-blond hair, moody gold eyes, a sexy mouth set in what she guessed was a perpetual scowl.

A big, grumpy lion.

She'd never get to see him again, and she didn't even know his name.

Vossol tossed her roughly to the floor. On her hands and knees, Bellamy dragged in air.

"If we kill her, we'll bring the wrath of the House of Rone down on us," the Edull leader said.

Good. "I'll enjoy watching those cyborgs tear you apart."

His breath rasped. "We can't kill her directly, but we can still get rid of her."

Bellamy stilled, a shiver going down her spine.

"Take her to Zulnath."

An Edull stepped forward. "The desert crime lord?"

"Yes. He's foolish enough not to care who he angers. Even if it is Magnus Rone." Vossol's eyes glowed again.

Bellamy knew he was smiling behind his red mask.

"Zulnath likes to feed people to his pack of rabid *caquls*," Vossol added.

Bellamy had no idea what a *caqul* was, but she guessed they weren't small, fluffy, and cuddly.

"Take her." Vossol waved a gloved hand.

Someone grabbed the back of Bellamy's shirt and dragged her up. As she was hauled out of the battle arena, her gut churned. *Cyborgs, if you're coming, please come soon.*