

62: THE PRODIGAL

PROLOGUE

I was a small child. I was barely old enough to understand that my life had to be a secret. If his enemies, the Yeerks, knew that he had a son, they would use me to bring him harm.

I lived, hidden in a place only my father knew of. I never protested this. I knew that what he did was important. That the war was important. So I did my part to help the war and I stayed hidden.

My father would come to visit me sometimes. He came whenever he got the chance. One day, he took me away from the place where I was hidden. We went into the only city on our planet.

It was the most incredible thing I had ever experienced. There were Andalites everywhere. My father was disguised so no one would recognize him and wonder who I was. I did not mind.

We watched a parade. The soldiers who had just returned from a battle were marching down the street. There was music, flowers, and cries of joy. My father had been in that

battle but he never marched in the parades. He said he would have his parade when the Yeerks were defeated.

He turned to me with all four eyes. <My son, do you know why Andalites hate war?>

<Why father?>

He laughed. <It's the death, of course. So much death. It catches up with you eventually. In the end, we all die, be it on the battlefield, in a ship at space, or in our fields. No one lives forever.>

<No, father. No one lives forever,> I agreed as a dutiful son must.

<Not even me?> he asked.

I thought about it. I did not know what he wanted me to answer. So I said what I thought was the truth. <Not even you, my father.>

He smiled. <It is good that you understand this. Knowing the inevitability of death is what makes me appreciate life all the more.

<Knowing the inevitability of death is what makes me appreciate life all the more. I spend my life destroying. I do it for a good cause, but I am a killer. I take the lives of innocents so that the guilty may be punished. I sacrifice the innocent to

save the innocent. It is a terrible existence. But it is one that I can not ignore.

<What I have to do was terrible. But it is necessary. We must all do what is necessary, be it right or wrong, good or evil. It is our burden, the curse of our family. It is a curse I wish I could remove, and yet one that I never would.

<When I am gone, you must see for yourself what is in the universe. You must decide what is necessary. And once you have decided, you must always, always do what must be done, no matter how wrong it may seem at the time.>

<Father, why do you speak this way?>

He put his hand on my shoulder. <I am going to be off to another planet, soon. I was there once before, when I tried to run away from what I had to do. I can feel in my bones that my war will end there, for good or for ill. The time may come very soon when you must stand for what is necessary and I will not be there to help you.

<Know, my son, that you do not stand alone. There are unnumbered people in this galaxy. And there will always be one who will stand with you. When the time comes, you will know him. When you meet him, do not hesitate to do what you must do.

<It will not be quick and it will not be easy. It will be slow and terrifying, painful and difficult. It will torment your soul and haunt your dreams for the rest of your life. You will suffer, but you will never suffer alone. This is all I can promise.>

<It is all I can ask.> That was the last time I ever saw my father.

CHAPTER 1

My name is Alloran-Sirinial-Fangor. I am, as you may have guessed, and Andalite. You may have guessed incorrectly, of course, because my name is not common among Andalites.

My given name, Alloran, is also the name of War Prince Alloran-Semitur-Corass, who eventually became the Abomination. Even before that, he became Alloran the Disgraced. Alloran is a notorious name amongst our people.

Nevertheless, my father named me Alloran. More than anyone else, my father was the enemy of the Abomination. He named me Alloran to remind himself that, no matter how long he fought the Abomination, it was the Yeerk who was his foe, not the Andalite.

My second name, my family name, I share with my father, the great Prince Elfangor-Sirinial-Shamtul. Rightfully, though, the name of Sirinial should belong to my older brother. But he is not an Andalite, so the name became mine.

My final name, Fangor, is not a name any other Andalite has. It was the family name that my father used during his time on Earth when he called himself Al Fangor. During that

time, he married a human woman named Loren, who gave birth to my older brother, Tobias.

For many years, the fact that I lived was kept a secret, lest the Yeerks use me to harm my father. I was raised by automatons. They saw to my education and my survival.

I became quite talented with computers of all kinds and began to reprogram them. When my skill at this was learned, I was referred to as a prodigy. Even by the standards of my race, I am considered a technological genius.

That time, when I no longer had to hide, was the greatest time of my life. I worked with the scientists perfecting anything they threw at me. It was quite enjoyable.

And I was loved by everyone. My father, Prince Elfangor, was a great hero. He had died on his mission to Earth, but everyone remarked how much I looked and acted like he did at my age.

I lived with my uncle, Prince Aximili-Esgarrouth-Isthill. Aximili of Earth, he is called. He and five humans defeated the entire Yeerk Empire on the planet of earth. Uncle Aximili was my hero. When I was old enough to become an *Aristh* in the military, he would become my Prince.

But one day, something happened. Prince Aximili disappeared. We did not know what happened. Life went on as usual, but there was an unsettling feeling about everything I did.

One day, I was sent down to the Hork-bajir world on a reconnaissance mission. I was captured and almost tortured. Before the Yeerks could torture me, though, someone arrived to help: Tobias, my half-brother. Tobias the Animorph. Tobias, one of the heroes of Earth. The one our people called *Sectalan*; the Martyr.

He rescued me. Then, the other Animorphs arrived and told me that the Yeerks had returned to Earth. They wanted me to help fight them. I could not refuse, of course. Especially now when I learned that Prince Aximili had been captured and turned into the host of Esplin 9466, the very Yeerk who murdered my father.

The Andalite Electorate made Tobias my Prince and allowed me to come to Earth, though even the Electorate did not know that the Yeerks were back.

Now, I live with my brother and Prince aboard his ship, the *Reliquary*. With us lives one of the Animorphs, Rachel.

She had apparently returned from the dead with the aid of the Crayak, a creature of nearly infinite power.

I preferred to sleep outside, under the ship. It was designed so that the area beneath the cockpit created a scoop large enough for an Andalite or two. It was there that I slept. And waited for the fighting to die down.

Prince Tobias and Rachel had been fighting for the last hour. This tended to happen rather often. I knew they were fighting because Prince Tobias had instructed me to ‘go for a snack.’ He wanted me out of the ship so that I would not have to hear him fight with Rachel.

I was in peregrine falcon morph. It is an Earth bird of prey with excellent hearing. I was attempting to discern the nature of the argument. I should perhaps not have been doing it, but one of the Animorphs, Marco, had offered me one thousand human dollars if I would report my findings to him.

He assured me that one thousand dollars was a great deal of money.

Unfortunately, the *Reliquary* was well sound-proofed. Even my falcon ears could not discern any words. I merely felt vibrations as I pressed my ears against the ship.

Then, I heard a distinct THUD, followed by several more in rapid succession.

What had happened? Had one attacked the other!? It seemed unlikely, but both of them had been very on edge lately and their arguments were more frequent.

I raced to the hatch of the ship, demorphing as I went. If I was needed to break up a fight or assist my Prince, I wanted my tail.

I pulled open the hatch and climbed inside. I used the hatch in the floor of the ship since it was in the roof of my scoop. Perhaps that is why they did not hear me entering...

I walked inside. Rather carelessly, I suppose. I was attempting to be stealthy so as not to alert them to my presence. My lack of caution was why I saw it with all four of my eyes.

I knew exactly what they were doing. We had discussed it in school and I had seen some videos of it on Marco's computer. I did not want to see it here.

I have decapitated fearsome enemies. I have seen my friends lose limbs. I have even seen an entire room of warriors be dropped in a second. But I have never seen a more terrifying sight than what I saw in that ship.

CHAPTER 2

I dove out of the hatch though which I entered. I was morphing to owl before I even hit the ground. The owl was the best morph for flying at night and I wanted to fly. Far away and very, very quickly.

I flew to the motel where Marco and the other Animorphs lived. It was several miles from the *Reliquary*. Not far enough, but it would have to do. I had nowhere else to go.

Marco left the window of his motel room open. I could see into the room. Marco was sitting on his bed, looking at the television set. In one hand, he held a wedge of what appeared to be cheese.

Marco is short as humans go, and is apparently of Hispanic descent. His hair was in what is known as a faux-hawk and it was blue. Human hair is not naturally blue, but Marco had dyed his.

Next to Marco sat a small, white rat. David. He was our newest member and yet an older one as well. He became an Animorph many years ago. He turned against them and was trapped in the body of a rat. A powerful being known as The

One gave back his ability to morph and he had been convinced to return to our side.

I consider David to be my *shorm*, my best friend. He and I forged a powerful bond when we morphed the different parts of a symbiotic creature. I hardly know him, but I would do anything to help him.

David was also nibbling on a wedge of cheese. My owl ears were very good. I could hear Marco speaking to David. “I just don’t get it. What’s so appetizing about this? I mean, put it on a cracker, sure. Smother broccoli with it and I might eat that. Put a hamburger under it and I’m set. But just straight cheese? I’m not seeing it.”

<Come on, you’re saying it isn’t the most delicious food in the world?> David answered.

“Yes. That is exactly what I am saying. It is *part* of the greatest food in the world. A double-bacon-cheeseburger. Now *that* is the most delicious food in the world. Are you as hungry as I am?”

<I’m a rat. I’m *always* hungry.>

I swooped in through the open window. David shrieked and dove under the bed. Marco climbed down to retrieve him.

“David, dude, calm down. It’s just Alloran. Oww! You just bit me! Alloran, the rat bit me!”

<Sorry,> David said, climbing back up on top of the bed. He was quivering. <Would you mind NEVER DOING THAT AGAIN? You might as well have been the Blade ship!>

<I am sorry,> I mumbled. I had forgotten that owls often ate rats. David had all of a rat’s instincts. He is a *nothlit*, a person trapped in a morph. Tobias used to be one, but Crayak, the same creature who resurrected Rachel, gave him back his human body.

I was fully Andalite when the door opened. Jeanne entered. She is tall for a female, with green eyes and long, dark hair. She is from the human country of France, so her speech is different from that of the humans I know. It can be difficult for me to understand at times.

“Is everything alright in here? What was all that screaming?” is what I think she said.

“I think Tobias is rubbing off on Alloran. He tried to eat David,” Marco answered.

<I made no attempt to consume him,> I protested. <I simply entered the room.>

“Perhaps he should morph to human,” Jeanne suggested. “It may be suspicious if we are sitting around with an Andalite.”

Marco nodded, so I began to morph. My human morph is a combination of DNA from the humans that were available at the time. In this case, it was Prince Tobias, Rachel, Marco, Jeanne, and Jake. My morph looked very much like Tobias did. I thought it was a good choice because, as my brother, Tobias should look a lot like me.

David had morphed to a human as well. He was shorter than I was, with blond hair and brown eyes. This had been his human body before he was trapped as a rat. Although he was, in reality, the same age as the other Animorphs, his human morph was the same age as mine.

“Al, you alright?” Marco asked. He often calls me Al when I am in human morph. I do not know if it is short for Alloran or he is aware that my father called himself Al.

“My morph seems to have gone correctly. Core. Rect. Lee.” I enjoy using my human mouth. As an Andalite, it is not something to which I am accustomed.

“Oh, he’s doing the mouth thing,” Marco moaned. “That stopped being funny six years ago.”

“I am sorry. Sore. Re.”

Jeanne cocked her head to the side. “You know, Marco is right. You do not look very good.”

David looked at me too. “I saw that look on someone’s face once. It was my face. I was about five. There was a storm and I got scared, so I wanted to see if my parents would let me sleep with them. I opened the door and...”

“Oh,” Marco replied. Then, his eyes got wide. “OH!” he practically shouted. “Al, did you walk in on Tobias and Rachel having—”

“I am sure that the two of them would know better with a child running about,” Jeanne interrupted.

“I think you severely overestimate them,” Marco told her.

“Marco is correct,” I said. “I saw.”

David rubbed his stomach. “You know what, Marco? I *am* hungry. Let’s go get some food.”

Marco shrugged. “Sounds good. Come on, Al; Jeanne. We’ll grab a burger. Al needs some junk food. And then maybe we can have a little discussion about what he saw.”

CHAPTER 3

We took Marco's car to the mall. A car is a human vehicle that...well, I suppose that by now, even Andalites are familiar with such common human technology. And I certainly do not need to explain what the mall is. Any Andalite who has ever visited Earth has been to the mall.

We stopped to eat at an establishment known as McDonald's. I was slightly confused because I had seen the same establishment in other places such as the Animorphs' home town and on the Andalite homeworld. "Marco, how can Mr. McDonald be everywhere at once?"

"What?" He was clearly as confused as I was.

"I have seen places operated by Mr. McDonald before. How can he maintain all of them?"

Marco seemed to be thinking. Then, he smiled. I think it was a sign of amusement. "Al, McDonald isn't a person. He's more of a symbol. He owned the first McDonald's and a few of the ones that came after that. He's dead now. Someone else owns all of this."

"Then why are the restaurants still named after McDonald? They are no longer his."

“That’s just the way things go,” Marco shrugged.

“Humans are very confusing.”

“You bet we are. Now what do you want to eat?”

Another human peculiarity: food. Other races eat, of course; even we Andalites absorb nutrients through our hooves. But no other races have the sheer variety of consumables that the human race has.

And yet they have deemed it wrong to eat some of their most delicious foods. Motor oil, for example, is not a viable option for food at a McDonald’s. Chicken, however, is completely acceptable. Perhaps it is because there are many more chickens than there is oil.

Jeanne shook her head. “Marco, he and David will eat everything if we do not stop them. Just order for them. David, Al, and I will find a table.”

Marco sighed. “Since when do *I* do the grunt work?” Jeanne whispered something in his ear. I did not know what she said, but it seemed to have an odd effect on Marco. His face reddened and then he smiled. “Well, when you put it like that...”

We sat in a booth near the rear of the establishment. David darted his head around nervously. I do not know if he was

really nervous or if it was just his rat instincts. “We shouldn’t be here. Didn’t I tell you it was a Yeerk pool entrance?”

Jeanne shrugged. “We cannot avoid every entrance. Just act natural. We are safe in a public place.”

Marco returned and obviously noticed David’s uneasiness. I myself was a bit uneasy. I was not afraid of doing battle here, unlike I believe David was. These were Human-Controllers; no match for us. I was only worried about what would happen without our Prince to give us directions.

“What’s with him?” Marco asked, nodding his head to David.

“Slugs,” David sighed.

We ate in silence after that. I tried very hard to concentrate on my food. It was difficult to eat as a human. I attempted to eat at a stately pace like the others so as not to attract attention. Still Marco said to Jeanne, “Look at Al rip into that. What he saw must have really freaked him out.”

“He is as bad as David.”

I glanced at David. His face was covered in condiments and trace amounts of food. In the reflection of the window, I saw that I looked no better.

Pretending to be human is hard.

“Hey,” David hissed, “listen to those two guys at the table next to us.”

David still had all the instincts of a rat, so he was constantly looking and listening to everything. Any sound could be a predator. I do not know what it is like to live with that kind of fear.

That is not to say that I have no fear, of course. But we Andalites have learned to ignore our fear. It is a weapon that the Yeerks have used to terrible effect before and it is not one that we could allow to work against us.

Now that I was trying, I could hear the two men. “...miss Guraff’s briefing?”

“I was in the pool and couldn’t hear. I didn’t come to you to get a hard time about it. So, was there anything important or not?”

“Oh, you have no idea. Do you know how he started it? Guraff stood up in front of the entire pool, in his big Hork-bajir body and said, very calmly, ‘Jake is dead.’”

“No way.”

“Guraff wouldn’t lie to us. He’s no Visser, just another soldier. He tells us what we need to know.”

The second man was silent for a few moments. Then, “I can’t believe it. That devil is finally gone. Any idea how he died?”

“Remember that explosion we heard about that wiped out our fleet on the Hork-bajir world?”

“That was him?”

“Yeah. He took twenty thousand of us down with him, not to mention the entire fleet.”

“Well, at least we don’t have to deal with him anymore. Taking Earth should be a piece of cake now.”

The first man shook his head. “You didn’t hear what he said next. He told us that the guy in charge of the Animorphs now is even worse.”

“Worse? How could it get worse?”

“It’s Tobias, the Beast’s son.”

Again, the second man was silent for a few moments. “Is he as bad as his father was?”

“Guraff thinks so. He might be worse. Haven’t you heard the rumors? He’s insane. The Visser’s host keeps telling all of the other hosts he can reach. Jake held back. He had limits, morals. Tobias doesn’t.”

“You believe it?”

The first man nodded. “Yeah. My host is usually in a cage next to the Visser’s. The things he’s told me...they’re either pure fiction or completely true. And I’m leaning towards true. I was there when the young beast took out that Truck ship all by himself. Thank the Kandrona I was in a chopper. I think only five or six people survived that.”

“The young beast, huh?”

“Yeah. That’s what Guraff says. And to make things even worse, David turned on us.”

“Well, I never liked him anyway.”

“He’s still dangerous. The Visser gave us orders to capture any Animorphs we can. But Guraff wants David’s head on his desk. About the only thing he hates is a traitor.”

“Was that it?”

“Nope. More bad news. Rachel’s back from the dead.”

“No. That just isn’t possible, even for her.”

“It’s true. Guraff had a nice long conversation with her during that little disappearing act he, the Visser, and David pulled a few days ago.”

The second man sighed loudly. “Anything *else*?”

“Uh...yeah. Tobias isn’t the beast’s only son. An Andalite, Alloran-Sirinial-Fangor, is with them now.”

“So, let me make sure I’ve got this right. Jake’s gone. That’s good. Rachel’s back. That’s bad. The beast’s sons are fighting us now. That’s very bad. David turned against us. That’s bad, too. All in all, this is a very bad situation, you know that?”

“Yeah. Guraff, though...he seems happy about it. He’s obsessed with Tobias. The young beast, he calls him. Says he’s a worthy foe.”

“Now I’m getting scared. Didn’t Guraff once try to take on that Dome ship outside of the Taxxon world in a Bug fighter?”

“And he came out to tell the tale.”

“Yeah. I’m scared.”

CHAPTER 4

We left the McDonald's shortly after that. As Marco said, "It's not a good idea to hang around too long when we know Controllers are walking around."

When we got back to the motel, Prince Tobias was waiting for us in the parking lot. Marco greeted him. "Hey. What—"

Prince Tobias grabbed me by the shoulders. "Where. Have. You. Been?"

Marco put a hand on Prince Tobias' shoulder. "Dude, chill. He was just out with us, getting something to eat."

Prince Tobias shook his head. "You should have told me where you were. You can't just go running off like that."

Prince Tobias stood up straight. Jeanne was speaking to him now. "From what we understand, you were a bit... preoccupied."

I saw a look pass across Marco's face. I do not know what that look entailed. "Oh, isn't that sweet? He was worried about you, Al."

"You're damn right I was worried! He goes running off in the middle of the night without any word where he's going or when he'll be back! And when I called the motel, no one

answered and no one had any clue where you were! You could have been dead for all I knew!”

“I am unharmed,” I tried to say.

Prince Tobias wasn’t done. “Rachel and I searched the woods for an hour looking for you! She’s *still* out there!” He grabbed me by the arm and started pulling me away. “Come on, we’re going home. Right now.”

“My Prince,” I began.

“Not another word,” he interrupted. “Morph to owl. We’re going. Now.”

I was confused. I was clearly unharmed. I had only been with Marco and the others. There had been no reason for Prince Tobias to worry. Certainly no reason for him to go searching for me.

We flew in silence for about half an hour. It felt like several days. I am no expert on human emotions, so I decided to assume that Marco had been correct. My Prince had been worried about me.

On one level, I was pleased. A Prince seldom worried about his warriors outside of battle. I did not fool myself into thinking that he cared about me only because we shared a father. He had human relatives and could not have cared less

whether they lived or died. He cared about me because I had earned it from him.

On the other hand, I did not like him worrying over me. It made me feel good now, but it could be a problem in battle. If he was afraid to risk my life, I could not serve him effectively.

When we were in sight of the *Reliquary*, he finally spoke to me. <Alloran, why did you run off like that?>

<I was in the scoop beneath the *Reliquary* and I heard what sounded like a fight. I thought you might need my assistance. And when I entered...I saw what I believe you would rather I not have seen. I did not want to embarrass you. I am sorry.>

<Embarrass me? Alloran, that's something we human males tend to be proud of.> There was a trace of a smile in his voice. <You're the one who was embarrassed.>

<It is my fault. I should have obeyed you and remained outside of the ship.>

<Don't go blaming yourself. We should have been more responsible. I'm sorry, too. I'm kind of new at this whole parenting thing. I guess that's why I overreacted.>

<Is it common for humans to worry like that when one of their young goes missing?>

<I don't know. When I went missing, no one tried to find me. I guess...I guess I'm just worried you'll end up like me.>

<Like you?>

<Our father...he did what he had to do. I can never blame him for that. And my mother didn't have a choice but to leave me. I can't hold that against her. But my uncle and my aunt... they didn't care. I used to not blame them, either, but now... When someone gives you responsibility, like a child, you step up whether you want to or not.>

<But things have worked out now,> I reminded him.

<In a sense. Better than I ever thought they would go, I guess. But getting here...it isn't something I'd wish on anyone. Not even Esplin. And especially not you.>

We landed in front of the ship and demorphed. Prince Tobias put a hand to my head, between my stalk eyes. My fur was unusually long there. "You need a haircut."

I looked at him. His own hair almost reached his shoulders. He had not cut it since he had been returned to his human form.

He realized what I was thinking and laughed. It was always strange when he laughed because he never smiled. The laugh felt real, but it looked fake.

“If I was you, I’d be asleep before I found Rachel. She’ll want to yell at you a lot more than I did.”

I nodded my head, a habit I had acquired from the humans.
<I will do that, Prince Tobias.>

“Yeah. Get some sleep, kid. We’ll meet with the others tomorrow and try to plan our next move. I need you at your best.”

I pretended to sleep, although it was difficult. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw them again. It was not that they were unattractive; it just disturbs me when I see my Prince in such a context. And, to be fare, only the severely disturbed would wish to see two members of an alien race engaged in such activities.

It was good that I was feigning sleep because it was not long before Prince Tobias and Rachel returned. I heard my Prince speak. “See, Rachel? Safe and sound.”

“Yeah, I guess so.” There was a moment of silence. Then, “Tobias, what’s gotten into us? He was only gone for a few hours and we were worried sick! What have we become?”

“Parents?”

Rachel laughed. “Yeah, I guess so.”

Another silence. Then, I felt a hand softly brushing my fur. It stroked from my shoulder down to my hand. I risked cracking my eyelids. Rachel was standing only a foot away from me, her hand on mine. I tried not to move.

Prince Tobias shook his head. “Rachel, this isn’t right. We’re the last people who should be raising a kid.”

“Nah. We’re great parents. We’re better than the others would be, I think.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah. I mean, my mom wasn’t around much since she worked so much, so I practically raised Sara and Jordan. I’ve got experience. And you...well, you raised yourself. And did a very good job, I might add. We’ll be good parents.”

“You sure?”

She laughed. “Of course. Do you know where he was, what he was doing?”

“Yeah. He was just at the mall, eating.”

“Exactly. When that’s the worse your kid does, you’re succeeding as a parent.”

CHAPTER 5

I felt oddly refreshed the next morning. Perhaps it was because I went to sleep directly after feeding. If so, it was a tip I would want to remember.

I ate breakfast in the forest. Andalites, as you likely know, feed by absorbing nutrients through their hooves. The grass in this area of the forest was particularly sweet.

<Hey, Al,> I heard a thought speak call. I looked up with one stalk eye. An osprey landed on a tree branch near me. Marco. In the sky, I could see a red-tailed hawk and a golden eagle. Jeanne and David.

<Good morning, Marco. What brings you out here so early?> I asked.

<Rachel invited us to breakfast. David accidentally accepted. We didn't have time to warn him.>

I nodded. Rachel's cooking was perhaps the only thing I would not eat if given the choice. I do not know what she does to food, but I believe that once she is finished, it is no longer safe for human consumption.

Of course, Prince Tobias has ordered me to eat it and pretend that I enjoy it. I believe these instructions are more for

his safety than for mine, but I am not going to disobey a direct order from my Prince.

Marco continued speaking. <Tobias always wants to talk strategy at these things so Rachel doesn't realize we aren't eating. Got any ideas?>

<None,> I admitted.

<Good. We'll spend more time talking that way.>

I nodded and then morphed to a peregrine falcon. It is the fastest bird on Earth, though small for a bird of prey. We often used bird of prey morphs because they have excellent eyesight and hearing. They were also very amusing.

<Oh man, I had forgotten how much fun this was,> David cried as we swooped through the sky. There is nothing quite like the freedom of flying on your own wings. No matter how many times I fly, it will never lose its value to me.

<And now, it's even cooler,> David added. <I mean, right now, I'm the kind of creature that would be eating me if it ever saw me!>

Thanks to our vision, we could see Prince Tobias before he saw us. He was standing on one of the *Reliquary's* wings, leaning against the cockpit, drinking a cup of coffee. When he

saw us, he glared hard at David, then shook his head. “Sorry. Force of habit. You all know how I feel about golden eagles.”

<What’s for breakfast?> Marco asked, demorphing.

“With any luck? Arsenic.”

“Since when do we have any luck?” Marco replied darkly.

“That’s what I was thinking.”

We entered the *Reliquary* through the hatch in the roof. It was impossible to find if you did not know where to look. Fortunately, Prince Tobias and I had more than enough practice to locate it.

As usual, Rachel had the cockpit prepared for our guests. Tables were set up so that everyone could eat. Even me. Although I did not need food since I ate in my Andalite form, Rachel insisted that I join the others for meals.

We gathered around the tables and waited. Prince Tobias was always the first to eat. I believe the others wished to make sure that nothing was poisoned, although that makes little sense to me. If one of us was to die, our Prince was not the one we should choose.

But Prince Tobias did not perish after eating his first bite of...I was unable to identify what was on my plate. We all assumed that it was safe to eat after that. We were wrong.

After a few minutes of struggling with what I honestly believe may have been part of a Hork-bajir, Prince Tobias began his usual discussion of tactics. “Okay, we need to think of some way to get at the Yeerks. So far, we’ve done nothing.”

“Yeah, and now we can’t even surprise them,” Marco sighed. “They know everything thanks to that little escapade the Ellimist sent us on. How did that help us? He promised it would.”

“No he didn’t,” Prince Tobias snapped. “And even if he did promise, it wouldn’t mean anything. He can’t be trusted.”

“Unlike Crayak, the pinnacle of morality,” Marco shot back.

“At least Crayak keeps his promises,” Prince Tobias responded.

<When it suites him,> David grumbled.

“Not unlike a rat we know.”

“*Pluriel? Can we stay on track, s’il vous plait?*” Jeanne interrupted. She seemed to be reverting to her native language. I believe it was a sign of irritation.

Prince Tobias shook his head. “Okay, we need to think. How can we hurt them?”

“We could try the Kandrona,” Rachel suggested. “Or we could attack the Yeerk pool.”

Marco shook his head. “The Kandrona is pretty much out of reach, I think. It’ll be far too guarded. Six Kelbrid almost took us down last time. I don’t want to deal with sixty.”

“What about attacking the pool?” Jeanne asked.

This time, David answered. <To what end? What would we accomplish? We’d probably just end up getting innocent people killed.>

“That’s never stopped you before,” Rachel shot back darkly. “I say we raid the pool.”

Prince Tobias looked at David. “David, you were one of Esplin’s top men. Don’t you know of any projects he has going on right now? Something we could tear up?”

<I’m afraid not. The Visser keeps us all in different departments. He’s the one man who knows everything. And maybe Guraff. I was just in charge of finding you people. Aside from a few Yeerk pool entrances, I don’t know anything.>

“Any ideas, Alloran?”

<I am sorry, my Prince. The sad truth is that we know nothing about the Yeerks, their movements, or their plans.>

“Yeah,” Marco sighed. “All we know is that Guraff’s getting everyone worried.”

“What about?”

“You, mostly. Last night, we overheard two Controllers talking about a briefing he gave. He warned them pretty strongly about you.”

A look passed across Prince Tobias’ face. Then, he smiled. “I might have an idea. Some of them are scared? We’ll make them all scared. The Visser used to callus terrorists. We’ll show him what the word ‘terror’ really means.”

“Oh, I don’t like that look,” Marco moaned. “That’s Rachel’s smile.”

Prince Tobias nodded. “And it’s her kind of plan. We attack. We attack everything we can find. Anything Yeerk related, we destroy. We show them that it’s time to be afraid. Nowhere is safe. Nothing can stop us. We’ll remind them just why they got off of Earth four years ago.”

CHAPTER 6

“That’s great and all, but what are going to attack?” Marco asked. “We still don’t know anything about their operations.”

<I have an idea,> David began. <The Visser has weekly meetings in his office. We could go in as bugs and listen in, maybe figure something out.>

Prince Tobias nodded. “We know about his meetings. We were planning on stopping by some time.”

Jeanne raised her hand. It was a gesture I have seen humans perform before, but I do not understand its purpose. It seems to be a way of getting the attention of a superior without interrupting.

“You don’t have to raise your hand, Jeanne, we aren’t in school,” Prince Tobias prompted.

“Although, Tobias *does* kind of act like Chapman,” Marco whispered loudly. That was something I did not understand either. Whispering is how humans communicate when they do not wish to be overheard, but Marco tends to whisper loud enough for everyone to hear him.

“Marco,” Prince Tobias began.

“Yeah, yeah, I know, I know. Detention after school, right? I promise I’ll turn in my homework next time.”

Prince Tobias just shook his head. “I don’t like the idea of all of us hanging around in Esplin’s office, waiting to overhear something.”

David nodded. An odd movement coming from a rat.
<Yeah, it’s kind of risky. Although...>

“What?” Marco prompted.

<The Visser records what he discusses during his meetings. If you get the records of the previous meetings, you wouldn’t have to sit around waiting. Of course, you couldn’t get past the security, so forget I mentioned it.>

Prince Tobias nodded at me. “Can you crack it, Alloran?”

<Almost certainly, my Prince. At best, the Visser will be using security designed by Prince Aximili. He was a great warrior but he was no scientist. His security will be easy enough for me to bypass.>

Prince Tobias nodded again. He was making an effort to make motions that most humans make naturally. “Okay. I don’t want to send everyone on this, though.”

“Why not?” Rachel asked.

“Because too many will make us feel more powerful than we are,” he answered. “We’ll feel strong if all six of us are there. But we can’t handle the entire Yeerk pool.”

<I would be able to do this alone, my Prince,> I told him.

“Probably, but there’s no way I’m sending you without backup.” He paused to think. “Jeanne, you have... experience...with security. You’ll go along with him. David, you know ways in and out of the Yeerk pool. You’ll go along, too.”

Rachel raised an eyebrow. “Just the new guys?”

<I resent that,> David interjected.

Prince Tobias nodded. “They don’t need us babysitting them all the time. I think it’s about time they handled a mission on their own.”

“But do you really think it’s safe to send Jeanne and Alloran with *David*?”

<I resent that, too.>

“If we never offer David the chance, he can’t earn our trust. I’m not worried about him turning Jeanne and Alloran in. They aren’t the ones the Yeerks really want. Anything less than my head would get David killed.”

“Unless he never really betrayed the Yeerks,” Rachel insisted.

<Again: resentment.>

Prince Tobias shook his head. “He turned on them. Esplin wouldn’t have ordered him to fake the defection. Not when he had you all pinned down. He’d never pass up a sure thing.”

“I just don’t like it,” Rachel insisted.

“Stop worrying,” Marco told her. “That’s my job. When you’re worried, that means the rest of us should be fleeing at top speed. So cut it out. It’s scary.”

<Look, I don’t blame you guys for not trusting me, but now I have nowhere else to go.>

“That didn’t stop you the first time,” Rachel shot back.

<This is different. You don’t understand. I could never betray Al. Ask him. He knows.>

They all turned to me. I nodded. <The Anati are symbiotic creatures. David, Cassie, and I each morphed a piece of one. When we were connected... David will not betray us. He asked for forgiveness for what he did. He earned it.>

“Not from me,” Rachel insisted.

<Then give me a chance to make it right,> David argued.
<Let me show you that I'm different now. I'm not the same
scared kid I was back then.>

“You'll always be a scared kid, David,” Rachel answered.

Marco shrugged. “Maybe so, but now he's a scared kid on
our side.”

“You can't tell me that you, of all people, trust him,” she
said flatly.

Jeanne interrupted. “*S'il vous plait*, let's stop this fighting.
Tobias has given the order and that is what matters. It was a
command decision. I will go with David and Alloran and that
is *la fin*.”

Marco sighed. “That's what I'm worried about.”

CHAPTER 7

David led us to the water tower just outside of town. <This is where the Yeerks get Kelbrid into the pool,> he explained. <It pipes water out from a lake beneath the mountains. A little work and the Yeerks turned it into an entrance.>

<Then why are we using it?> Jeanne demanded. We were in our bird of prey morphs. I was my falcon. David was a golden eagle. Jeanne was a red-tailed hawk. <If it is where the Kelbrid enter the pool, it does not sound like a smart way to get inside.>

<It's because of all those different creatures coming and going all the time,> David answered. <The Yeerks couldn't put BioFilters in or anything like that. It's our best bet. If we stay as flies, we should be fine.>

<But we are birds, not flies.>

<No problem. We land, demorph, remorph, and go on in.>

<Wouldn't someone see us?> I asked. <Surely there is security on this entrance.>

<No, nothing. The Yeerks figure that if anyone wanders in on them unloading Kelbrid, they won't live to tell the tale.

Worst case scenario is that someone accidentally stumbles into the Yeerk pool. It's like getting a free Controller.>

<But surely there is at least human security. Cameras perhaps. Something.>

<No cameras. Cameras would leave evidence. They're trusting that no one will be stumbling around the water tower. Who would be that stupid?>

<[*Nous*,> Jeanne muttered.

In spite of our concerns, we demorphed on tower. There was a catwalk wrapping around it where we were able to stand. I did my best to keep away from the edge. Andalites are not built for heights.

“Alloran, you do not have to hug the tower.”

<I was not embracing it, Jeanne,> I insisted. <I was merely making certain of its structural integrity.>

“Ah. And it meets with your approval?”

<Yes. Yes it does.>

“Then you are ready to morph, *peut-être*?”

I was already morphing. It would be much better to be a fly here. Flies...well, they possess the ability to fly. Andalites do not.

First came the shrinking. It was as though the catwalk was rushing up to strike me. I averted my eyes from my own body. A fly is not an attractive creature and you would not want to watch yourself become one.

I accidentally caught a glimpse of Jeanne. Her eyes bulged like those of the fly. I could see their many lenses glistening in the sun. I wanted to scream. But a warrior must become used to such things.

I also saw David, a hideous rat-fly monstrosity. I had heard Marco make a joke once about flies the size of rats. What I was seeing was in no way humorous. It was terrifying.

I kept my eyes focused on the sky after that. I didn't see the changes, only felt them. I felt the wings shoot out of my back. I felt my legs and hands twist and mutate into the claws of the fly. I felt my fur become dagger-like hairs.

Morphing is never painful. In fact, the way that it kills pain is remarkably simple. Or so I think. However, I have learned that all humans and even, I must admit, most Andalites do not understand the principles behind it. To avoid embarrassing readers, I will not elaborate on it here.

Before long, we were fully fly. <Okay,> David began. <Now, we wait here until someone opens this thing.>

<What? That isn't a plan,> Jeanne complained. <This could take all day!>

<I don't think so. The Visser operates on a predictable schedule. A shipment of Kelbrid is due within the hour.>

<You did not mention this,> I noted. <It could have been a target for us to attack.>

<We wouldn't have attacked. The last thing we want to do is fight a hundred Kelbrid,> David answered.

<One hundred?> Jeanne questioned.

<That's how they usually come.>

<Form whence do they come?> I inquired.

<What?... Oh, now I understand. Where did you learn to speak, the Dark Ages?> David inquired. I believe he was using the human tone of voice known as sarcasm. <No one knows where they're coming from. The One sends them here and the Visser sends them out.>

Sure enough, we had been waiting for only thirty minutes before felt a presence above me. My fly antennae detected heavy vibrations. Something large was not far away. <Does everyone else feel that?> I asked.

<Oui.>

<Yep,> David answered. <I believe that is the ship we have been waiting for.>

<For which we have been waiting,>I corrected him. <Honestly, humans are so confusing. Why is it that you are unable to obey even the most basic grammatical rules of your own language?>

<Because he's American,> Jeanne answered.

<Hey, these Americans saved your people from the Germans. Twice. And we took over that whole Vietnam mess for you.>

<And we all know how well that turned out,> Jeanne muttered. <Besides, you owed us. We helped you in your rebellion against the English.>

<That doesn't count! You barely helped us at all!>

<Well you...>

CHAPTER 8

I tuned out their arguing and concentrated on our mission at hand. I could feel something heavy being dropped onto the water tower. Probably the Kelbrid exiting their ship. Sadly, a fly's vision is very poor, so I could not be certain.

<I can't believe no one sees this,> Jeanne marveled.

<A simple hologram would shield them from view,> I answered her.

<Yep. That's what the Yeerks are doing,> David agreed. <Come on, let's get going. The Kelbrid will notice us, but I doubt they'll realize that flies are enemies. They aren't particularly bright.>

We flew up to the top of the water tower and I could see a bit better. The Kelbrid were leaping from a ship ten feet above the tower. When they landed, they would walk over to a hatch in the roof and slide down a pole. Presumably, they landed in the Yeerk pool.

<Who wants to lead this charge?> David asked.

<You,> Jeanne answered.

<Of course. Count on us Americans to do it for you. Fine, just hang back, *croissant*. Al, cover my back.>

Together, the three of us made our way to the hatch. <We should wait until the last Kelbrid has descended,> I warned them. <Otherwise, we will have to worry about Kelbrid landing on us.>

<Good thinking.> We waited. After five Earth minutes, it was safe to go.

The descent was rather boring. It felt like endless miles of darkness. There wasn't even anything to interest the fly brain. I had expected something, but nothing met my senses. The Kelbrid did not leave even a scent as they passed.

I wondered, not for the first time, how much of a hand The One had in the evolution of the Kelbrid. There were many aspects of their being that confused me. Their forepaws, for one thing, were odd. Almost everything in nature has evolved to be symmetrical. The Kelbrid were not.

What baffled me more, however, was that the Kelbrid were superpredators. Such creatures evolved vary rarely and quickly died. They were too efficient and killed off their food sources, and then went extinct. That should have happened to the Kelbrid long ago.

The superpredator dilemma is why, I believe, all sensible creatures evolve as grazers; omnivores at the very least. We

Andalites, for example, would have made excellent predators. Lucky for many, we were grazers instead. If we had been predators, I suspect that we may have at one point been as bad as the Yeerks.

Humans have a peculiar dual nature. They can be predators or grazers. Any human can ‘swing either way’ as Marco might say. Their feeding habits are a good metaphor for humans as a whole.

I believe that you can learn everything you need to know about a race by looking at how it eats.

David shook me out of my thoughts. <Alloran? We’re there. Can you see me?>

<Yes, David, you are visible.>

<Okay. Jeanne, Alloran, follow me. We don’t want to stick around here long. They just unloaded a pack of Kelbrid and they’ll notice flies.>

<Really?> Jeanne asked.

<Yeah. They can sense vibrations like a cockroach can. Every little disturbance will alert them.>

<Would they stop to worry about flies?> I asked.

<They're Kelbrid. To them, everything's prey. They'll notice. Once they're infested, the Yeerks in their heads probably won't care, but its best not to take chances.>

We followed David down another tunnel. There were Kelbrid below us. As David had predicted, they snapped their jaws at us, but we stayed out of reach. Heights seemed to be the only weakness of the Kelbrid. Perhaps they were weak in water as well; we had never encountered them there.

<Hold on, stop,> David called.

<*Qu'est-ce qu'il y a?*> Jeanne asked.

<Uh...what? Was that French?>

<She asked why we stopped,> I told him.

<Oh. We're just above the Yeerk pool.>

<I thought I smelled brimstone,> Jeanne muttered. I think it was a joke. <Why is that reason to stop?>

<Guraff will be briefing the new Controllers. It might be worth listening in on.>

<Would he give them any information that isn't in the computers?> I asked.

<Maybe. The Yeerks like to keep secrets, even from each other. Guraff doesn't keep secrets. He tells his men things he thinks they need to know, no matter how secret it's supposed

to be. He might reveal something that the Visser is too paranoid to keep on his computer.>

<I say we forget it,> Jeanne responded. <We're here to find targets. Guraff's briefing will probably just be the same thing he told those human Controllers in the McDonald's. Everything I have been taught has told me not to hang around where you are not needed.>

<AI, what do you think?>

I realized that it was up to me. It was a small decision and probably not one of any importance. Still, it was my first command decision. That made it special to me.

What would Prince Tobias do? Divide his forces. Someone would listen, the others would hack the computer. He would want all the information possible.

Then, I remembered where the Visser's office was. I remembered that it had a window overlooking the pool. And I knew that the Visser would want to be able to hear the briefing. I could hack the computer while listening.

<We go to the Visser's office,> I told David. <We will be able to hear Guraff from there.>

CHAPTER 9

<So...how do we get in?> David asked. We were hovering before the door of the Visser's office. Unfortunately, the door was tightly sealed. It would be impossible to sneak past it. And there were certainly security systems.

<I will be able to disable electronic security systems,> I assured David. <I will have to demorph, though.>

<Go ahead. No one will be watching up here. The Visser doesn't trust anyone to guard his office; he's been betrayed before. Too many times.>

<Perhaps if he was not so hated...> Jeanne trailed off.

<He's gotten a lot more forgiving lately,> David answered. <I think it's because he's taking Guraff's advice. The Visser won't let another fiasco like the end of the first war happen to him again. He's learned that there are other ways of motivation than fear.>

<I sincerely doubt that the Visser will ever be loved by his subordinates,> I told David as I demorphed to my Andalite body. I hoped he was right about no one watching.

<Oh, don't get me wrong. The Yeerks know exactly what he's like. The ones in command positions, at least. But these

newer generations are being brainwashed. He's convincing them that he's the greatest thing since The One. And the Kelbrid love him, too. He reminds them of...well, of them.>

When I was fully Andalite, I set about working on the door. The edges were protected with a force field. I located the generator, hidden in one of the door hinges, and disabled it without any difficulty.

<Alloran, be certain that you can re-enable any security systems,> Jeanne reminded me. <We do not want the Visser to realize that his office has been infiltrated.>

I nodded. <Of course, Jeanne. I had not thought of that.>

Sadly, there was no security other than the force field. I suppose it makes sense. A BioFilter would destroy any visitors, and it would be a hassle to shut down ever time someone entered the office. And it was useless, since Prince Tobias had Prince Aximili's DNA.

I pulled on the door handle. It did not move. <There seems to be a problem,> I told the others.

Jeanne lightly shoved me aside. "It is locked, Alloran. Give me a moment." She and David had demorphed. I scooped David up. He was vulnerable in his rat form and I did not want to risk his being harmed.

“Got it,” Jeanne announced. “This was a pathetic lock. An idiot could have done it.”

<An idiot put it here,> David muttered. <Let’s get going. No one looks up here, but the Kelbrid might be able to feel us. I don’t know how far their senses reach.>

We entered the office and closed the door. There was an ancient wooden desk facing the window. On the desk were some objects. Many of them were obviously of Yeerk origin, but a few were clearly Andalite. Like the computer.

It looked like an egg and was the same color as my fur. I picked it up. Immediately, images raced through my mind. I set about hacking it. Andalite security would have stopped most intruders. But, as I believe I said earlier, I am a prodigy.

After five minutes of work, the entire system was wide open to me. It was actually embarrassing, since I was bypassing Andalite security measures.

<Got anything?> David asked me.

<Too much,> I sighed. <I have everything in the computer available to me, but I do not know for what we are looking.>

“So why not take it all?” Jeanne suggested. “Can’t you upload it to the *Reliquary*’s computer or something?”

<Of course. I should have thought of that.> I began to take Jeanne's suggestion, but then I had a better idea. I inserted a program that would link this computer with that of the *Reliquary*. Now we would know anything the Yeerks recorded.

I felt another presence in the computer with me. Jeanne was accessing it as well. "This is so much data," she sighed. "It could take us months to find a single target. We have no way of knowing what's important."

<Hey, AI,> David suggested, <the Yeerks would back up anything critical, right? I mean, they'd have to have a quick way to restore their information if the computer crashed.>

<Yes, that is correct. Of course, the odds of an Andalite computer 'crashing' as you say are astronomical.>

<So here's what I'm thinking. You crash the computer. When it starts to reload data, flag whatever comes up. Then we'll know what they really want to keep around.>

<That is a very good idea.>

<Well, do it fast because Guraff looks like he's going to start soon. They Kelbrid are assembling.>

I nodded and began doing what David had said. It did not take long. After a minute, the computer system crashed. I

crashed only the one I was using, so as not to alert the Yeerks. Sure enough, some files began to load themselves almost instantly. I marked them and they were sent to the *Reliquary*.

<I am finished,> I announced.

<Just in time. Guraff's starting.>

I went over to the window to watch. It was a sight I wish I could forget.

CHAPTER 10

To me, it seems that everything about the Yeerk pool is designed to be anti-Andalite. It is an underground area, for one thing; not a place any Andalite would choose to go. There is no grass anywhere, only stone and sludge.

The cages that lined one wall would certainly be torture for any Andalite. They were torture enough for the humans and Hork-bajir inside of them, waiting to be re-infested.

The narrow piers were also terrible for any host, but especially for an Andalite. The wooden one where a host deposited his Yeerk into the pool was narrow and looked a bit unstable. It was no place for an Andalite.

The steel pier was much worse. That was where the hosts were re-infested. It looked slippery and was as narrow as the wooden one. That was the last place any creature wanted to be; especially an Andalite.

In all of history, there have been only two Andalite Controllers. Both were controlled by the Yeerk Esplin 9466, now called the Visser. The first was my namesake, Alloran-Semitur-Corass. The second was my uncle, Aximili.

I had a cold feeling as I looked at that steel pier. It was almost a premonition. I couldn't help but feel that I would one day find myself at the end of it, waiting for Esplin.

All this flashed through my mind in an instant. I was more actively focused on what was taking place below me. Spanning the pool was an arched bridge with a large, circular area in the center. A monster of a Hork-bajir stood in the center. Guraff 427.

Guraff is an oddity among the Yeerks. He does not seem to be one of the ambitious Visser types, but he is not one of the separatists of the Peace Movement. He seems to be Esplin's only friend.

Guraff disturbs me mostly because he reminds me of an Andalite. He seems to value honor and courage; virtues that he alone amongst all the Yeerks appears to possess. He also seems to have a reputation as a great warrior amongst the Yeerks. From what I have seen, his reputation is well deserved.

The new Kelbrid stood around the pool in a half-circle. They seemed to be waiting for something. Then, Guraff's speech boomed throughout the pool. "One of you Yeerks has

infested the Kelbrid leader, the chieftain of this pack. Step forward.”

The largest of the Kelbrid, a specimen about half a foot shorter than Guraff’s nine-foot frame, started along the bridge. He stopped when he reached the larger area where Guraff waited for him.

“I know the Kelbrid hierarchy. This one is your leader because he has fought for it. Now he and I will fight. Normally, it would be the Visser’s place to do this, but you are to be my special, elite pack. You will answer to me and to no one else. Now, Yeerk, stand ready.”

The Kelbrid dropped to its forepaws. It closed its ten-fingered hand in a fist and raised its stingered arm. Then, it attacked. It struck like lightning; like an Andalite tail. Guraff was ready.

He parried the stinger with an easy swing of one arm and kicked with one of his feet. The Kelbrid’s head hit the floor beneath the two of them. The rest of its body hit shortly afterwards.

<Did I really just see that?> David asked me.

<I believe you did,> I answered. <Although I cannot speak as to the accuracy of rat eyes. I am hardly an expert on the visual capabilities of your species.>

Jeanne cut me off. “*Oui*, you saw that.”

Guraff turned to the remaining Kelbrid. “I am speaking to you, now, the hosts. You see what I can do. I killed your greatest warrior in less than a second. You answer to me. Is that clear?”

Almost in unison, the Kelbrid dropped to their forepaws. They balled up their hands. The stingers of their other hands retracted. On all fours, they loped around the pool, circling about Guraff. They roared with their raspy Kelbrid voices.

<I believe it is an acceptance of subservience,> I told the others. <They are accepting Guraff as their leader.>

<Yeah, that makes sense,> David agreed. <Guraff said the Visser normally did this, right?>

<That is correct.>

<That probably means that the Kelbrid-Controller who fights him probably throws the fight.>

<That is correct. I cannot imagine the Visser fighting a battle he could actually lose.>

<I just got an idea.>

“Do tell.”

<Not here. I’ll explain it when we get back to the *Reliquary*. It’s really one that the others should hear.>

“Then let’s be going. I think I know where this is going and I do believe I like it.”

<Oh, I think you’ll love it. Tell me, Jeanne: how do you feel about assassins?>

CHAPTER 11

When we got back to the *Reliquary*, it seemed that we walked in on an argument between Marco and Prince Tobias. They were sitting around the *Reliquary*'s table, eating cooking that I knew was not Rachel's. Marco was saying, "...ore than a little risky, isn't it?"

"Maybe, Marco, but that doesn't make it a bad plan. Name one of our plans that wasn't risky."

"I always said that all of our plans were bad."

"You made most of our plans."

"And I still hate them." Marco looked up and saw us. "Oh, hey. How'd it go? Everyone alright? Did you get caught?"

<We're fine,> David answered. <Check the computer.>

Prince Tobias closed his eyes for a moment. Then, a hologram of the Yeerk's computer system appeared between him and Marco. Marco raised an eyebrow at me. "Al, did you steal the whole thing?"

<Not only that. Now, whenever the Yeerks add information to their computers, it will also be added to this one. Anything they know, we shall know,> I answered.

Prince Tobias gave me one of his rare smiles. “Good job, Alloran. I think you three deserve the rest of the day off. Marco and I will find some targets.”

<Where should we go?> I asked him.

He shrugged. “Wherever you want. Rachel went to the mall half an hour ago; maybe you should find her.”

<As you command, my Prince.>

“You’re off the clock. Now I’m just Tobias.”

<As you wish, Prince Tobias.>

Marco gave me an odd look. “Do you do that on purpose or does it really just slip out?”

<Do what?>

He rolled his eyes. I suspect I may have annoyed him. Or perhaps he was having some sort of seizure. “You know, Alloran, if I—”

Jeanne interrupted him. “Marco, do you want to go and practice those new morphs we got?”

Marco shrugged and turned to Prince Tobias. My Prince raised an eyebrow. “You got a new morph? What is it?”

Marco smiled. “A surprise. It’s only fair, since you didn’t tell us about your Howler. That scared me to death, man.”

Prince Tobias nodded. “Well, go on. I don’t want you showing off and the morph getting out of control.”

“Can you pick some targets without me?”

“I don’t need you to hold my hand.”

“Yeah; you’ve got the wife for that.”

Prince Tobias smiled. “I’ll tell her you said that. The next time you see her, guard your shins.”

Marco started to morph to an osprey. “I’ll re—” <-member that. Let’s get going, Jeanne. I don’t exactly want to be here when Rachel gets back.>

The two of them, an osprey and a red-tailed hawk, flew out through the roof hatch. Prince Tobias turned to us. “Well, what about you two? Going to enjoy your day off?”

<Actually, I had a plan I wanted to talk to you about,> David answered. Prince Tobias nodded, so David went on. <We learned that, when the Yeerks get a new shipment of Kelbrid, the Visser fights a Kelbrid-Controller to get the respect of the other Kelbrid hosts.>

<This Controller almost certainly throws the fight,> I added.

<Right. So I was thinking that we—>

“Infiltrate the next shipment, morph a Kelbrid and, when the Visser comes to fight, rip into him like a screaming rat?”

<Yeah. That’s about the size of it. How did you know?>

He shrugged. “During that whole Anati-Helmacron-Garatron incident, Guraff mentioned the dominance rituals. I’ve been trying to work out a way of pulling it off, but there are some serious holes.”

<Like what?> I asked.

“For one, we don’t know how the Kelbrid select their leader. That’s the one who would fight the Visser. Number two, they’d still put a Yeerk in the head of every Kelbrid who passed through there. Number three, we don’t even know if we could beat Esplin when it came down to it. He’s got Ax’s body, for one thing, and far too much experience with a tail.”

<Oh. Yeah, I guess those are a few hang-ups.>

“Maybe we can work on this later, David. But not today. You two are taking the day off. Go to the mall or something. Have some fun.”

<What about you, my Prince?>

“I’m staying here. The sooner we get on this, the better. We’ve sat still far too long.”

<All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,> David replied. <Come on, you could use a little fun. How long has it been since you just kicked back and relaxed?>

“Twenty years.”

<Yeah, you definitely need a break.>

CHAPTER 12

David and I spent an uneventful afternoon at the mall. We were only thrown out of three eating establishments and handed over to mall security once. Rachel found us and brought us home after that.

Back aboard the *Reliquary*, David, Prince Tobias, Rachel, and I waited for Jeanne and Marco. Rachel was complaining. “I can’t believe you let the two of them go off alone,” she said to Prince Tobias.

“I’m not here to baby-sit,” he sighed. “They can take care of themselves.”

“I’m not worried about their safety. You know Marco, Tobias. You know what he’s up to right now.”

“Yeah, and that isn’t any of my business.”

“Well, it’s mine. She’s my sister, after all.”

“Would it make you feel better if I told you I found a lot of stuff for us to blow up?”

Rachel’s mood instantly brightened. “Like what?”

“A couple Yeerk-operated businesses. One of them is a propane distribution center and that should leave a real pretty ball of fire.”

“This night is sounding better already.”

<Hey, is everybody decent in there?> I heard Marco’s thought speak call.

<We are fully clad,> I answered.

<Darn. Well, we’re coming in anyway. Open the hatch, Al. I can never find the thing.>

I did as I was told. An osprey and a red-tailed hawk flew inside and started to demorph. Prince Tobias was already telling us his plan.

He had the *Reliquary* pull up a map of the locations he had decided to target. “Okay, we’ve got six targets. This first one is one of the most difficult. I want to start with it because we’ll have the element of surprise.”

“What’s the target?” Rachel asked. “Propane?”

“Not yet. The bank.” He pointed to a hologram of the bank suspended in the air before us. “This is where the Yeerks are getting their money. If we shut it down, it’ll cripple their cash-flow. We hit them where it counts.”

“You just wanted to say cripple their cash-flow,” Marco accused him.

Prince Tobias smiled. “Maybe. This next target,” the hologram of the town spun around to the new location, “is

where the Yeerks get the water for the Yeerk pool. It's guarded mostly to keep people from accidentally learning where those pipes lead."

The hologram rotated again. "This is the chemical plant where the Yeerks make the other chemicals that go into the pool. It's guarded for the obvious reasons."

The hologram turned again and Prince Tobias gave Rachel a smile that I think may have come unwillingly. "This is a propane distribution center."

"Yay!"

"Down, girl. It provides the propane for the restaurants and cafeterias in the Yeerk pool. It won't exactly cripple them—"

"But it'll be fun," Rachel finished.

Prince Tobias nodded. "But it'll be fun."

Marco shook his head. "You're turning into her, you know that? Let this be a lesson. Never get married."

Rachel threw the nearest object at Marco. Unfortunately, the nearest object happened to be David. <AHHH! What are you doing!?! You're insane!>

Marco caught David. "Rat-boy's smarter than I thought. Where's the next target?"

Once more, the hologram rotated. “This is a sporting goods store. It’s Yeerk-operated but, more importantly, it leads people on hiking and camping trips into the caves. These people come back as Controllers.”

“And the final target,” Prince Tobias smiled once more, “is the Yeerk pool itself.”

“Yep, you’re turning into Rachel. What could we accomplish by attacking the pool?”

Jeanne nodded. “There is nothing to be gained from it.”

“This is a terror mission,” Prince Tobias argued. “The pool is the place they feel the safest. It’s the one place where they might actually be safe. If we hit them there...”

“It’s like Doolittle’s raid,” Rachel added. “You know, after Pearl Harbor. We launched some planes and bombed Tokyo. It didn’t hurt them, but it scared them. That’s what this is.”

“I think that maybe we should have a vote on this pool attack,” Marco suggested. “I vote no.”

“I am with Marco,” Jeanne agreed.

“I’m for it,” Rachel argued.

Prince Tobias nodded. “Me too.”

<I will go where you go, my Prince,> I assured him.

We all turned to David. He would decide what we did. <Well...it's risky and there isn't much to be gained from it. But I know a little something about fear. This will scare them and that's what we're going for. If we want to terrify the Yeerks, attacking the pool is what we should do."

"It's settled then. We attack the pool," Prince Tobias announced.

"When do we get started?" Rachel asked.

My Prince smiled. "We're already on our way to the bank."

Marco groaned. "Oh man. Stop doing that. Stop starting the missions before we even know what's happening."

CHAPTER 13

Prince Tobias' plan for the bank was simple. We would perform what is known as a heist. It was dangerous, risky. We were likely to be arrested. Marco kept insisting that it was insane. That didn't change Prince Tobias' plan at all.

He, Jeanne, and I stood on the steps outside of the bank. It was on the corner of the street. It was nearly five hours past noon. That meant that the bank would not have many innocents in it.

I was in my human morph. It was cold in this part of the world, at this time of year. A ski mask protected my face from the cold. Jeanne had a large scarf wrapped around her head and face. Prince Tobias was wearing large sunglasses, a wool hat, and his face was partially morphed to Howler.

Prince Tobias smiled. "Ski mask? Check. Sawed off? Check."

<Guilty conscience? Fear of death? Check, check, check. You're all clear for the exit,> David called from above us. He was keeping an eye out in eagle morph.

Prince Tobias nodded and then entered through the front doors of the bank. Jeanne and I followed. My Prince walked calmly to one of the tellers at the desk.

“Can I help you?” she asked.

Prince Tobias nodded. “I’d like to make a withdraw.”

“What is the account number?”

My Prince lowered his voice. “Nine-Four-Six-Six.”

The teller flinched. “Oh, I’m sorry, sir. Please, follow me.” Prince Tobias nodded to us. Jeanne and I remained where we were. He followed the woman into a room off to the side. I couldn’t see what was happening.

I felt someone tap me on the shoulder. I turned to see a man in a security guard uniform. “Son? Do you mind taking the mask off? It’s making me a little nervous.”

I glanced at Jeanne. She shook her head slightly. An idea occurred to me. To the man, I responded, “*No hablo Ingles, Señor.*”

“*Elimina la mascarilla, por favor.*” mask

Again, I glanced at Jeanne. She shrugged and shook her head again. I was stuck.

“*Hijo, elimina la mascarilla. Ahora.*”

A woman screamed. Prince Tobias rounded the corner. In one hand was a gym bag, no doubt full of Yeerk money. The other hand held a Shredder to the teller's head.

The guard completely forgot about me. He trained his gun on Prince Tobias. That was a mistake. Jeanne hit him in the spine and the guard toppled. I pulled a pair of Shredders from my coat and handed one to Jeanne.

<Guys, don't take too long. Cop cars are coming. They're about four blocks away. They're going slowly and keeping the sirens and lights off, but you don't have a lot of time.>

Prince Tobias nodded. Then, "I left you slugs a little present in your vault. Too bad I can't see you when you unwrap it."

Suddenly, the wall behind my Prince exploded. In its place stood a full-grown African elephant. Rachel. The few people in the bank were screaming now.

<Three blocks, Tobias,> David called.

Jeanne vaulted over the counter. I did the same, but with considerably less grace.

Prince Tobias continued to speak. "Tell Guraff the young beast says hi." Then, he turned and ran through the hole Rachel had created. Jeanne and I followed.

<They're almost here!> David cried.

“So are we,” Jeanne grumbled.

Behind the bank was an alley. Parked at the other end of it was a large, black van, waiting for us. Rachel was already halfway demorphed. Still too big to fit inside.

The large door on the side swung open. Marco stood there, waiting. “Come on, come on, we don't have much time. The cops are here already.”

“You are as bad as David,” Jeanne muttered, jumping in. I was right behind her. Rachel dove inside, still shrinking. My clumsy human feet became entangled with her trunk.

Prince Tobias tossed the sack of money in. But then he turned back to the bank. A cold-eyed human stood in the hole, aiming a Shredder at my Prince.

“You slipped up, half-breed. Are you faster than a Dracon beam? I doubt it.”

Prince Tobias smiled. “So try it.”

The man fired. I thought my Prince had a plan. I thought he would miraculously evade the shot. I expected anything but for him to be hit.

The beam struck him in the chest. It burned a hole through his heart and into the side of the van. We all gasped. “TOBIAS! NO!” Rachel yelled. My Prince fell to the floor.

The cold eyed man, cocky now, advanced on us. “Pathetic. I knew Guraff was overreacting. He was nothing but a stupid kid.” He drew back a foot to kick my fallen Prince.

Prince Tobias reached out a hand and grabbed his foot. “I wouldn’t do that if I was you.” My Prince calmly stood up as though nothing had happened. “At least you shot to kill.”

Prince Tobias grabbed the man by the throat and lifted him a foot off the ground. “But next time, pick an easier target. One that can actually be killed.”

Then, my Prince dropped the man and leapt back wards into the van. He swung the door shut. Marco was already peeling out of the alley.

CHAPTER 14

Rachel grabbed Prince Tobias' shirt at the collar and ripped it. His bare chest was exposed. Marco said, "Rachel, can't the two of you wait until you get home to do that?" Then he risked a glance over his shoulder.

Prince Tobias's chest was red and black. It looked like lava. "Most of my body is Howler right now," he explained. "Pretty much everything except for my jaw, really. Howlers regenerate. It takes more than a Dracon beam to kill one. I thought it would be a good way to freak the Yeerks out."

Rachel smacked him. "You could have been killed!"

He just shrugged. "It's safe. I tested it."

"You did WHAT!?"

"I had Al hit me with a Shredder on mid-level a few days ago. I wanted to see if a Howler would survive a full out blast from a Dracon beam."

"You should have told me," Rachel insisted.

"But then it wouldn't have been a surprise." There was the hint of a smirk on Prince Tobias' face.

"You think this is *funny*?" Rachel hissed.

"You being grumpy always makes me laugh."

“Hey, lovebirds,” Marco cut in, “do you mind keeping it down? I’m trying to drive.”

Rachel turned to stare at Marco. “I still can’t believe we decided he would be the best choice for the getaway driver. Don’t you remember what’s happened every time he’s tried to drive in the past? Remember Cassie’s dad’s truck?”

“Actually, only you and he were there for that. And anyway, Marco has experience driving at unsafe speeds. He’s got this awesome Ferrari back home...”

“Seriously, would you knock it off?” Marco shouted. “This is very stressful and David isn’t helping.”

<You’ll have to go left at the next intersection, Marco,> David called. <They aren’t chasing you but they are trying to box you in. Go left, then, right, then left again. That should take you to the dead end.>

“Why did we choose to go to a dead end?” Marco sighed.

“You just drive,” Prince Tobias admonished. Then, he pulled open the sack. “As much as I hate to do this...” He held a lighter to the money.

We didn’t need the money, of course. But we couldn’t let the Yeerks have it and we couldn’t take it with us if our escape plan was to succeed.

When he was sure the fire was going, Prince Tobias turned to us. “Okay, fly time. Marco, you can morph in time?”

“Not a problem, general.”

“Okay. Let’s go.”

My transformation to fly was pretty typical, if there is such a thing. My fur was replaced with little hairs. Plates of armor covered my body. My stalk-eyes turned into antennae. My main eyes bulged. I grew wings and shrank.

The fly instincts were easy enough to control. I was used to them, after all. As a fly, I didn’t know what Marco was doing. I only knew we were finished when he said, <Okay, I’m morphed. Now we wait.>

A moment later, the door slid open. I detected two men standing in it, guns raised. One turned to the other. “They’re gone.”

The second shook his head. “They just morphed to insects. Probably flies or cockroaches. Good luck arresting them.”

The first man rifled through the bag. “Just ashes. What were they after, do you think?”

The second man shook his head again. “They weren’t after anything. They wanted to leave us something.”

“What?”

“One of our people found a letter in the vault. It’s a list of places we own. The bank, the water pumping facility, the chemical plant, the propane outlet, and the sporting goods store we own in the mall.”

“What do you think it means?”

The second man shrugged. “Who knows? Did you hear what Inriss 812 said? He shot the young beast in the chest. The beast stood up, picked Inriss up off the ground, and said he couldn’t be killed. Then he left.”

“That’s not right. That’s not right at all. Maybe Guraff’s right to be scared.”

<Come on, let’s get going,> Prince Tobias decided. <The sooner we get started on the next one, the better.>

<Tobias, why did you leave them a list?> Marco demanded. <Now they know where we’re going to attack!>

<That’s the plan. They know where we’ll be, but they can’t stop us. That’ll make them more afraid.>

<And us easier to kill.>

<We’ll be fine. Would I lie to you?>

<Yes. Yes, you would.>

<Fine. Would Al lie to you?>

<If you told him to.>

<Okay... Would I lie to Jeanne?>

<Probably not.>

<Jeanne, we'll be fine.>

Marco sighed in our heads. <Now I feel so much better.>

A minute later, we landed on David. He flew back to the *Reliquary*. It was time for our next attack.

CHAPTER 15

The water pumping facility was not very well guarded. It was in the open, along the river that was just outside of the town. The only real protection it had was a large fence.

Rachel kept watch this time. The rest of us were in our battle morphs, hiding in the woods by the river. We hid in the shadows, waiting for her signal.

<I'm in position. Probably time to start morphing.>

Prince Tobias turned to us. "You heard her."

Marco and Jeanne shared a look. Then, Marco turned to Prince Tobias. "We'll be right back. I think this is a good time for our surprise morphs."

The two of them disappeared behind the trees. My Prince gave David and myself an odd smile. "Don't tell Rachel I let them go off like that." Then, he began his morph.

His flesh turned red and black. There wasn't much of a change in height, although his legs bowed. His dark eyes turned a pale blue. Claws sprung out from his wrists. My Prince was now a Howler, perhaps the deadliest creature in the galaxy.

The Howlers were created by Crayak and designed to do one thing and one thing only: kill. They were as fast as Andalites, as strong as Hork-bajir, and they were able to regenerate wounds. They could almost see inside of other creatures. Once, a Howler had fought all of the Animorphs to a draw. The Howler had walked away. The Animorphs ran.

David was morphing as well. First, his fur turned golden. His paws grew until they were the size of frying pans. His naked tail was covered with more golden fur. A small tuft of fur grew out of the end.

Then he started to grow. He was enormous. A beast over five hundred pounds. A magnificent mane of golden fur erupted around his neck. His teeth were a foot long. He was a killing machine. A fully grown African lion.

<Oh, man. I forgot what this feels like.>

Prince Tobias shook his head. <Don't get used to it. It's fun to play the predator. It's another thing to live it.>

<Thisistotallyawesome.Ican'tbelievehowfastIfeelrightnow.Jeanne do you believe this?>

<Marco? What did you morph?> I asked.

Two creatures stepped out of the trees. They reminded me of Andalites. They had the same basic shape. But these were a bit smaller and more slender. Their tails were longer and lacked blades.

Their heads were the strangest part. They had no stalk eyes. Their skulls were swept backwards, almost in a cone. I recognized them from the pictures I had been shown in school. <Garatrons?>

<Yep. Jeanne and I acquired them on that little escapade the Ellimists entuson. What do you think?>

<I think you need to slow down,> Prince Tobias answered.

<That would be like me telling you not to kill.>

<I'm not killing *you*,> Prince Tobias answered. <Yet. Okay, this is good. There's about one hundred yards of open space between us and that station. You two can get there in what, a second?>

<Less,> Jeanne snapped. I do not think she meant to snap, but it was hard for her to sound different.

<Okay, I see a few human guards with Shredders. Nothing to worry about,> Rachel informed us.

<Xena if you told us we should be worried I'd run screaming in the other direction,> Marco answered.

Jeanne nodded. <Can you see anything else?>

<No other guards,> she answered.

David stretched out on the ground. <So what are we waiting for? We get in there and do what we came to do. And for the record, Rachel, Shredders are dangerous.>

I nodded. I was in my Andalite form. <It should be simple enough. What do you think, Prince Tobias?>

<Marco and Jeanne can take out the guards before they know what's happening. You, David, and I will meet up with them. You hack the computer and flood the Yeerk pool with raw sewage. Sound like a plan?>

<Sounds like a joke,> Marco answered. Then, he and Jeanne disappeared. They were nothing but blurs in the distance. I heard the FWAP of a tail snapping. FWAP! FWAP! FWAP! <Guards are down what next boss?>

Prince Tobias, David, and I were only halfway to the station. <Open the gates for us,> he told them.

Almost instantly, the gates swung open. <Anything else?>

<Just, uh...take a quick run through the station. Take out any other guards.>

<Willdo.>

FWAP! FWAP! FWAP! FWAP! <Allgonewhatnext?>

<I guess...just do some laps around the building while we're finishing up here.>

<IfyouwantIcouldhaveapizzawaitingwhenyougetback.>

<That won't be necessary.>

David, Prince Tobias, and I made our way through the station without difficulty. All of the guards were unconscious, bleeding from wounds in their temples. <Those Garatron morphs certainly are effective,> I noted.

<Better than Andalites?> David asked. I do not think it was a serious question, but I decided to answer.

<Of course not. Andalites are able to morph, for one thing. And our tails have blades. Also, we know that the Garatrons exist only in small numbers. We Andalites are much more successful, as you know.>

<Just a joke, Al.>

<I thought it might have been.>

We reached a computer. It was pathetically easy to hack into the system. A moment later, I re-routed the flow from

some pipes so that their contents went to the Yeerk pool. In minutes, the Yeerk pool would be full of raw sewage.

<That'll tick off the Visser,> David noted.

Prince Tobias nodded. <Not to mention those Yeerks who are in the pool. With any luck, we'll poison them. It'll be a while before they can use the pool again anyway. Esplin will have to start shipping Yeerks to the Blade ship to feed. We might kill more than a few of them.>

<And here I thought this was just for fun,> Marco commented. <Pizza's ready.>

<How could you have cooked a pizza that fast?> Rachel demanded. <That isn't possible.>

<I used the friction created by my hooves as I ran around the dough Xena. It was more than hot enough to cook a pizza. Do you want anchovies? I could catch a few of them.>

CHAPTER 16

Our next target was the chemical plant. Jeanne flew cover this time, in owl morph. Darkness had fallen, so we were crouched in the open, not far away from the plant.

Like the water pumping facility, the chemical plant was alongside the river outside of town. The river was between us and the facility, since there were no nearby woods in which we could hide. We thought our side of the river would be safer than the other.

Prince Tobias turned to us. “Okay, it’ll be a bit different this time. I once saw a Garatron run across water, so Marco can do that. Al, I want you to go to a small morph. Hitch a ride on Marco. The same thing goes for David, but without the morph. When Marco gets to the other side, get ready to fight. Al demorphs. David goes lion.”

“What about you two?” Marco asked, already morphing.

“We’ll be waiting in the river, as sharks. Backup.”

Rachel glared at him. “I have to be backup?”

“Propane’s next.”

“Oh. Okay. Marco can sit back and watch that one.”

<With pleasure Xena. Wish mel luck. Al David you woready to go ye tor what? What's keeping you?>

<I am only halfway into the fly morph,> I told Marco.

<Close enough let's go. You too David. Ho pon.>

With some degree of difficulty, I climbed onto Marco's back. <Ready to go,> David called.

<I am as well,> I added.

<Cool. Then hang on because this is going to be really really really really fast.>

My fly senses exploded. Vibrations were all around me! Not just vibrations. These were VIBRATIONS! They could not be ignored. The whole world was exploding. <Marco! Slow down!>

<Couldn't even if I wanted to Al.>

Suddenly, we came to a dead stop. No slowing, just an instantaneous stop. FWAP! <Get off. Start morphing.>

I flew from Marco's fur. David leapt, already growing into a lion. I was rapidly becoming an Andalite.

FWAP! FWAP! FWAP! <Come on kids!>

I heard Jeanne call to me from above. <Morph faster, Alloran. You too, David. More are coming. They're flanking you. Marco can't take them all.>

<Saysyou.Watchme.>

I was fully Andalite now. I could see that Marco was running circles around a group of guards. Probably Controllers. More were coming around the building.

David turned to face me. <I'll take the guards. You get us through this fence.>

I nodded, then raised my tail. SLICE! SLICE! SLICE! SLICE! I cut through the links of chain. <Is this a large enough hole?> I asked.

<Could you fit a lion through it?> Jeanne asked.

SLICE! SLICE! SLICE! <Now I can.>

Marco materialized next to me. <Let'sgetgoing.> He glanced over his shoulder. <YoureadytomoveonDavid?>

David cuffed the last remaining guard with his paw. <Now I am.>

Marco dashed through the fence. I was right behind him, since he was going slowly. For a Garatron, it was a leisurely stroll. David paused, then pulled the hole open wider. He barely squeezed through. <Getting out won't be a picnic.>

Inside the fence were three buildings. One was a large factory of some sort. One was a garage. The other looked like a small office building.

<Where do we go?> I asked.

<Choose fast,> Jeanne told us. <I see some boats a mile or so upriver. The Yeerks called in reinforcements. I think I see some Kelbrid with them.>

<Right,> I heard Prince Tobias say in my head. <Rachel and I will try to stall them. You have to be out before they get here.>

<Splitup,> Marco decided. <I'lltaketheoffice.>

<I can check out the garage,> David decided.

<That leaves me with the factory.> I set off for my goal.

<CallifyouneedhelpI'llbetehreinaflash,> Marco called.

I pulled on the door of the factory. It was locked. SLASH! I removed the door handle. The door was easy enough to open after that.

Inside, the place was full of drums. I didn't recognize any of the labels. Although chemistry was part of my education, humans called their chemicals by different names. And the ones that went into the Yeerk pool were certainly disguised.

<AHHH!> I heard David yell.

<What is it?> I asked.

<The garage is full of guards. They were waiting for us in here. I'm hit pretty bad...>

I heard Prince Tobias's voice. <David, demorph. Get outside. I'm in hawk morph. I can get you.>

<Whyareyouinhawkmorph?>

<Because they'll recognize me that way. I need the Yeerks to see me. Especially when they run into the surprise Rachel just set up for them.>

<Whatsurprise?>

<Giant squid. She'll handle the boats. Make this fast, though; a squid can't handle the river for long. It's far too shallow.>

<I'm fine,> I heard Rachel argue. I could hear weakness in her voice. I had to move fast.

<There are a lot of chemicals in here,> I told them.

<Jeanne, go in with Al. I'm sure you'll be able to help him think of something.>

A moment later, an owl flew through the door. Jeanne landed on my back. <Okay...Alloran, I knock over that drum to your left.>

I swiped it with my tailblade. It fell the floor. A green liquid started to spill out.

<Good. Now, do you see that blue container over by that wall?>

<I see it.>

<Roll it over here and cut it open. Mix it with that green one you just knocked over.>

I did as I was told. In the distance, I could hear the TSWEEE of Shredder fire.

<AHHH!> I heard David yell again.

<It's just me, David,> Prince Tobias assured him.

<I know. Please don't eat me.>

<Then stop squirming. Marco, keep those Controllers distracted. Jeanne, Alloran, hurry up. The boats are almost here. Get 'em, Rach.>

Jeanne spoke to me again. <Now, here comes the tricky part. Spill that *jaune* barrel over there.>

<The what?>

<The yellow one, I mean. Make sure the liquid makes a line from the yellow one to the blue and green ones.>

I did as she instructed. <Now what?>

<Use your tailblade to make a spark. The yellow liquid will burn. When the fire reaches the blue and green ones, this whole factory will be *cendres*.>

<Yeahthat'llbereallycool.Justdont'thinkaboutJakewhileyoublo wtheplaceup.>

I slashed my tail across the ground. A spark jumped to the yellow liquid. It caught fire and started to burn. I had only a few seconds before it reached the other combustibles.

I turned and ran.

CHAPTER 17

[b][size=150]BOOOOOM!!!!!!![/size][[/b]

The whole world exploded. I was thrown several feet by the blast. The entire plant was leveled. The office and garage were reduced to rubble. The factory itself, as promised, was ashes.

The human-Controllers who Marco had been keeping busy were lying on the ground, unconscious or dead. Marco was lying there, too. He was already demorphing.

I concentrated on my owl morph. It was a little difficult. My ears were ringing, my vision was blurry, and I was tired. Morphing takes a lot out of you. I suddenly realized that we would be doing more morphing tonight than I had ever done in my life.

Still, the changes came. Feathers replaced fur. I shrank. My blurry, dim eyes were replaced with the clear vision of the owl. I took wing over the destruction I caused.

Jeanne, Marco, and I flew up into the night sky and looked down on what we had caused. The whole place was rubble. The fence was destroyed. Bodies lay here and there.

On the riverbank not far away, a pair of boats lay overturned. <Where is Rachel?> I asked.

<Look up,> Jeanne instructed.

An owl, a golden eagle, and a red-tailed hawk circled above us. <Oh man,> David said. <Al, I am getting the most amazing updraft from your little bonfire.>

Prince Tobias answered my unspoken question. <The Controllers ran off when Rachel attacked them. Something about running into a giant squid in the middle of the night in a calm river really got to them, I guess. Come on, we're behind schedule. Propane time.>

<My favorite part.> Rachel, of course.

The propane distribution center was on the other side of the town. We decided to fly there in the *Reliquary*. It was cloaked, so no one could see us.

Once inside, Marco collapsed in a chair. Everyone looked tired. Even David did not have his usual energy. Prince Tobias lay back on his bed, his hands behind his head, his eyes closed. Rachel lay beside him. Jeanne sat in another chair. I leaned against the wall.

“Man, this isn't a good idea,” Marco moaned. “Too many morphs tonight. Can't we call it a night?”

Rachel shook her head. “No. Propane’s next. I’ve been looking forward to it all night.”

Prince Tobias nodded. “We’re only halfway done. We’ve still got to attack the propane, the sports store, and the pool.”

“Dude, there is no way we can take them all tonight,” Marco argued. “Jeanne, what do you think?”

She looked unsure. Or maybe just tired. “I think... I will obey my orders.”

Prince Tobias shook his head. “Give us your opinion, Jeanne. Do you think we should do it?”

After a moment, she nodded. “It is important to our mission. But I am not sure it can be done. If we are voting whether or not we should continue, I will vote not.”

“David?”

<I think...I understand fear. To make the Yeerks afraid, we have to seem superhuman. Invincible. Immortal. They can’t know that we get tired. They have to think we’ll just keep coming, all the time. They can’t think that they’ll ever get a rest. I know that kind of fear. I say we have to keep going. That’s the only way to scare them.”

“Alloran?” my Prince asked.

<I will go where you lead, my Prince.>

“No. Give me your opinion.”

<I agree with David. We must seem like something unnatural if we are to create the myth you want. But we should be mindful of our limits. We are creating a myth; myth is not fact. We are mortal.> I added, <Of course, if you ask it, I will do anything.>

“Then we go on. I’ll make some coffee. That ought to keep us up for a bit.”

Ten minutes later, we were drinking coffee, looking down on the propane distribution center. David and I were in human morph. Marco assured me, from personal experience, that, if you fed coffee to a rat, it would die.

Marco darted his eyes around the ship. “Man, Tobias, this is really good coffee,” he said rapidly. “It’s kind of like being in Garatron morph.”

I nodded. I couldn’t keep my hands from twitching.

Jeanne looked at Tobias suspiciously. She was twitching as well. “Tobias, what is *à ce café*?”

Prince Tobias gave a weak smile. “Drugs.”

“No, really,” David insisted.

“Really. Sorry, but I drugged you guys. I laced the coffee with a small dose of some stimulants I...let’s say bought...at a

hospital earlier today. You needed energy and I knew you wouldn't agree to it if I told you."

Marco looked betrayed. "You...you drugged us? I'd be angry if I wasn't busy wondering where or not I was going to die."

"You'll be fine. It's just adrenaline."

I was shocked. For a Prince to lie to his warriors, drug them, and send them out into battle...it was unthinkable. It was...it was something the original Alloran might have done. Was that good or bad?

CHAPTER 18

High on ill-gotten adrenaline, we prepared to assault the propane distribution center. Prince Tobias turned to me. “Alloran, you keep watch this time. We’ll do this fast. In, blow it up, get out.”

I morphed to owl and watched as the others went to their battle morphs. Marco and Jeanne were a pair of Garatrons again. Rachel was a grizzly bear. Prince Tobias was a Howler. David was once more a lion.

The *Reliquary*, responding to Prince Tobias’s thought speak commands, brought us in low. I flew out through roof hatch. The other dropped through the floor.

I got as much air beneath me as I could. Prince Tobias had told me often enough that height was the best thing for a bird. With my owl eyes, I could see the center below me.

Jeanne and Marco raced around the parameter, clearing out the guards. It took them maybe ten seconds. Prince Tobias, Rachel, and David were already advancing on the center.

Massive tanks of propane were stationed throughout the center. <Hey,> Rachel called, <if I puncture one of these, the rest will go up in flames, right?>

<Anduswiththem,> Marco muttered. Well, as much as a Garatron is capable of muttering.

<Placeslikethisusuallyhavesafeguardstokeepchainreactionsfromhappening.Wewouldfirsthavetogettothecomputerandshutthosedown,> Jeanne warned.

<Okay. You get on that, Jeanne. We'll handle anyone who shows up.>

<Can I go too?> Rachel asked. <I want to be the one to pres the button.>

<Thebuttonwillprobablybemorelikeacomplexseriesofkeys,> Marco commented.

<I don't care. I want to do it.>

Prince Tobias nodded. <Marco, come back with me and David. We'll keep an eye out. Everything look clear, Alloran?>

<All is clear,> I told him.

I watched as Rachel and Jeanne disappeared into the facility. Prince Tobias, Marco, and David prowled around the outside. <Thisisn'tright," Marco complained.

<Yeah,> David agreed. <The Yeerks should have been waiting for us by now.>

<Itshouldhavebeenatrap,> Marco added.

A moment later, <Okay, it's time. In two minutes, this place will blow sky high. It'll make Alloran's little bonfire look like a candle.>

<WellatleastRachel'sshappy,> Marco sighed.

<Two minutes? Time enough,> came a new voice. Guraff.

I looked around. Where was he? There! Six shapes on the ground started to grow into Hork-bajir Morph-capable Controllers, probably hiding as bugs. Even I couldn't have seen them.

<Rachel, Jeanne, get to owl morphs. We don't have the time or the energy to fight them here,> Prince Tobias ordered. <When they're done, David, you demorph. Alloran will air-lift you out of here. After that, Marco, you run away from here; I'll pick you up in the *Reliquary*.>

<What about you?>

Prince Tobias smiled with his Howler mouth. <I've got a bit of a myth to spread.> To Guraff, he said, <Didn't you hear, Guraff? I can't die. Ask Inriss 812.>

“I have been around since the beginning of this war, young beast. No one is invincible.”

My Prince raised his Howler claws. <We’ll see.>

Marco attacked in a blur. His tail, cracking like a bullwhip, slashed a Hork-bajir. A pair broke off to fight him. He ran around them in a figure-8, lacerating them. They weren’t fast enough to touch him. Not even an Andalite could have hit a running Garatron.

Prince Tobias leapt at three Hork-bajir. His claws worked like magic. No matter how fast they moved, no matter how hard they fought, the Hork-bajir could not touch him.

Guraff advanced on David. “The traitor. It is time that you regret what you did.”

<The only thing I regret is ever turning against the Animorphs in the first place. Well, that and that I didn’t ask Rachel out when she was available.>

<Heythat’smyonlyregrettoo,> Marco called, still running. <Maybe we have more in common than I thought.>

Guraff was impossibly strong for a Hork-bajir. For any creature, really. He dove on David. They grappled, but it was a losing fight for David. Guraff split his stomach open with a knee-blade.

I had to do something. I remembered the stories about the first war. So I did what my Prince would have done. I tucked in my wings and dove.

“TSEER!” I screeched. Guraff glanced up. I raked my talons across his eyes.

He actually laughed. “Another scar! I will remember this, Alloran-Sirinial-Fangor. It is the first time you drew my blood. It will be the last.”

By the time he looked away from me, David was limping away, demorphing. I swooped down and sank my talons into his back. <Sorry,> I apologized.

<Just get me out of here!> he yelled.

Rachel and Jeanne joined me in the air. <Prince Tobias,> I called, <the center will explode in thirty seconds.>

<Got it. Marco, it’s time to go, man.> Marco took off. Prince Tobias turned back to Guraff. <In about twenty seconds, this place will be gone. I can survive that explosion. Can you?>

Guraff hesitated. Then, “I am no fool. Everyone, cockroach morph. We will not die here.”

Tobias started to walk away. <My Prince, perhaps it would be best for you to increase your velocity,> I suggested.

<I'll be—>

BOOOOOM!!!!!!!

[/size][/b]

I saw the explosion carry my Prince through the air. He landed several yards away from where he had stood. I could see his spine. The blast had scorched away his flesh.

Miraculously, his body started to heal itself. Flesh covered his spine. He stood up, cracked his neck, and then looked upwards. <That stung a bit.>

The *Reliquary* descended. With one leap, he landed in the ship. We followed. When we demorphed, Rachel looked like she was prepared to strike him. “Don’t ever do something like that again!”

He held up a hand. “I’m too tired to argue.”

A moment later, we retrieved Marco. He just sighed. “So, I suppose you want to press on to the mall now.”

“Yep. We’ve got to finish what we started.”

“Then I’ll need some more coffee.”

CHAPTER 19

The mall is a different place at night. The normally brightly-lit hallways are dark and, in some cases, frightening. Iron gates were pulled over stores. The air of happiness was gone. It felt like a tomb.

From the *Reliquary*, I had remotely disabled the security cameras. There would be no evidence of our passing except for a destroyed sporting goods store.

<It's just around this corner,> Rachel assured us. She was in her grizzly bear morph, which meant that she had abominable eyesight. Still, Prince Tobias trusted that she could navigate through the mall.

We turned the corner and found the store. I was surprised. It was deserted. The metal gate was pulled securely down. I was expecting an attack.

<Hmmm...pretty tight security,> Rachel muttered. Then, she grabbed the gate and pulled it out of the wall. <Oh, that took care of it.>

Rachel then started pulling things off of the wall. Our plan here was simple. Destroy everything. If we did that, the store

would have to close for a time. That would at least delay more tours of the caves.

Jeanne whipped her tail left and right, breaking anything even remotely fragile. I did the same, though my targets were a bit sturdier.

David leapt around, breaking things. His claws tore up bicycle tires, twisted metal, and shredded shirts. <You know, this is how I always said we should use our powers.> Almost instantly, he added, <Sorry, that was a joke. Rachel, don't attack me.>

<Hey, everything alright in there?> Marco asked. He was an owl, keeping watch outside.

<Yes,> I confirmed.

<That's what worries me,> Marco sighed.

We spent five minutes tearing up the store. In all that time, no alarm sounded. No one arrived. Nothing happened. I was also getting worried.

<Alright, let's bail,> Prince Tobias decided. <We've still got to deal with the pool.>

One by one, we exited the store. <That was fun,> Rachel said, licking one claw. <I really think—>

SLAM! A steel gate slammed into the floor behind us. SLAM! More and more gates hit the floor. We were suddenly separated, boxed into little compartments.

I could see the others through the gaps in my gate. <Oh, here's the trap,> Prince Tobias sighed.

Rachel attacked her gate, but it didn't move. <Yeerks,> she hissed.

As if on cue, the panels in the roof above me pulled back. A Kelbrid dropped into my cell. I caught glimpses of the others. Jeanne had to fight one Kelbrid. Rachel and Tobias each had to battle two. Guraff dropped into David's cell.

<Ah, my friends have arrived at last,> I heard the thought speak voice say. I knew the voice in two ways. I knew it as the voice of my uncle, Prince Aximili-Esgarrouth-Isthill. And I knew it as the voice of the Visser, Esplin 9466.

He appeared on the other side of the gates. He paced confidently, gesticulating with his tailblade. <I saw your list, Tobias. I knew what it meant. So all I had to do was wait. The losses of the other facilities are regretful, but I decided it was worth it if I got to kill you.>

<Then why hide out there?> my Prince taunted.

<I am no fool, Tobias. I know what that Howler body would do to this Andalite one. Besides, I do not want you dead. I want you captured. The Kelbrid will see to that. Their poison will weaken you until you collapse and pass out. Then, I will have you infested.>

The Visser turned his eyes to David. <The traitor will, of course, be killed. He would be too difficult to infest anyway. Every time he demorphed, he would kill the Yeerk in his head. It is much better this way.>

He smiled an Andalite smile. Somehow, he managed to make my uncle's warm smile into something cold and cruel. <And now, if you will excuse me, I will be leaving. It is far past my bedtime. Finish them.>

My Kelbrid swung his stingered arm at me. I dodged it and counterattacked with my tailblade. I struck him, but he did not seem to care. My wound was a scratch to him.

I could feel the wind whipping around me. Jeanne was circling her Kelbrid, slashing at it with her tail. She did not even draw its blood.

I hear Rachel give a roar as she attacked. One of her forepaws slammed a Kelbrid against the wall of her cage. The

other did the same to her second opponent. She was crushing their throats, but they were stinging her repeatedly. The poison would drop her soon.

David was slashing and clawing at Guraff, but the massive Hork-bajir was getting the better of him. Guraff had more blades, more stamina, and a lifetime of experience. David was out of his league and already exhausted. It would all be over soon.

Prince Tobias was backed up against one wall of his cage. The Kelbrid poison seemed to be able to halt the Howler's regenerating capabilities, so my Prince did not wish to be struck. He was holding his own, but he was the only one. It was only a matter of time.

<Everyone,> Prince Tobias called, <brace yourselves. This might not even hurt the Kelbrid but it might give you an opening. Be ready.> Then he unleashed the weapon that gave the Howler its name.

“KEEEROOOOOOWWW!!!”

My brain exploded. That's what it felt like. It was worse than the explosion at the chemical plant. I slapped my hands over my ears. I felt blood.

But my Kelbrid stumbled. He wasn't nearly as hurt as I was, but he had hesitated. I attacked.

My tailblade sunk deep into his throat. His black, acidic blood sprayed all over the place. It melted part of the wall of my cage. That was all I needed.

I began to morph to fly. It was time to flee. Once I made it to the *Reliquary*, I would be safe.

Before I morphed, I looked around. Jeanne was gone. In her cell, Rachel was finishing off a Kelbrid. Two more lay in shreds at the floor of the cage Rachel had vacated.

Prince Tobias had dispatched his Kelbrid and melted his way through the wall into David's cell. He and Guraff stared at each other, unsure how to proceed.

<Alloran, go,> he ordered. I nodded and morphed. It was time to go.

CHAPTER 20

We were all basically collapsed inside of the *Reliquary*. No one had the strength to move. No one even had the energy to be thankful we were alive. And I do mean all of us. Guraff and Prince Tobias had called a truce and let each other walk away.

After what felt like an hour of silence, Prince Tobias spoke. “Okay. Final target.”

“No. No way,” Marco interrupted. “We can’t do it. Not even with all the drugged coffee in the world. We don’t have the energy, Tobias.”

Jeanne nodded. “I cannot go on. I felt tired even in my Garatron morph. Do you know how hard it is to tire one of those things?”

<I’m with them this time,> David decided. <I know all about fear, but I also know about exhaustion. If we keep pushing ourselves, we’ll die. Then what will they have to be afraid of?>

My Prince turned to me. “I’m still going. Are you going to follow me even now, Alloran?”

I looked at him. He was lying on his bed. He did not even have the strength to sit up. He couldn't possibly be allowed to continue. It would be his death. But he was my Prince. I had no choice but to follow him.

<I will follow you, my Prince,> I said. <But I cannot allow you to go on tonight. If you try to attack the Yeerks again tonight, I feel that it is my duty to stop you.>

“You would disobey me for my own good, eh?”

I thought about it. <Yes. Yes I would.>

He laughed. “See, Rachel, I told you he'd do it. Congratulations, Alloran and David. You passed.”

<Passed? Passed what?>

“I never intended to attack the pool. That would be suicide, even if we were in top shape. But I could use this mission to test the two of you. David, you could easily have tried to turn back to the Yeerks. Instead, you didn't even offer them a deal. You were ready to die with us. As far as I'm concerned, you're off probation. No more adult supervision. You're a full-fledged Animorph.”

He turned to me. “As for you, Alloran, I needed to see just how far you would go. How far could I bend you before you broke and decided I had to be stopped? You'd follow me to

hell and back. I always knew that. What I needed to learn was whether you'd ever let me go that far in the first place.”

<Did I make the right decision, my Prince?>

“I don't know. But once, Guraff told me a story about our father. Elfangor was just an *Aristh* at the time. Alloran-Semitur-Corass ordered him to fire on an undefended transport ship full of Yeerks. Elfangor didn't do it.”

<Was that right or wrong?> I asked again.

“I don't know. Maybe neither. But that was the decision he made. The way I see it, you made a similar choice. I don't know if it was right or wrong, but it's what Elfangor would have done. That has to count for something.”

With a little smile, he added, “And by the way. The coffee wasn't drugged. A little caffeine was all it took to wire you and David. Jeanne, Marco, and Rachel were in on the whole thing.”

We all fell asleep on the *Reliquary* shortly after that. I woke up at three hours past noon the next day. It seemed that everyone else was just waking up as well.

Prince Tobias sat in a chair, sipping a cup of coffee. He was reading a hologram of that day's local paper. “Would you look at this,” he said. “It seems that some masked people, one

of them either a midget or a kid, robbed a bank. They were never caught and no photos have been released.”

“Good,” Marco sighed. “What else?”

“A malfunction at a water pumping facility left a small section of town without water last night. Nothing serious. Not as serious as that explosion that destroyed the chemical plant. It seems that some drums fell over and exploded. A bad mix of chemicals, apparently.”

“*Apparemmment*,” Jeanne agreed.

“In an unrelated story, the propane distribution center also caught fire. No one was harmed.”

<Good,> David sighed.

“And finally, some kids vandalized a store in the mall. No suspects. No videos. But the store is closing for a few weeks. It turns out that they were uninsured.”

“Poor planning,” Rachel sighed. “I’m making breakfast. Who wants pancakes?”

We all turned to stare at Prince Tobias. He was the one we trusted to lead us out of these situations. He did not disappoint us. “You know, Rachel, we all had a long day yesterday. Let’s just go out for breakfast. No need for you to cook.”

“Well, if you’re sure you want—”

“We’re sure,” Marco butted in.

“Well, let’s go them.”

I was thousands of light-years from home. There were no other real Andalites with me. But I was far from alone. My family was here.

Marco, who reminded me so much of my other uncle, Aximili. Jeanne, a warrior I now trusted as much as I trusted any other. David, my shorm with whom I had shared an experience of brotherhood that no one else has ever shared outside of the Anati race. Rachel, who in our short time together has become like a sister and mother to me. And Prince Tobias.

He was my Prince. But more than that, he was my brother. And in some ways, my father. He was a friend, my family, and a fellow warrior. He was wise, brave, strong, and cunning. He was my hero.

It was the six of us against the entire Yeerk Empire. Against all the arcane power of The One. Against logic, reason, and all odds.

We Andalites have a deep rooted optimism that we try to keep in check. But this day, I could not keep it down. I couldn’t help but feel optimistic.

We could win. We would win. As long as I had my family.

And now, to leave you with some words of wisdom from
Streetlight Manifesto:

*“I know it's hard but so are you
And so am I and we'll pull through together, together
And I said that it's been years but I still fear
That someone dear will leave me here forever, forever and I said: hey!
Hey! You've got to keep trying
You've got to keep holding onto what you've got
Because what you've got it sure ain't a lot
And hey!
Everyone's falling down
Everyone's holding out for what you've got
But what you've got, it sure ain't a lot.”*
—Failing, Flailing

Don't miss the next installment of the Animorphs series:

63: THE HOMECOMING

We met aboard the *Reliquary*, the ship that Tobias, Rachel, and Alloran called home. As usual, Rachel had a hot meal waiting for us. And, as usual, we were afraid to eat it. Rachel was good at many things. Cooking was not one of them.

Tobias, our fearless leader, ate without hesitation. Slowly, the rest of us joined in. "Okay," he said. "As you know, Alloran rigged our computers so that they would get all the information the Yeerk computers did. We know from this information that the Yeerks are going to open a second front."

"Bring it on," Rachel said. "We can take them."

Marco shook his head. "No, we can't. And they know it. We can barely hold our own here. If they open up a whole new invasion, that's the ballgame. We might as well call it quits."

Tobias nodded. "That's why we have to stop this before it even starts. We have to go to where it's happening and shut it down. Now."

David sighed. “Guraff will be in charge. Or the Visser himself. I can’t imagine the Visser trusting anyone else with this. It won’t be easy.”

I respect David because he knows our enemy. He worked for the Yeerks not too long ago. He understands their inner workings. Also, he has a similar mentality.

“Where is this invasion going to take place?” I asked.

Tobias gave me a slight smile. “Our home town. Another reason we have to stop it now. I’m sure none of you want your families to get infested. Possibly for the second time.”

“How do we stop them, my Prince?” Alloran asked. He was in his human morph as well, looking like a younger Tobias.

Rachel smiled. “Blow stuff up.” Then, she looked questioningly at Tobias. “Right?”

He nodded. “Complete sabotage. Find where they want to set up their Kandrona and destroy it. Find out where they’re building their pool and level the place. Find out what Yeerks are in charge and take them out. Don’t give them an opening. Don’t let them breathe.”

Marco nodded. “Sounds like fun and all, but that will attract a lot of attention. This has to stay secret.”

“We can make it look like an accident,” Rachel said.
“Right Jeanne?”

I shuddered. “*Oui*. We can make it look like *un hasard*.”

“Oh, she’s speaking French again,” Marco said. “Say something else.”

“Marco, now really isn’t the time,” Tobias began.

“Hey, I just learned that we’re about to lose this war. I can’t think of a better time.”

Rachel glared at him “Marco? Do you remember the deal we made?”

Marco turned just a bit pale. “Oh, come on, Rachel. I’m not—”

“No excuses. You know the rules.”

Marco hung his head. “Fine. Carry on, oh fearless leader.”

David, Alloran, and I exchanged glances. I was certain that this was somehow related to the first war, since only the original Animorphs seemed to understand it.

Tobias sighed. “As I was saying, this new invasion is back home. The Visser will probably start it himself. Gurauff will take over here, where they’re well situated.”

“This won’t be easy,” David reminded us. “Stopping an entire invasion? Not easy at all.”

“When has it ever been easy?” Marco answered darkly. “We’ve got no plans, no targets, no idea what to do.”

“Well,” I said, “we could try to end the invasion here instead. We crippled them not long ago.”

Rachel shook her head. “I want to keep the Yeerks out of my home. Leave this for later.”

Marco answered her. “It isn’t about what we want. It’s about what we can do. But I think it’ll be easier to end this new one. I say we go home.”

I nodded. “It will be easier to prevent than to cure.”

“That’s true,” David agreed. “Take it from a guy who used to carry the plague.”

“You were not a plague rat,” Marco argued. “I know. I caught the rat you morphed. No plague.”

“Maybe I picked something up on that island,” David responded. “You never know.”

“Could we concentrate here?” Tobias asked. “We were taking a vote. Rachel?”

“We stop them at home first,” Rachel said. Then, more forcefully, “They are not getting their hands on my family.” She looked at me. “On any parts of my family.”

“I will go where my Prince commands,” Alloran decided.

Tobias nodded slowly. “Then we’re going for it.” He smiled. “Everyone, pack your bags. We’re going home.”

PREVIEW SUMMARY

The Yeerks are opening a new front. The Animorphs know that they can't fight two wars. This second invasion has to be stopped before it can even begin. But there is a complication. This new invasion is in the Animorphs' home town.

Jeanne, Marco, David, Rachel, Alloran, and Tobias have to put an end to this before it gets any farther. But Jeanne has been thinking of quitting the war ever since Santorelli's death. Seeing her father may be too much for. She may not be able to carry on. This might be her last mission before she calls it quits.

She wouldn't be the first...