



## **Hell Squad: New Beginnings**

She ran her hand over the lush, green plants.

Selena Rahia smiled. It had been a hot summer, but the new irrigation system had worked perfectly. Now, as the fall was arriving, everything was still thriving.

She looked across the neatly ordered fields. Over the last few months, so much had changed.

It had been almost a year since the human survivors of Earth had fought off the alien invaders intent on taking over their planet.

For two years, the Gizzida had ravaged Earth, killing so many. The reptilian aliens and their horde of beasts had fought hard.

But they'd underestimated the grit and determination of humans.

The inhabitants of Earth had fought back.

They'd also rescued Selena. She'd been abducted from a moon orbiting her planet Florum, and had been a Gizzida captive—beaten and terrified.

But now...

She smiled, tilting her face to the sun. Now, the Gizzida were gone and here at the Enclave they were rebuilding.

Communities were springing up everywhere. She looked over at the cabins nestled under the trees. Several new ones were being built, but hers had been one of the first.

They had a long way to go to rebuild what Earth had been before, but this was a new beginning.

One of the workers in the field, waved and she waved back. Old Man Hamish ran the agricultural team with precision. Selena was his second-in-command and he loved her.

"You're better than any fertilizer, girl," he always told her.

Grinning, Selena touched some vegetable plants. She watched the leaves grow and unfurl. She felt the pulse of the Earth pass through her.

Then she felt another pulse—the kick of a small foot in her belly.

Love fluttered through her and she touched her large stomach. Her daughter kicked again, delighted with her mother's attention.

“Hi, baby girl. Not long until I can hold you.”

Selena had a week until her due date. Until she and Tane welcomed the child they’d made.

Tane was a gorgeous, tall, dark, and impossibly handsome soldier. He was lethal, intense, and all hers.

They’d fallen in love, and married right here in this field with their friends and his family.

She rubbed her belly. They’d also made a baby. Every day, he brought her flowers that he picked himself. Wildflowers from the fields, or sometimes he’d risk the wrath of Hamish and raid the flower garden.

Hamish grumbled, but since they were for Selena, the old man let Tane get away with it.

She heard the laughter of kids and looked over to see several children, maybe nine or ten years old, riding bikes near the edge of the fields. They spotted her and waved. She lifted her hand.

“Selena.”

At the female voice, she turned and smiled.

Elle Steele was walking across the grass toward her. Her newborn baby was tucked in a sling on her chest.

“How’s baby Jameson today?” Selena asked.

Elle’s pretty face lit up. “He’s such a good baby. He sleeps and feeds well.” Her smile widened. “He sleeps best lying on his daddy. At night, Marcus always sneaks him out of the crib and puts Jameson on his chest.”

The look on Elle’s face said she didn’t mind much.

“I came to tell you that Tane called in and said he might be late. The berserkers got held up on a mission north of here in the Hunter Valley.”

Elle worked in comms for the squads. The Gizzida were gone, but there was still plenty of work for the commando squads to do. Hell squad—led by Elle’s husband Marcus—primarily did law enforcement. Squad Three—the berserkers—led by Tane, were monster hunters.

Selena’s belly clenched. The Gizzida were defeated, but some of their alien hybrid animals had survived. They lived in the forests and rivers, but every now and then, one slunk out of the shadows.

“Are they okay?” Selena asked.

Elle nodded. “Totally fine. There was a sighting of *something*. It attacked some cattle at a new farming community.” Elle’s gaze dropped to Selena’s belly. “How are you feeling? You look gorgeous and glowing. I looked as big as a house a week before my due date.” She kissed the top of Jameson’s dark head.

“I feel great.” Her baby was healthy, but Selena was carrying it well and still looked quite small. She also had lots of energy. Today, she wore a flowing blue dress, her silver-white hair was tied back with a long scarf, and she’d stop wearing shoes weeks ago. She stuck her toes into the grass.

“I hate you,” Elle said good-naturedly. “I have so much baby weight left to lose.”

“You’re gorgeous, Elle. I saw Marcus kissing you outside the dining room yesterday. He didn’t look like he minded any extra curves.”

A faint blush stained Elle’s cheeks. “God, I love that man.”

Suddenly, there was a shout in the distance. Selena spun and felt...something ugly.

The kids were screaming, and several had dropped their bikes and were running into the field.

She saw an ugly, mutated alien hybrid skulking out of the trees.

It moved on four legs, had a hunched back covered in spikes, and two curved horns on its boxy head.

One boy was still on his bike, trying desperately to pedal away.

The creature pounced and dragged the boy off the bike by his leg.

*No.* Selena's pulse spiked. "Elle, take the baby back inside and alert security."

Elle's eyes went wide. "Selena—"

"Now." Selena started toward the creature.

With each step, she dug her feet into the grass and soil. She waved her arms at the rest of the agricultural team.

"Get away! Run."

She felt her power growing, her connection to the life force of the planet opening.

Doc Emerson had ordered Selena not to use her abilities a couple months ago. The doctor was worried it would trigger labor.

"Sorry, baby. We have to help that boy."

She felt a pulse from the life inside her.

The grass beneath Selena's feet grew faster, slithering upwards and curling gently around her calves. Her hair blew back from her face, like a wind was blowing, and her pale skin started to glow.

The young boy was screaming, but the creature sensed her, its heads lifting from its prey.

Its red eyes glowed. She couldn't tell what animal it had been before, as it was too far changed.

It snarled.

*You aren't the most dangerous being here.* Selena lifted her hand.

Responding to her call, a flock of magpies flew out of the trees nearby, arrowing at the creature.

They hit hard, pecking and squawking. The animal released the boy.

“David, this way,” she cried.

Sobbing, the boy scrambled toward her, dragging his injured leg behind him.

The creature snapped at the birds, its jaws open, drool dripping.

It started forward.

*No, you don't.* Selena stomped her foot on the ground.

The soil heaved, and dirt sprayed at the creature. It shook its head and roared.

The ground shuddered, and a wide crack opened up in the ground between the creature and the boy.

Selena fought a tremor of pain that ran through her body, her muscles clenching. She stiffened her knees.

“Hurry, David.” She heard shouts in the distance, but knew the Enclave security team was still too far away.

She had to save the boy.

An intense contraction gripped Selena's belly. *Oh, no.* She wrapped an arm around her stomach. Panting, she forced back the pain.

The hybrid animal roared, its muscles bunched as it readied to leap the crack.

Another contraction hit. She lifted her hand and let loose with a hard pulse of wind. It hit the animal, rocking it back. She bit her lip. She had to stop the creature.

Suddenly, there was a whirr and a shadow crossed overhead.

She looked up and saw a Hawk quadcopter hovering above.

Relief punched through her.

The Hawk had a sleek, gray body and four spinning rotors. It was near-silent, running on a small thermonuclear engine. It lowered and several big bodies leaped out.

The men were all tall, muscled, and clad in armor. Their arms were bare and covered in an array of interesting ink.

Her gaze zeroed in on the man with the dark dreadlocks pulled back at the base of his neck.

Her husband flicked her one brief glance, then his dark gaze shot straight to the creature. He whipped up his carbine and fired.

As the rest of the berserkers did the same, the squad advanced on the beast.

It went down under a barrage of laser fire.

“And stay down, you ugly asshole,” Hemi Rahia bellowed.

As usual, Tane’s brother was grinning.

Tane turned and looked at Selena.

She smiled. She was so lucky that handsome man was all hers.

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His wife was the most beautiful thing he’d ever seen. She always made Tane think of a fairy who’d escaped some fairytale garden.

The blue dress flowed around her petite form and her skin glowed. She glowed with or without pregnancy, but Selena didn’t hide the fact that she loved carrying their child.

He was aware of Ash striding toward the crying, injured boy. And of the grass growing gently at Selena’s ankles.

She was so full of life. She’d brought him—a battle-hardened mercenary—back to life. She’d given him everything.

Then he saw her grimace and clutch her belly.

As she started to fall, Tane didn't think. He dropped his carbine and sprinted.

He caught her at the last minute and lowered her to the grass.

"Tane." Her face was impossibly pale. "The baby's coming."

Blind panic hit him. He'd gone into so many battles and fights in his life: as a mercenary, in the alien invasion, as a berserker. He'd never hesitated or let fear get the better of him, but knowing Selena was in labor left his mouth dry.

"I'll get Doc Emerson—"

Selena grabbed his hand. "No time." She moaned and squeezed his fingers.

"You weren't supposed to use your powers," he said.

"I...know. But I had to save the boy."

Of course, she had.

"Okay, Butterfly. We've got this." He lowered her down. "Someone get the doc."

He saw Dom nod, then sprint toward the Enclave.

"She okay?" Hemi asked.

"Baby's coming," Tane said.

"*Fuck.*"

Tane pushed Selena's dress up, and nudged her legs apart. "Breathe."

She nodded. "It'll be fine. We can hold her soon."

He pulled off the pretty scarf that she had tied in her hair, then reached under her skirt and ripped her panties off.

She made a sound. "It's usually more fun when you do that."



Tane's lips quirked. He'd been his beautiful alien woman's first and only. She never held back how much she wanted him. Since they'd married, her sexuality had blossomed. She was still sweet, but at night, in their bed, in his arms, she was a hot, insatiable lover who let him do whatever he pleased.

"I love you, Selena."

Her face softened. "I love you too, Tane." Then she grimaced. "Oh, oh, it hurts." She groaned.

"The baby's coming, Selena." *Oh, God.* He'd never, ever forget this.

He kept talking to her, wishing he could take away her pain.

"She's scared," Selena panted.

"Not for long." He'd never let anything hurt his girls. "Push, Selena."

She bore down and moaned.

And their baby slid into his hands.

Fuck. *Fuck.*

He wrapped the baby in Selena's scarf, and wiped off her face. She didn't cry, but she opened her eyes and looked at him.

A jolt went through Tane. She had pale wisps of hair and pale skin like Selena, but her eyes were deep brown.

*His eyes.*

Then he realized they were ringed with a thin line of bright green, like Selena's.

A perfect mix of them both.

The baby looked at him, almost serene.

"*Selena.*" He shifted, pulling his wife close, then set the baby on her chest.

"Oh, she's beautiful." Joy filled Selena's face.

“She is.” He pulled them both close. “Thank you.”

She looked up at him. “Thank you, Tane. For loving me.”

“That’s one thing you never have to thank me for.” He kissed her.

The baby made a noise.

“I’m here, too late, it seems.” Doc Emerson stopped beside them, huffing a bit. “Man, I need to work out more.”

That was a lie. The doc was as fit as a fiddle, and back to her usual self after having her twins. She hadn’t let having babies slow her down.

“Let’s get that cord cut.” Emerson knelt and smiled. “God, she’s gorgeous. Well done, you two.”

Emerson set to work. She cut the cord and checked the baby.

“She’s tiny compared to my two hellions.”

“How are the twins?” Selena asked. “I haven’t seen them for a couple of weeks.”

“Big and healthy as horses. They’re not even six months and starting to crawl. They take after their daddy, who encourages their shenanigans.”

Big, bad Gabe Jackson was a total pushover when it came to his boys.

“And they’re named perfectly. When they get into trouble, Zeke gives you this charming, angelic smile. Meanwhile Marcus is so solemn, but you can tell he’s planning and strategizing how do it again and not get caught.” The doctor handed the baby to Tane. “Here, hold your daughter while I check out our new mama. What’s the baby’s name?”

Tane met Selena’s gaze and cupped her cheek. They both looked at their little girl.

“Amaia,” he said. “Amaia Rahia. It means brave warrior in Māori. Named after her mother.”

“And her father,” Selena said.

While the doc checked Selena, Tane rose and turned to his squad. Hemi was his blood brother, but all these men—Ash, Levi, Griff and Dom—were his brothers too.

“Selena and the baby all right?” Hemi asked, eyeing the bundle in Tane’s arms.

“Yes. Amaia, I want you to meet your Uncle Hemi.”

Hemi’s brown eyes widened. “She’s so fu...I mean effing small.”

“She’s beautiful, Tane.” Griff slapped his back. “Indy’s going to want to babysit all the time.”

The berserkers—all big and badass—crowded around. They stroked the baby’s cheek, and congratulated Tane.

“That’s it,” Hemi announced. “I’m knocking Cam up.”

The guys all laughed.

“Does your woman get a say?” Levi asked.

“Nope.”

They all hooted. Cam—a Squad Nine soldier—would definitely have something to say.

Although, as Tane looked down at baby Amaia, he figured his brother could talk Cam into it.

“All good,” Emerson announced. “I think Selena will be fine at home. I’ll check in on her and the baby later.”

Tane knelt beside his wife. She instantly reached for the baby. Amaia, sensing her mother, turned her face into Selena’s neck.

He felt a fierce love for them both. He’d protect them, now and always.

Selena cupped Tane’s cheek. “I want more.”

“Already?” He grinned. *No surprise there.* “I’ll give you as many as you want, Butterfly.”

That’s when he realized pretty white flowers were blooming all around them.

“Selena.” He plucked one and tucked it behind her ear.

Her eyes widened. “That’s not me.”

They both looked at baby Amaia. She’d fallen asleep. A butterfly landed on the baby’s head.

Tane’s chest filled with warmth. His girls were special.

“She’s a new beginning,” Selena murmured.

Tane looked around at the crowd coming from the Enclave. He saw lots of their friends and family: his older brother Manu and his wife, Kate, Indy, Finn and Lia, Elle and Marcus. All their loved ones.

He saw the plants growing in the fields, more cabins being built, the signs of life and hope all around them.

“So many new beginnings,” he said.

What had been before was gone, but right here, and all across the world, new beginnings were flourishing.

Tane saw it all reflected in the eyes of his new baby and his wife. Right here was everything he needed.

“Come on, Butterfly.” He lifted Selena and Amaia into his arms. “Let’s get home.”