



## Chapter One

Ugh, this was really annoying.

Dr. Finley Delgado stepped out of Space Corps Headquarters and into the warm Houston day. She blinked at the sunlight, fighting her bad mood about having to leave her lab and her work.

She huffed out a breath and headed toward the crowd gathered on the lawn. A dais was set up, along with rows of chairs. The hum of conversation was loud as people talked, clearly excited.

All this pomp and circumstance to welcome some brawny alien warriors to Earth.

Finley stayed near the edge of the crowd. If she ventured much closer, she'd have to talk to someone.

All she wanted was to be in her lab, working on her project. Her really important project. Her gaze drifted over the buildings that made up Space Corps Headquarters. An old SpaceX rocket sat on display. It was a far cry from what the Space Corps fleet of starships looked like today.

Then her gaze snagged on the ruined building in the distance, partly collapsed and fenced off. Scorch marks covered the walls.

She swallowed, and remembered the attack six days ago. She'd been evacuated with the other scientists. They'd huddled together in a bomb shelter beneath the building, while a Kantos strike team had done its best to blow up Space Corps.

*The Kantos.*

Finley's chest tightened, like it had filled with concrete. The insectoid aliens had set their sights on Earth—to destroy the planet, and consume humans as food. She winced at the thought of being some bug's entree.

“This is exciting, isn’t it?” A bubbly, blonde scientist from microbiology bopped over to Finley. Her name was Aimee and the woman bopped everywhere, all perky and happy. The woman could talk, talk, and talk. Finley routinely avoided her.

“What’s exciting?” Finley asked.

Aimee rolled her big, blue eyes. “The Eon warriors arriving.” The woman bounced on her feet and Finley resisted the urge to pat the woman’s head like she was an overexcited puppy.

“I find it more inconvenient than exciting.”

“Finley,” the woman said, clearly exasperated. “They’re Eon warriors!”

Another alien species, now allied with Earth. The Eon were big and brawny, with warships and advanced technology, and were helping Earth fight the Kantos.

Finley grunted. “They’ll just be disruptive and get in my way.” She *really* wanted to get back to her lab. She glanced at the ruined building again. Her still-experimental defense weapon—the StarStorm—had been used as a last resort, and had repelled the Kantos strike team and destroyed their ship. The weapon was nowhere near finished yet, and there were bugs—the non-Kantos kind—in the targeting system. Space Corps were damn lucky they hadn’t razed Houston to the ground when they’d risked using it.

She was still working on the ground-defense part of the StarStorm, and needed to refine the targeting. Once that was done, they’d move onto orbital testing. Once she finished, Earth would have an orbital defense net that would provide security to the entire planet.

“They can help us,” Aimee insisted.

Finley made an unconvinced sound. *Right*. The Eon had advanced technology, but the warrior who’d called her prior to this trip had been big and muscular, and likely spent more time in the gym than the lab.

She wanted their tech, not their warriors.

“Well, I’m going to get to know them.” Aimee fluffed her hair.

Finley watched the move. Did hair fluffing make any difference to her attractiveness? Finley’s hair was tamed into a braid so it would stay out of her way.

“The Eon are hunky. Total fantasy material.” Aimee got a dreamy look in her eye. “Several are mated to humans now.”

*Ugh.* Finley had heard that a colleague of hers, Wren Traynor, had mated with an Eon war commander. Her sisters were mated to other warriors, as well. So strange. Wren had always seemed reasonably intelligent.

Men were mostly a waste of time, in Finley’s opinion.

“Let’s get a drink.” Aimee suggested.

“Fine.” Finley attempted to shake off her bad mood. They moved closer to the crowd, and she nodded at Admiral Linda Barber, one of the top brass at Space Corps.

Then, she spotted a crying woman and several families. A man was clutching a small child to his chest and talking with a Space Corps official dressed in a neatly-pressed uniform.

Finley froze. The mother’s sobbing drilled into Finley’s head. For a second, she was thrown back in time. To another woman’s harsh sobs. To pain, darkness, and despair.

She couldn’t breathe.

“It’s so sad,” Aimee whispered. “That family was touring HQ when the Kantos attacked. Their eighteen-year-old son died.”

Finley felt a rock lodge in her gut. She remembered another young man, a math prodigy, who’d also been killed.

All because Finley hadn’t been smart enough, fast enough, or courageous enough.

“Your weapon stopped the attack, Finley,” Aimee continued. “It saved lives.”

Just not soon enough.

Crushing guilt was a familiar sensation. She tried to drag in a breath, but it was so hard to breathe. She grabbed the elastic band she kept on her wrist and snapped it. The sting on her skin felt like a lifeline.

Then she heard a whoosh of sound overhead.

Like the rest of the gathering, she looked up and gasped.

The sleek, black shuttle had blue lights along the side. It was so streamlined and aerodynamic.

“They’re here,” Aimee said breathlessly.

The Eon shuttle was a fine piece of design. The weapons scientist in Finley wondered what weapons capabilities it had.

The starship touched down on the landing pad nearby, and moments later, the side door slid smoothly open.

Three Eon warriors disembarked.

At first glance, they all looked the same. Tall, broad shouldered, with muscular bodies clad in black uniforms. Their shirts had no sleeves, so there were lots of muscles on display.

Beside Finley, Aimee made a sound that sounded suspiciously like a moan.

The warriors all had long, brown hair, and rugged faces. Two had hair close to their shoulders, in a lighter shade of brown.

The third one...

Finley stiffened, and felt an odd, electric shock zing through her body. It was him. The one she’d met on the call.

Security Commander Sabin Solann-Ath.

His hair was a shade darker than the others—a deep, oak-brown—and slightly shorter, too. He stood a little straighter, and projected a sense of power and strength. Like he'd pick up a sword and shield and charge into battle to protect his princess.

*Jesus.* Finley shook her head. See, Eon warriors were a huge distraction. She pulled her unruly mind and body back into line.

Space Corps officials moved forward to welcome the warriors. These three men were allegedly all Eon weapons experts.

Solann-Ath lifted his head and their gazes met. Finley blinked and her heart did something weird. Maybe she was coming down with something?

His eyes were almost pure black, but they were threaded with impossibly beautiful strands of purple. She saw a flash of recognition on his face.

His gaze slid over her body and she tensed.

She knew what he saw—an almost-six-foot-tall woman, with more curves than were fashionable, wearing ordinary clothes and a lab coat.

For a horrible second, it dredged up memories of the quarterback she'd dated briefly in high school. He'd called her a beautiful Amazon, but after taking her virginity, he'd called her an unattractive giant.

She really must be coming down with something.

Finley lifted her chin and glared at the Eon warrior, then she turned away.

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So far, Sabin didn't see much about Earth to excite him.

He did appreciate the green vegetation, the clear, blue sky, and the fresh air. The sunlight was warm on his skin. He took a second to absorb it all. It made a nice change to being aboard a warship.

His helian symbiont, housed snugly in the thick band on his wrist, pulsed. The buildings in the city appeared to be an irregular mix of different construction.

Ahead, a crowd waited for them.

“Well, warriors, this is our home for the foreseeable future,” Security Commander Rade Vann-Felis said. The warrior was from the science ship, the *Solent*. The other warrior, Gadon Harann-Jad was a scientist from the Eon planet Ath.

Sabin scanned the area, taking in the partly destroyed building. His jaw tightened. That would have been from the recent attack. They had to stop the Kantos, or they’d annihilate Earth, then go after the Eon.

Several Space Corps officers, wearing navy-blue uniforms, stepped forward to greet them. But Sabin looked past them and spotted a tall woman in a white coat. She was staring at him boldly. The coat draped her magnificent figure.

Dr. Finley Delgado. He perused the woman he’d be working with, then she gave him another bold look before she looked away.

His pulse spiked.

“Welcome, I’m Admiral Linda Barber.”

Sabin focused on the woman in front of him and shook hands with the admiral. She looked to be several decades older than Sabin, her ash-colored hair in a sleek cut to her jaw line. Her brown gaze was direct and steady.

“Admiral, I’m Security Commander Sabin Solann-Ath of the *Rengard*.”

“A pleasure, Security Commander. Ambassador Thann-Eon has kept us updated on all the assistance you, your war commander, and your ship have been giving us. Thank you.”

He inclined his head. This woman was more welcoming than her scientist. “The Kantos are our shared enemy. We will do whatever is necessary to stop them.”

“Thank you. We hope your stay here is beneficial and fruitful.”

Another man moved up beside the general. He was maybe ten years older than Sabin. “I’m Dr. Eli Kemp, head of Space Corps Projects. Allow me to introduce you to the scientist in charge of the StarStorm Project, who you’ll be paired with for your time here.”

“Thank you.” Sabin noted the other warriors had been led away by other Space Corps officers. Dr. Kemp led Sabin toward Finley Delgado.

“Security Commander, meet Dr. Delgado. Finley, this is—”

“Security Commander Sabin Solann-Ath.” She held out her hand, her gaze direct. “I read the report.”

He shook it, wrapping his fingers around hers and saw the faintest flush in her cheeks. Her hand squeezed his. Her hair was golden, several shades lighter than it had appeared on their call.

Unlike some other Terran women, who were downright tiny, she was tall and strong. Her scent hit him—subtle, with a mix of spicy and sweet notes.

“I’ll leave you to it.” With a nod, Kemp left them.

“I look forward to working with you on the StarStorm weapons system,” Sabin said.

Dr. Delgado sniffed. “Security Commander, as I told you, I don’t need help.”

He cocked his head. “My species is technologically advanced compared to yours.”



Her brown eyes flashed. “I know, but we understand our planet better than you do. I would like access to your technology, but not to have you—” her gaze drifted across his chest “—poking around in my research and slowing me down.”

A spurt of anger, amplified by his helian, made Sabin grit his teeth. “Perhaps I could speed up your work.”

“I doubt that.”

“You’re very arrogant,” he said.

Her eyes widened, her voice a low hiss. “I’m the renowned expert on Terran laser weapons systems. Just because I don’t like people dictating who I work with and who gets access to my project, doesn’t mean I’m arrogant. I simply state facts, and I’m direct. I don’t—” she blew out a breath “—know how to play polite games.”

Hmm, he was starting to see another side to the scientist. Sabin didn’t mind it when people were direct and said what they meant. “I don’t like games, either.”

“I’m glad to hear that, Security Commander.”

“Call me Sabin. We’ll be working closely together, so we should dispense with the titles.”

Her nose wrinkled. “Fine. Finley.”

“Finley.” He liked her name.

More color touched her cheeks. “I hope you’ll stay out of my way while you’re here.”

Well, that cease-fire hadn’t lasted long. “I’ll do whatever is required to stop the Kantos.”

“I guess we have that goal in common, at least.” Her gaze shifted.

He saw her looking where some families were gathered. A sobbing woman was leaning into a man.

“Victims and families of the recent attack,” Finley said. “I won’t let more kids die.” She spun and stalked away, her long legs eating up the ground. She disappeared inside the building.

Well, the woman wasn’t pleasant, and she was opinionated, but he was told she was good at what she did.

And like she said, they shared a common goal.

He scanned the Space Corps grounds again.

His family had all called him before he’d left for Earth, thrilled at the honor given to him by the king of the Eon Empire.

They were a warrior family—his father and mother were both warriors. His two brothers were warriors. Sabin had never been given a choice. He was fit, athletic, and strategically minded. From birth, he’d been well-suited to becoming a warrior.

If he’d ever felt yearnings for...more, well, he never gave into them.

The scent of Finley taunted his senses. He savored it. It flared along his senses, along with the feel of the hot sun, the murmur of the crowd.

His chest tightened. No, he would not let distractions get in the way. He would stay focused on his task.

The sooner he got to work, the better.

“Security Commander?” A young Space Corps officer stood nearby. “Allow me to show you to your quarters.”

The man led Sabin into the main building. An elevator took them up several levels, and he was shown into some neat rooms—with a kitchenette in the corner, a living area, and an adjoining large bedroom and bathroom.

“We worked hard with our chef to provide food that will be pleasing to your Eon palate.”

“Thank you.”

“Anything else? I’m sure you want to rest after your journey.”

“Actually, I want to get to work.”

The man blinked.

“Can you tell me where to find Dr. Delgado’s lab?”

The man winced. “Devil Delgado.”

“Excuse me?” Sabin frowned.

“That’s what people call her. Dr. Delgado can be...difficult.”

“Is she good at her work?”

“A genius with weapons systems. And no one works harder.”

Sabin nodded. “That’s all I need to know.”

“Well, be warned. She doesn’t work well with others, and she hates people in her lab.”

“I can handle the doctor. Where’s her lab?”

“Lowest-level. Lab B5.”

“Thank you.” Sabin strode out, following the signs to the elevators and down to Finley’s lab.

He was eager to get to work.

And strangely, he was eager to cross paths with the prickly doctor again.