



Chapter One

Getting abducted by aliens really sucked.

Commander Kaira Chand strained against her bindings, but the jellylike ooze that kept her wrists and ankles glued to the bench didn't budge.

She flopped back on the hard surface. She *hated* the Kantos.

If one of those bony insectoids came in here, she'd...

Still be stuck. Still be their prisoner.

She turned her head, and her heart knocked in her chest.

She wasn't the Kantos' only prisoner. Medical Commander Thane Kann-Eon was strapped to the bench beside her. Her belly turned over. The Eon warrior was tall and muscular, with dark hair streaked prematurely with gray that only added to his good looks.

His eyes were closed, so she couldn't see his stunning black eyes threaded with strands of green. He'd been unconscious since the Kantos had beaten him during their abduction.

They'd been at the Woomera Range Complex—a weapons testing facility in the Australian desert run by the Australian Air Force. Kaira was the commander in charge of the facility's security. She blew out a breath.

She'd failed. *Big time.*

They'd been at a party to celebrate the success of the StarStorm Project. A Terran scientist, Dr. Finley Delgado, and an Eon warrior, Security Commander Sabin Solann-Ath, had gotten the orbital defense system operational. The array of laser satellites could protect Earth from large-scale Kantos attacks.

While working on the project, Finley and Sabin had fallen in love and mated.

They'd had a lot to celebrate. A party had been thrown at the Complex. One minute Eon warriors and Terrans were mingling, then the next, a small team of Kantos soldiers had attacked.

Kaira prayed everyone was okay. She'd been outside with War Commander Davion Thann-Eon and his pregnant mate Eve, and Thane, when the Kantos soldiers had appeared out of the darkness.

She shoved against her bindings again, drowning in an ugly sense of helplessness. She wasn't going to think about exactly what she and Thane had been doing when the Kantos had attacked them.

She barely knew the warrior, but they'd gone at each other like hormone-riddled teenagers.

That kiss...

She shivered.

Yep, she'd jumped Thane like a...well, definitely not like the sensible, dedicated security commander she usually was. Even with her late husband, she'd never been so out of control. She and Ryan had enjoyed a great sex life, but she'd never been so overcome by desire that she'd jumped him in public.

Kaira sighed. She felt a pang for her husband. He'd been killed two years ago in a training accident. The pain had dulled, but it could still rise up—sharp and gut-wrenching—and surprise her. She'd always miss the sweet, sexy man she'd loved.

“Thane.” No response. “*Thane.*”

God, he must be really hurt. The Kantos had put some strange substance on the helian band at his wrist, so he couldn't access his symbiont.

She knew why. The helian that the warriors were bonded with from a young age gave them increased strength, enhanced senses, and amazing abilities.

There was a clank, the door opening, and she turned her head. Their prison was a dank room with faint lighting, and it seemed to be devoid of anything else. She knew they were on a Kantos ship.

Several Kantos soldiers entered.

They kind of reminded her of a humanoid praying mantis. They had four strong, jointed legs, a brown, tough carapace, and armor plates at their shoulders. Four small, yellow eyes dominated their faces.

Another soldier sailed through the door. It was a little taller, skin grayer, and its golden pinprick eyes aimed her way.

Her stomach turned. She'd read files on the Kantos and all the different bugs they had at their disposal. She'd fought alongside Sabin to kill some of them.

She knew this was a Kantos elite.

A buzzing and clicking noise filled the room, and she knew the soldiers were communicating with each other.

The elite moved closer and studied Thane. The alien didn't appear pleased.

This is not War Commander Thann-Eon.

The creepy voice in her head made her grimace. Elites were telepathic.

"No," she said with relish.

Its head swiveled to look at her.

Examine her.

She tensed as two soldiers moved closer. One clawed hand touched her belly. She arched up, fighting against her glue-like bindings.

"Keep your bug hands off me!"

More buzzing filled the room.

You are not with child.

"What? Of course, I'm not." Realization hit. Kaira started laughing and it echoed through the room. The soldiers shifted uneasily.

"You were after Eve and Davion." Kaira laughed harder. "Your bug heads got the wrong couple."

What is your name?

She just grinned at the elite. She was so damn glad that Eve and her baby were safe.

The elite moved fast. It pressed its claws to Kaira's shoulder, digging in.

Tell me your name.

"Fuck you."

The claws sliced into her skin. She hissed. It hurt like hell.

"Tell...them."

She turned her head. Thane's eyes were open. He looked like hell.

He gave her a firm look, and she felt like she could read his mind. If they had any chance of getting out of here, they couldn't do it if they were both injured.

"Commander Kaira Chand," she bit out. "Australian Air Force."

The elite pulled back. *And you, Eon?*

"Medical Commander Thane Kann-Eon."

Of the Rengard. The elite started vibrating, rage pumping off it. There was more intense buzzing, and the soldiers shifted uneasily again.

Suddenly, the elite backhanded one soldier and sent the alien flying. It crashed to the floor.

Kaira felt no sympathy. These alien assholes were targeting Eve and Davion's child—the first Terran-Eon baby.

They could rot in hell.

The elite's eyes glowed. It scanned Kaira, then Thane.

I have no need for the two of you.

It spun on its four legs and strode out.

Oh, God. Her mouth went dry.

The other soldiers filed out, leaving them in silence.

She met Thane's gaze. "So, what happens now?"

The green in his eyes glowed. "Now, I think they'll kill us."

Just great. Her chest locked. Yes, getting abducted by aliens sucked.

This was a *cren*-cursed mess.

Thane strained against his bindings. The ooze at his wrists and ankles wriggled and flexed, but he couldn't break it. He gritted his teeth. *Cren.*

He needed to get Kaira out of here.

His mate.

Emotion stormed through Thane. He'd never, ever believed he'd mate. Even before mating became rare for the Eon, matings didn't happen in Thane's family. They'd resorted to medical intervention for procreation long before the rest of the Eon had needed it.

People said his family was cursed. There was a terrible story of a long-lost ancestor who'd killed his mate. The most horrible offense for an Eon warrior.

Well, now Thane had a beautiful, impressive Terran mate.

And he wasn't going to let the Kantos kill her.

He strained against his bindings again. He and Kaira barely knew each other. The unheard of had happened—instant mating.

He'd never heard of that happening before. Both of them had been shocked.

Now, he had to get her off this Kantos ship.

Thane kept straining, his veins and muscles popping.

"Thane, you're going to hurt yourself," she whispered furiously.

He kept pushing, keeping Kaira as his motivation.

"Thane!"

With a groan, his wrists moved through the ooze and broke free.

He sat up, shaky, hurting.

He'd watched carefully as the Kantos had used the controls on the bench to lock them in with the bindings. He moved his hands along the bench, found a bump, and pressed the button. The ooze on his ankles melted away.

He wished he could do the same to the black gunk on his helian band. He really needed access to his symbiont. But to release that, he needed to find the antidote.

He swung his legs over the side of the bench and stood. Then he staggered.

"Shit, Thane. Are you okay?"

His vision swam. The pain from his beating made it hard to breathe. Everything hurt. "I'm all right." He crossed the space between the benches. He wanted to touch her, but despite being mated, he knew he hadn't earned that right yet.

He pressed the controls and her bindings melted away. She jerked into a sitting position.

Kaira Chand was tiny compared to him, but had a taut, toned body. Her dark-brown hair was pulled back in a long tail, her skin a smooth brown he wanted to explore, and she had dark, fathomless eyes.

"Thank God." She swung her legs over the side. "Let's blow this joint."

Thane frowned. "What?" The phrase made no sense.

She grinned. "Earth saying. Let's get out of here."

He nodded. That, he could agree with. "First, I need to find the antidote." He lifted his wrist.

She eyed his helian. "Where will we find it?"

"In the ship's labs."

She blew out a breath. "Okay, let's—"

The doors to the room opened. Two soldiers entered, and when they saw Kaira and Thane free, they froze.

“Fuck,” Kaira muttered.

A fierce, protective urge rose in Thane.

He kicked at the bench he’d just freed her from. It was made of a hard substance. Not metal, but some sort of resin. He kicked it again and it cracked. On the next kick it broke and he wrenched the leg off and shoved it at Kaira. He broke a second leg off and spun, just as the soldiers rushed at them.

With a cry, Kaira dived into the fight, swinging her bench leg.

So courageous.

Thane swung his weapon. He kicked and hit the Kantos’ sharp arm. The alien swung its other arm and Thane dodged.

His hips slammed into a bench and pain rocketed through him.

With a groan, he dodged the Kantos’ next strike. He and the soldier traded blows, moving across the room.

He saw Kaira leap onto a bench. She ran along it, the soldier chasing her on the floor below.

She leaped off, and whacked the leg into the soldier’s head. The alien rocked back, looking dazed.

Thane’s soldier rammed into him. They crashed against another bench.

Thane hammered his fist into the alien’s face. It made a frantic buzzing noise.

Suddenly, Kaira leaped onto his Kantos, using her bench leg to press against the soldier’s neck. She jerked it back and the alien kicked.

With all his strength, Thane rammed his bench leg into the soldier's chest. The hard carapace held. He rammed it again. And again.

The soldier's chest cracked. With everything he had, Thane slid his makeshift weapon deep. The Kantos slumped.

Panting, Thane rose, and Kaira leaped free of the dead Kantos. The other soldier was on the floor, not moving.

"You're a tough fighter, Commander."

She arched a brow. "I was highly motivated."

"Let's get out of here."

"I really like the sound of that."

Thane pried the doors open and glanced out. *Cren.*

He ducked back inside. "The corridor is filled with Kantos."

"Shit," she muttered.

He glanced around. "I think we're close to the Kantos labs." He needed the antidote. Once he had access to his helian, it upped their odds and gave them options. He looked up and his gaze snagged on a grate in the ceiling.

She followed his gaze. "Ventilation ducts." Her nose wrinkled. "How will we get up there?"

The ceiling was high, and Thane considered it carefully.

He grabbed her discarded bench leg from the floor. He hefted it, aimed, and threw it.

It slammed into the grate, knocking it open.

"I'll throw you up." He moved under the grate, cupped his hands together and gestured with his head. "Run, and put your boot in my palms."

Kaira bit her bottom lip. “How will you get up?”

“I’ll jump from the bench.”

Her gaze narrowed. “It’s too far.”

“I have to try. Come on, Kaira. They’ll be back soon.” He at least wanted her safely out of here.

But she didn’t run. She walked to him. “I know you’re hurting.” She touched his cheek.

That small touch felt so good and he wanted to savor it.

She looked uncertain, like she was fighting herself. Like she didn’t want to touch him, but couldn’t help herself. She stroked his skin. “Don’t you think about not following me into that vent, warrior.”

Thane nodded.

She backed up. Then she ran, planted her boot in his palms, and he boosted her high. Such a tough, tiny thing.

She sailed through the air gracefully, caught the lip of the hole in the vent, and pulled herself in.

“Ugh, it reeks in here.” Her head popped out. “Your turn, warrior.”

He climbed onto the bench. It was a long jump, and his body was already aching.

“Come on, Thane.”

He took a deep breath, then ran along the bench and threw himself into the jump.

Cren. He wasn’t going to make it.

He extended his arms as far as he could. His fingers brushed metal and he tried to find purchase.

Kaira's hands clamped on his wrists. She grunted, trying to pull him up. She slid a little, and for a horrible second, Thane was sure they would both come crashing down. Then he gripped the edge of the vent.

Down below, he heard the door opening. *Cren.*

"Come...on." She yanked back.

Ignoring every ache in his battered body, Thane thrust himself upward.

She tugged him into the vent and Thane landed on top of her.

"*Oof.*" The air rushed out of her.

In the gloom, their gazes locked.

Then they heard buzzing below, and they both tensed.