

# The Unusual Hazards of an Extraordinary Workplace

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Tavish woke and stretched with a yawn. His great muzzle hinged open to reveal a room-sized mouth, lined with an assortment of sharp teeth that were almost as long as the average human was tall. Then rolled out of his bed, which, as most Brellan beds were, was more of a large nest of pillows and blankets than anything else, to prepare for the day ahead.

He had the early shift at the bar, such as he usually did, which meant that he didn't have all that much time to waste. So, he bathed, cleaned his mouth out, and dressed for work. Which was the most unusual part of the process. As his job was at the "Pub" that had opened not too long ago, which meant he needed to dress like someone who'd typically work at such a place.

They consisted of some rather odd, if not comfortable, humani style clothing. It had taken him several weeks to get used to the garments, as they covered far more of his body than any brellan had ever needed. But once he'd figured out how the pants worked, he'd found them somewhat... cozy. Perhaps that's why the little creatures could stand wearing them all the time.

It was something that had opened not long after the tiny apes first arrived on the planet. After they'd done a thorough scan of their ship's data core that found a treasure trove of interesting customs and social activities. Where, for some reason, the Brellans had taken a liking to this singular part of Human culture.

Despite how strange the place was, for a variety of reasons, he rather liked working there. It was the first truly alien experience he'd ever gotten the chance to encounter. And if this one small facet of there society was any indication, then the humani would have a lot to introduce to the universe. Once they got used to their place in it, that is.

Plus, it gave him a chance to meet some rather pleasant females, who seemed to enjoy gathering and socializing within the place more than his fellow males did, for some reason. He lacked the social experience and wisdom of age to have given that matter any serious thought yet. Besides, several of his female patrons, if their strengthening musk was any indication, were getting rather close to there cycle.

Some had even shown signs of, perhaps, allowing him a chance at proving himself worthy enough to try and survive coupling with them. The thought of their favor and the honor associated with a successful mating, especially one that bore fruit, elicited a pleasant sensation from his loins. So much so, that he felt his slit relax a little in expectation, just enough for the tip of his rod to poke out and brush against the rough fabric concealing it.

Of course, there were other reasons besides the alluring promise of dangerously sexual bliss. He also had the opportunity to interact with the little humani that now shared the planet with them now and then. Although most of the tiny apes seemed to shy away from him whenever he did and, much to his dismay, he could never quite tell why.

He had just enough time to eat before having to leave, so, he prepared a simple meal and lounged next to the small Raj`aera, or low table, while doing so. As he did, he checked the datapad that usually sat upon it for any last-minute news or messages. Where, other than the usual information, he found a single message that piqued his interest.

The message was simple and to the point, as most Brellan communications tended to be. In which he was informed that a humani would be leaving the safe zone to perform some kind of work that day. The specifics of what the little creature's task consisted of weren't listed, only that care should be given so as not to kill the poor thing without due cause. Of course, were an accident of some kind to happen and his life jeopardized, they would fully understand.

Tavish was quite intrigued and rubbed the stubble of his recently shaven Keige-muan`a as he considered it. He'd had some interaction with an occasional humani here and there but hadn't had the chance to watch one work or have a meaningful conversation with one like he had been wanting to. And having the creature more or less stuck there would mean they'd have plenty of time to chat.



Stefan trudged down the long corridor in slow, even steps. All while the harsh, artificial light blasted into his eyes, and his arms ached from the heavy equipment he'd hauled all the way up from the tool room. Less than half of it was going to be required for the job, he knew, but Colony Management would be up his ass if he didn't bring all of it along.

The worst part about though, the part that really stuck in his craw, was that it should have been his day off, all for a job that should take no more than a couple hours. He'd originally planned on spending the day relaxing and perhaps catching up on some reading. Instead, he had spent all morning lugging over twenty kilograms of useless shit all the way to upper tear-six, section three.

And why? Because, *only he had the necessary skills to repair the faulty power conduit*, which was bullshit, and his supervisor fucking knew it. The sad truth was that he'd just been in the wrong place at the wrong time the night before when Donovan had walked into the room.

The steel walls of the hallway echoed with a harsh series of thuds as he unceremoniously dropped the gear. Not really caring if any of the finely calibrated equipment was damaged from the rough treatment. He faced the access hatch and paused for a moment to relax and calm down. Letting the bevy of warnings and limited access directives around the closed doorway blur into a mass of color.

After a minute or two, he took a deep breath and steadied himself. While Mentally preparing for what lay beyond the relatively thin protective layer of dura-steel and magnetic locks. Where, if he lost focus, for even an instant, he may not even survive long enough to ensure that the hatch to sealed closed behind him. Which would further ruin an already shitty day.

“Alright, there’s nothing to this, so calm down,” he said aloud, “It’s just a simple repair to an auxiliary line power-junction. You’ve done hundreds, if not thousands, of these before, and this one is no different.”

Except, this time he was going to be out in the open, among 75-meter-tall monsters. Any of whom could easily smash him into an unrecognizable paste or pluck him up and swallow him whole. As some incredibly short-sighted engineer had placed the access panel for it outside the human safe zone, within a wall somewhere behind the local Brellan Pub.

To be fair, it was technically a shared space, the human population had a small balcony where they could come out and order drinks or socialize. In theory anyway. Not as many people used it anymore, for one reason or another, especially after the last *incident* where some fool let himself get picked up and carried off.

Details were sketchy, as they always were, but the rumor was they he’d gone quite willingly. Which, of course, only fueled the rumors as to why he was never brought back. And what the beast had done or offered to get him to leap into her hand like that, some of them made his skin crawl.

Recently, however, there was also an old, repurposed SG-288 servitor droid someone had set up to bartend the human side. As well as make some strange, backroom deal to purchase brellan-sized drinks. Which were then resold, in the far-smaller human portions, for an insane profit, as the brellan didn’t charge by the megaliter.

Of course, nobody could ever find any concrete proof that such a thing had been done. But anyone served a drink from that bar must have surely noticed the industrial aftertaste it left in their mouth. He had no idea why Colony Management allowed it to continue, which made him suspect someone had been paid off.

Either way, rations had been all-but eliminated due to the surplus of cheap, strong, brellan booze. So, he guessed it couldn’t all be as bad as they said.

He roused from the divergent train of thought and shook himself. “Focus, pay attention, in and out,” he chanted aloud. “Two hours at most, but I can get it done in thirty-minutes if nothing goes wrong. Which it won’t, because, I’ve done this too many times to count.”

Which, of course, brought to mind the many, many things that *could* go wrong, not just with the repair, but to him in general. He’d been assured that steps were being taken to ensure his safety, and that the brellan on duty would be informed and directed to keep him safe. But they’d skipped over the part about just *who* had informed the brellans... and whether the creatures had bothered to listen.

Although, while not completely dissipating the worst of his fears, it had managed to calm them enough so that he could do the job. So, realizing that he could delay the inevitable no longer, he let out another long sigh and keyed in the security code to unlock the hatch.

A loud click hammered through the door and reverberated down the long corridor as the mag-locks released. Followed by a dull, almost impatient, chime as the security panel alerted him that it was ready for the secondary access key. Which was more to log who was opening the hatch than anything else and, perhaps, to give the user one last chance to reconsider their actions.

He punched in the code and the door pulled in, then slid to the side with a somewhat accusatory hiss of atmosphere. Where blinding natural light and thunderous noise blared in through the opening, stunning him for a moment before he could adjust to the sudden change. He activated a sound dampening implant and waited for a moment as the level became something he could manage.

As it did, he took in the view of what lay beyond the open hatch, which was less stunning than what he'd expected it to be, so far anyway. Directly in front of the doorway was a large bottle that diffused the light through its shimmering, greenish contents. Although, it was a very large bottle, which was a rather impressive sight to see, in a way. Then, with one last curse at his superiors, he picked up his equipment and walked through the hatch.

Once all the gear had been lugged through, he set down the tools that wouldn't be needed next to the hatch as it slid closed with another quiet swish. Then, after grabbing what he did need, he began to edge along the wall towards where the access panel should be. Which was, he noticed as he emerged from behind a towering bottle, located on a massive shelf, right behind the bar.

The brellan barkeep was busy mixing a drink for one of his regulars, when a slight movement from the left caught his attention. He glanced over to see a tiny figure carefully making its way across the shelf. After he'd finished and served the drink, he paused to watch its progress for a couple of minutes. While edging a bit closer to see what the diminutive humani was up to.

Stefan ducked as a large shadow passed over him when the brellan barkeep walked past. From what he could tell, the shelf sat just below eye level and he would likely be seen almost immediately if out in the open. Something that he had mixed feelings about and kept from moving forward.

On the one hand, being seen would mean that the colossal monster wouldn't accidentally squash or injure him in some way. However, on the other... it meant that the thing would have easy access to him. Then again, trying to stay hidden the entire time would slow his work and most likely increase the dangers involved significantly.

After a solid ten minutes or so of fretting and sulking about his shitty luck, he gave in to the inevitable and continued out into the open. Hoping to find the panel and get the job finished before something unpleasant managed to happen.

However, he hadn't made it more than a couple of meters before a shadow loomed overhead that stopped him cold. "Hello there," rumbled a deep, yet friendly, voice from just above him.

For a heart-pounding moment, he considered bolting toward the closest bottle to and attempt to hide. But something told him that running away from the creature would likely trigger some kind of predatory response. Which was a bad idea, especially as he already looked a lot like prey to it already.

So, Stefan stood his ground and gazed up at the massive, furry face that looked down at him for a moment before replying. While trying not to let the odd gleam in its eyes bother him too much.

He set down his toolbox and gave the towering creature a small wave. “Um, hello... I’m Stefan,” he offered, and not sure why. “I’m the tech they sent out to fix the damaged conduit.”

The brellan regarded the little humani for a couple of seconds, then gave him a wide, toothy smile. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Stefan,” he said with a slight nod. “They told me you were going to be stopping by today, so, I’ve already taken some precautions to keep you safe.”

Stefan nodded back and went to pick up his tools again, while trying not to dwell too much on the image of the many, large teeth that filled the brellan's mouth. Some of which looked as though they were larger than he was.

“Thank you,” he managed to say after a second or two of mild terror, “I’ll just, erm... get started then, if that’s alright with you.”

While the Brellan’s expression was friendly, so far as he could tell, he still couldn’t shake the feeling of being sized up for a meal. Or a light snack at the very least. A sensation that wasn’t helped by the way he loomed over Stefan, as though about to pounce on him.

“Of course,” the monstrous publican replied, “Just let me know if you need anything.”

Stefan turned to go, but something about the brellan’s expression stopped him. It seemed a little sad, like pictures of a fretful and curious puppy he’d seen once. He didn’t know why, but he felt the need to stay and talk to him for a while, and as the fear died down, as his own curiosity had risen.

“So, um...” Stefan began, not sure of the exact protocol when conversing with a Brellan. “What’s your name, what should I call you if I need anything?”

The barkeep perked up. “Oh, well, even with the translators I doubt you’d be able to make sense of it... or say it correctly. For simplicity, you may call me ‘Tavish,’” the brellan replied with another smile. “It’s as close to my name as can be pronounced in your language.”

Stefan set his tools down again and nodded sagely at the topic. “I tried to learn some Brellan,” he said with a shrug, “Simple phrases and the like that might be useful. But I couldn’t make much sense of it, and the attempt always gave me a headache after too long.”

Even then, the memory of it started to give him a painful tingle somewhere behind his forehead. Their language was too strange and complicated for humans to properly decipher. One where every word was essentially a nonlinear palindrome that sounded differently depending on what its intended meaning was. While others sounded the same and had everything to do with body language or scent. Which was rather difficult for a human to properly do.

It had been quite a relief to the confused and increasingly desperate human population when a suitable workaround had been found. While it relied on two translators, one human and the other brellan, and a terabyte of software on each, it could at least give them all a general idea of what the colossal predators wanted. Which, much to everyone's relief had not been about their taste.

Tavish nodded knowingly. "Indeed, it is quite difficult for a species without the proper anatomy for it. But some of you have managed to not completely embarrass yourselves while giving the effort."

Stefan chuckled, despite his lingering unease, as he tried to remember something easy to say. Perhaps a simple question about needing the bathroom or general assistance? He cleared his throat and let a series of oddly rhythmic guttural sounding grunts, barks, and keening noises escape his lips. Afterward, he thought he'd done a good job of it, but a sudden boom of laughter suggested otherwise.

"Not too bad," Tavish said with a tilt of his head, "The vocals are good, spot on actually, but I think your posture wasn't quite right. Because you just asked if someone could shove you up their ass to help them find a lost shoe. A tempting offer, but I think you have better things to do right now."

Stefan blanched at realizing what he'd just said. Not only because it was rather embarrassing, but because one of them might have taken him seriously and considered it a legally binding verbal agreement. Which he'd been strongly warned about.

Tavish let out a low rumble of mirth at the dire look on Stefan's face. "Don't worry," he said with a dismissive gesture, "I doubt anyone would take something like that seriously. Although you should still be careful about it, you never know who might take advantage of such a simple error. Were Pashda here, I'm sure she'd find some amusing way to further instruct you on the fine points of our language."

Stefan gulped at the array of images that ran through his mind. "I will, thanks," he said. Then added as his curiosity continued to push him further along while his tension eased, "So, if you don't mind me asking, why do you work here, and why a recreation of an ancient human bar of all places?"

Tavish leaned on one arm and made a gesture of noncommittal as he thought about it. "Well," he replied after a moment, "I like to meet people and learn new things, especially when it

comes to you humani. Your culture is fascinating and a little strange at times, so, where better to learn about it than here.”

“I guess that makes sense,” Stefan said with a shrug. “Although, I’ve always thought it was because there were plenty of snacks available.”

The massive bartender gazed down at him with a confused expression for a couple of seconds. “There is a kitchen here, and I do get a free meal or two out of it now and then,” he said, “I guess that’s a pretty good perk.”

“No, not that,” Stefan said, not believing that he actually needed to explain himself, “You know... *snacks*... Plenty of humans lounging around up on the balcony, within arms reach... for when... you know... the *craving* sets in.”

Stefan wasn’t stupid, as he, like everyone else, had heard the rumors and read some of the redacted reports. Instances of humans disappearing, whether willingly or not, while in the presence of a brellan. The really weird ones were the stories of those who sought out a brellan to, well, offer themselves to. Such as what might have happened there not long ago. The very idea made his skin crawl.

Tavish’s expression shifted to one of revulsion and the fur on the side of his face stood on edge. “You mean... eat one of you... just like that?” he asked with a rather nauseated look. “Pashda likes to talk about that from time to time, especially after something that happened a couple of weeks ago on her shift. And I know Kestial enjoys *playing* with you humani whenever she can find a willing participant. I’ve even introduced her to several, in fact. But I could never see myself doing that, and never to someone against their will, that’s basically murder.”

A small wave of relief flowed over Stefan at seeing how sincere Tavish’s repugnance of the idea had been. Of course, hearing about how the others weren’t too picky about it was a bit distressing. As was the fact that he’d apparently introduced a few victims to some brellan acquaintances of his.

Although, they at least seemed to care about whether their prey was willing or not, which helped to make him feel better about everything. If only a little bit.

“That’s good to hear,” he said, and would have added more, but a small chime went off in his head. “Crap, sorry to cut this short, but I really have to get to work. This is an interesting conversation, but I’m already falling behind,” he continued while starting to make his way along the shelf again, “It was a pleasure to meet you.”

“Anytime,” Tavish said with a little wave before turning back around to the bar. “Just squeak if you need anything.”



Stefan threaded his way through the enormous bottles as he chided himself for wasting so much time. As it was, he'd already spent a quarter of an hour flapping his gums when he should have been working. There'd be plenty of time to socialize *after* the job was done.

He continued forward with a steady grumble under his breath until he reached a nondescript spot on the wall. Where he set everything down and spent a couple of minutes carefully setting up his equipment. Then, with a complex wave of his hand against the metallic surface of the wall, it split open to reveal several large power lines inside.

Where all but one of the four lines hummed and glowed as they directed several hundred petawatts through them to various destinations, both brellan and human. The amount of power was staggering and could easily vaporize him and everything else within fifty meters if he wasn't careful. Which, to be honest, scared him far more than a room full of angry and quite hungry brellans.

However, these power conduits had become damn near idiot-proof over the years. To the point where it would take a planet-sized fuckup for that to happen. One that required the technician to be a flamboyantly suicidal idiot.

That, and having calmed down quite a bit about being out of the safe zone, meant the repair was finished far quicker than even he'd first assumed. Which a pleasant bit of relief for him. So, he reactivated the power feed, ensured everything was working correctly, then closed and secured the panel.

But rather than gathering his tools and heading back to the hatch, like he should have done, Stefan decided to have a quick look around. As his curiosity had really started to get the better of him. After all, it might be some time before he'd get the chance to freely wander about like that while in relative safety. So long as he was careful to stay in full view of the bartender and away from anything dangerous, there shouldn't be anything to worry about.

He began to make his way along the shelf, slowly at first but soon quickening the pace as his anxiety evaporated completely. All while meandering between the rows of massive bottles. Each one filled with thousands of liters of fluid that shimmered and danced in the light.

The view from his lofty perch was quite an interesting sight indeed, and he stopped for a moment to fully appreciate it. As he could see pretty much the entire bar that stretched out away from him with enough open space to easily park several dropships. But other than that, and the oddly dressed, furry creatures within it, the scene was almost identical to pictures and virtual constructs of similar places that had existed centuries ago on earth. Only much, much larger.

As he continued down the row again for several dozen more meters, he wondered why they'd chosen *this* specific look from *this* period. Why hadn't they picked something a little more modern? They might as well have recreated a saloon from the ancient American western expansion period, as it would've been just as archaic. Of course, watching as a Brellan tried to use a spittoon would be as horrifyingly disgusting as it would be fascinating.

There was a sudden flurry of movement from the front door as several new patrons entered and seated themselves. Most of them were dressed in the traditional loose, robe-like garments and made their way to the back. The small group spread out to lounge around one of the few raj`aeras, placed there. Where they relaxed against the array of rough, building-sized pillows, just as they would for any other social occasion or a simple meal.

Although, some of them padded over to the table and chairs that would normally be found in such an establishment. As they did, each of them eyed the furniture with an array of curious and cautious expressions at the strange, humani way to relax. But the most interesting thing about them, Stefan thought, was that a couple of them had chosen to wear close approximations of human clothing.

Some of the various items had to be altered quite a bit to fit their alien frames, especially the females. Which needed to be let out to almost comical proportions so that their multiple rows of breasts could fit. But other than that, the effect was that they managed to fit right into the room's atmosphere quite well.

He'd drifted somewhat close to the edge as he observed, and a sudden gust of wind sent him stumbling back as Tavish walked by at a brisk pace. The barkeep was engaged in a flurry of motion as he mixed drinks and took orders from the new arrivals. Stefan hauled himself back to his feet and chided himself for being careless, then continued down the shelf for a short distance.

After watching for a while longer, it became apparent that many of the new brellan arrivals were there for a midday meal or libation. An idea that was nudged along by a familiar pang of hunger within his own gut. A feeling that made him realize how much time he'd already spent gawking and should probably head back.

However, just as he turned to walk back to his gear, his nose caught the scent of something that made his empty stomach complain and his mouth water. Which turned him in the opposite direction as he wandered further along the shelf, until his hungry steps soon led him to the end of it. Where he gazed down far below him to see several plates of food being brought out from the kitchen and placed on a prep station.

Being so close to such a sheer drop gave him vertigo and he stepped back as a strong wave of it washed over him. But after a minute or so, the sensation faded sufficiently to allow him to get close enough to the edge so that he could inspect the scene below. Where, as he did, the collection of smells that rose from the steaming dishes enticed and teased him in strange culinary ways.

Of the three plates thus far set out, none of them seemed to have a substantial amount of any kind of meat on them. Rather, they each had a different assortment of colorful wads, rolls, or mounds of vegetables. Few of which he could identify, but there was one particular item he did that comprised a large part of two dishes.

Something called, Ka`gestiman or Kag`eastamen, he couldn't quite remember which, or even how it was properly pronounced. But the human colonists generally called it 'Snot Grass', due to its odd, greenish hue and long, leafy appearance. It was basically a protein-rich fungus that grew in deep caves all over the planet.

The stuff was semi-intelligent, mildly aggressive, quite toxic, and attracted to anything that emitted an EMF. All of which made it essential to keep it away from the colony's lower levels, where most of the power distribution system was. He still shuddered when thinking about the last damage calculations from even a minor inundation.

The brellans, however, cultivated it in vast, cavernous tube-like constructions that lay buried, out of the way, here and there across the planet. Where they often employed small groups of humans to tend and watch over them. It wasn't that bad of a job, as far as he knew. So long as they paid attention and kept the snot from sneaking up on them.

Stefan had always wondered what the creatures did with the stuff, as it seemed all but useless. It piqued his curiosity ever higher, and he leaned over a little bit more to get a closer look at one of the plates. As he did, something rather alarming caught his eye. Where, buried among the colorful mix of pasta-like vegetation was an oddly familiar-looking shape, which was moving as though trying to escape.

He watched it writhe in distress for a couple of seconds, not sure if it was just his eyes playing with him. Perhaps it was an animal of some kind, he wouldn't fault the brellans for eating a live goat, cow, or even one of the planet's native species every now and then. But the more he focused on it, the more it appeared to be another human that had somehow become trapped in the food.

When he could no longer deny the obvious, he decided to wave down Tavish and ask him about it. But just as he was about to pull himself back, something jostled the shelf. It wasn't much, in fact, he might not have even felt it had he not been in such a precarious position, but it was more than sufficient to pitch him over the edge.

A small cry of alarm escaped his lips as he felt his balance shift dangerously forward. He waved his arms in a rather comical fashion for a moment in a futile attempt to try and stop the momentum. But there was nothing he could do to change the law of gravity, which toppled him over the side.

The plummet down was long enough that he'd be surprised if nobody noticed it. It sent the wind ripping past him and the bar became a sickening blur of color. Where his concern became more about surviving the landing than anything else. As even his somewhat armored unisuit and implants wouldn't protect him from impacting the stone floor at terminal velocity.

However, fate seemed to have other ideas as his trajectory had him careening diving directly onto one of the plates of food. Which shifted his concerns dramatically as he realized what landing

there would likely mean for him. He again tried to swim through the air, and several other useless gyrations, to try and change his destination. But nothing had any effect, and his fall ended just as suddenly as it had begun.

Stefan impacted with a loud splat on a large roll of something wrapped in Snot Grass that lay on a soft bed of steamed Dama fruit. The effect of which might have been rather pleasant, were it not for the throbbing pain all over his body from the fall and terrifying threat of being eaten. Which was a matter he knew should be addressed as soon as the room managed to stop spinning so much.

But before he could do much more than realize that he'd somehow managed to survive the fall, the plate lurched upward and was carried away. Its jarring movement as it was lifted and conveyed out to one of the tables didn't help the pounding in his head. So much so, that he barely managed to keep from vomiting, and ruining someone's perfectly good lunch as the room spun by, yet again. As it was, by the time the world came to a standstill with a sudden jolt, he had really started to regret his damn curiosity about everything.

As the plate was set down, he chanced a quick look around him as best he could without aggravating his nausea. Thinking that he might have landed on the same plate as the thing he'd noticed before. Where, should it indeed have been another human, would have allowed them to have worked together to better their chances of escape. But all he could see were the dozen or so mounds of the same kind of roll, or whatever they were, that he had landed on.

Seeing that he was alone and that his eyes were again able to focus on his surroundings, he glanced around to see where it was that he'd ended up. The first thing he saw was a rather hungry pair of eyes gazing back down at him as their owner reclined next to the low table. Where he realized that he'd been taken all the way to the back of the room and set before one of those sitting around the low table. And he began to wonder, with mounting dread, whether human flesh was an acceptable part of a traditional mid-day meal for a brellan.

The robust, and quite mature from what he could see, female brellan was already regarding the plate of food with an expression of ravenous expectation. If she'd noticed the tiny human mixed in with the other food, she didn't show any sign of it... or care much either way. It dawned on him that staying put was an unbelievably bad idea. So, he looked around for a way to escape while working to get free of the sticky substance that held him before her gullet had a chance to claim him.

She reached out and grabbed the edge of the plate with her long fingers and pulled it towards her as she leaned forward to inhale the food's subtle mix of scents. He watched as her muzzle drifted down ever closer while her nose twitched at what was likely a mouth-watering array of spices. But what really made his blood run cold, was, with a small flick of her tongue to lick away some drool from her lips, she swallowed some of the drool quickly building within her mouth.

Her muzzle was so close that he didn't just hear it sending a swimming pool's worth of saliva down her throat, he *felt* it. The thunderous gulp slammed into his chest as though being hit by a

sledgehammer made of flesh. It brought up primal fears so ingrained and deep in the human psyche that he could almost feel the whiskers sprout from his suddenly furry cheeks.

It sent a surge of energy to his limbs and he tried to pull himself free of the thick, slimy fungus that clung to his legs and back. He struggled against it with all his strength and using any means he could think of. Perhaps, if he could scramble up enough to get her attention, then she'd pull him free and take him back to safety. Of course, she could still eat him after knowing he was there, but that would likely be a far less demeaning fate to the alternative. Although, no less terrifying.

However, no matter how much he wiggled against his bindings, she didn't seem to notice him as she'd gotten too wrapped up in the enjoyment the food was giving her. She didn't even seem to hear his desperate and somewhat shrill cry as her hand reached toward the food. All while arm-length claws extended from the tip of each digit to assist with retrieving one of the savory morsels. And so, he was forced to look on with mounting dread as she then plucked up one of the rolls next to him in a delicate grip between two of the massive, razor-sharp claws.

A hunk of food several times his size was tore from the bed of Dama fruit and soared skyward. To where she gaped her maw and deposited it inside with visible relish. An expression that shifted to satisfaction as her jaw began to move with a slow, steady rhythm as she chewed that first, wonderful bite. Where he couldn't help but imagine what lay in store for him when his turn to face that deadly cavern finally came.

Where her tongue would eagerly toss him over to her teeth, at which time, for the briefest of moments, he'd get an incredibly good view of them. Before they came together and began to rend the flesh from his bones. And, if he were lucky, his life would be snuffed out in a flash of enamel and a sudden stab of pain.

But after only a couple of thorough mastication's, her mood made a change, and a frown spread across her wide, dark lips. She stopped and looked down to regard the plate again, her gaze far more critical. Her jaw moved once or twice more before she swallowed the still partially-chewed morsel with a look of resigned disgust and open revulsion at having done so. As though spitting the offensive substance out would've been too far beneath her to have even considered.

As the lump disappeared down her throat, her expression hardened and she called out to someone, the sharp crack of her voice making Stefan jump. Where a demure looking male approached, and she began to berate him about something. At least that's what it looked like she was doing, as he couldn't understand any of it.

With a surge of dismay and alarm, he realized that his linguistic implant must have been damaged in the fall somehow. This meant that all he could hear was a long string of nigh incomprehensible noises from the goliath, furry monster as she chastised the poor male before her. But what was worse, neither could they understand him, which he really needed right then.

He thought about trying to get her attention again after she'd stopped, using what little brellan he knew. The sense of desperate urgency was so great, in fact, that he'd already taken a deep breath to try and make himself heard as a lull broke in her berating, when he remembered his earlier attempt. Where the thought of what he might accidentally say in his distress scared him into silence.

It was difficult for him to sit there as he waited for something to happen. Especially considering that whatever it was wouldn't likely be very pleasant for him. However, after an eternity of listening to the affronted female, she finally stopped to stare daggers at the waiter. Who gave the sign of utmost respect that a female of her class deserved, picked up the plate, and escaped back towards the kitchen.

As he was lifted away from the table, and the digestive threat posed by it, a deep relief washed over him. It lifted his spirits and he made another attempt to free himself, with some success, as the bar sped by. While he was unable to fully free himself, he felt confident that once back in the kitchen, or wherever the plate was being taken, someone would notice the poor human and pull him free. Of course, dealing with what might come after that, is a bridge he'd have to cross then.

However, just as the brellan carrying the plate is about to pass into the kitchen, he stopped to exchange a few words with Tavish. They were brief but seemed to carry a lot of meaning. Where the expressions of both shifted between an array of increasingly darker emotions while they discussed whatever threats she'd likely directed towards them. As, for some reason, nearly being her food had given him a rare insight into how she'd felt about the matter.



**T**avish looked down at the plate for a moment as the server glanced back at the still agitated matron. "What's wrong with it," he asked after giving the offending meal a cursory inspection. "It looks like a perfectly fine assortment of Calma`gavi to me."

The flustered waiter shook his head. "I'm not really sure," he replied, "It was hard to tell between all the yelling and angry threats." He glanced at the plate, then added, "She said something about the rash`na spices having spoiled. I... I didn't know they could do that."

Tavish tilted his head in thought. "Not as far as I know, but then again, food preparation isn't my specialty," he said with a quick look towards the back table, where the old female had resumed her animated discussion with the others.

He leaned forward enough to give the dish a tentative sniff or two, while giving it a closer examination. For a second, his gaze spotted something odd mixed into the mass of Dama fruit, but it soon blended into the rest and was lost from view. It also failed to reveal anything too unpleasant about it, in fact, the smell of it elicited a faint grumble from his empty forestomach.

“Dalgorma’s not going to be happy about having this sent back,” the server said darkly. “I don’t think he’ll care who it was either... you know how he is.”

Tavish eyed the played hungrily again as he thought about it for a moment. “I suppose she expects another one, or a different offering else at the very least?”

“Of course,” the waiter replied as his fur bristled, “She demanded I return with something more fitting to her status. I... I think she might matriarch over an entire congress, from the way her threats were worded.”

Tavish gave the poor brellan a reassuring smile, he’d always been rather anxious around females, especially the older matrons. “Tell you what,” he began with a gesture towards her table, “Go let Dalgo know there’s another order. But this time, be sure to tell him who it’s for, I think the old scrug is dying to prepare a meal for someone as important as that. And when it’s ready, I’ll take it out to her, along with a couple of complimentary drinks to keep her in a good mood.”

“Alright, I’ll have him get started then,” the waiter said with a relieved smile and turned to leave. But stopped short as he added, “Do you want this? I can’t walk back in there with it my hand.”

“Sure thing,” Tavish replied as he reached for the plate with, “Don’t worry, I’ll take care of the evidence for you.”



The smaller male gave the brellan equivalent of a shrug, then gestured toward the plate. To which Tavish replied with passive agreement and the refused meal was handed over then set down behind the bar. Where it was mostly ignored for several minutes as he went back to his increasingly busy work.

As time went on and having been left alone for a while, Stefan started to think he’d been all but forgotten. So, he decided to try and wiggle free once more or, at the very least, make himself a bit easier to see. But not long after getting started, a shadow fell over him and the plate shifted as it was, yet again, picked up.

With a small flash of relief, he looked up to see Tavish peering down at him and did his best to wave up to the looming brellan. He relaxed, expecting to be found and rescued any moment as the barman’s gaze drift over the food around him. The creature surely must have seen him on the plate when it was brought back and is just thinking of a good way to get him out and cleaned up. And in a second, he’ll be pulled free and then everything would be alright.

However, when the bartender’s free hand drifted up to hover above the food for a moment it didn’t swing over to rescue him. Instead, his fingers swooped down and latched onto one of the

sickly-sweet smelling rolls on the other side of the plate. Then tore it away from the sticky material around it before lifting it and inserting it into his mouth with a casual toss.

The trapped human watched with renewed horror as the brellan began to chew the piece of food thoughtfully while setting the plate back down. He called out to the barkeep again, unable to understand why or how none of them could see or hear him. Perhaps he was covered in too much of the gooey sauce to stand out, or that his voice was getting lost among the other thunderous noises around him.

Either explanation didn't make any sense to him. As they had a notably sharp sense of hearing and even better eyesight. Which should have been more than enough for any of them to have discovered him by then.

Stefan's thoughts on the matter were interrupted by a now-familiar sound as Tavish swallowed the morsel, high above him. It sent another tinge of primal emotions surging through him, along with the renewed energy to escape. Which had him scrambling to extricate himself from the food that still held him captive, his movements given strength by again seeing his immediate death in the gullet of an unaware brellan.

He began to try to free himself yet again from the sticky substances holding him. While Tavish finished chewing the small mouthful and went back to work. His attention returned to the bar and giving no more consideration to the plate or the food on it.

The relatively tiny human's struggles soon started to yield some fruit after another minute or two. An act that was somewhat helped by having been mostly ignored by the giant world around him. Which, having been disregarded for so long, allowed him the first good chance to get away to safety.

A goal that he'd even gotten exasperatingly close to achieving when a sudden movement above him drew his attention. He glanced up to see Tavish again looming over him with his hand already making its way down towards the plate. The sight brought out a small groan of frustration, as all but his right leg had gotten free.

The brellan idly shifted the items around on the plate for a moment as he gathered some of the loose material together, before taking some away to eat. The simple act created a wave of sticky sauce and strangely textured food that caught Stefan up and then buried him. It covered him with so much material that the sounds of the bar were muffled almost completely, while crushing the breath out of him at the same time.

It took him several minutes to work his way back to the surface. Where he nearly suffocated once or twice in the process as the steamed Dama fruit around him was more liquid than anything else by then. As the heat of which sapped his strength and burned his flesh, even through the protective layers of his unisuit. But soon, with a small gasp of relief, he burst into the open and took in a deep breath of the relatively fresh air.



His elation was cut short, however, as the food around him compressed together against him and lifted skyward. The sudden shock of it confused him, and it took a moment before the horrifying reality of what was happening crystallized in his mind. When it did, he looked up to see that Tavish held him in his fingers and was conveying him up toward the creature's face with a hungry gleam in his eye.

The brellan licked his lips as the diminutive human approached, eager for the next bite of food. Stefan went to cry out, hoping that being closer to Tavish's mighty face might help him be heard. But the scream was cut off before it could even exit his throat as the Brellan's muzzle parted to reveal the cavernous maw beyond. Which was already awash with a small lake of saliva that'd already gathered in anticipation of the next morsel.

As it was, he barely had enough time for little more than a meager wave of his arms before being tossed inside. The mass food flew into the bartender's humid mouth and landed on this expansive tongue with a loud, wet splat. Which then wrapped around him as the great cavern hinged close and sealed the terrified human in complete darkness.

Stefan's world was immediately turned upside down as the massive creature began to idly chew the relatively small lump of nourishment. Which launched everything within into the path of the brellan's razor-sharp teeth. And what he hoped would be a mercifully quick death, if not painless at the very least.



**T**avish placed the small piece of Calma`gavi into his mouth, licked his fingers, and began to chew as he again returned to his work. While he wasn't very familiar with the dish himself, he didn't think it tasted as bad as the old matron had said. In fact, the first couple of bites of it had been surprisingly good and even brought up several distant memories of home.

The bit in his mouth seemed to taste a little off for some reason. But there'd been no reason for her to have spoken to poor Salleed like that. So, as he savored the rich flavors in his mouth, he pondered the merits of bringing it up when he delivered the fresh meal and drink to her.

He chewed for several more seconds, then swallowed as a patron approached the bar and caught his eye. "Ki`shara, good to see you again," he said as she sidled up and took a seat. "Your usual, I take it?"

She smiled and nodded her approval while her eyes drifted over him with an oddly hungry gleam in them. "Of course," she replied with a subtle lick of her lips.

With a smile and a slight bow of his head, he turned and started to prepare her usual libation. But paused for a moment to grab another piece of food beforehand. As the whatever odd flavor had been in the last bite still lingered in his mouth and he needed another to try and wash it down.

That, and he'd gotten a strong whiff of her pre-cycle musk, which had his belly demanding more to fuel a possible night of desperate mating. And the food would help take his mind off it and keep him focused on providing the level of service they'd all come to expect.



Stefan lay panting as he gathered his composure at somehow having avoided following the sloshing mouthful down the brellan's throat. He also allowed himself a moment of relief at still being alive and in one piece as well. Although, he wasn't quite sure how he'd managed to accomplish the feat.

It had been by a strange triumph of luck that kept him away from Tavish's teeth. Let alone not being plunged down the dark abyss when the creature's tongue pulsed everything back into it. As the whole thing had been a terrifying blur of motion and sound that he was all but powerless to fight against.

Despite the growing desperation within him, he rested for a moment while his head slowly stopped spinning. He seemed somewhat safe for the time being. As, during the tumult, his body had gotten lodged somewhere between the barkeep's tongue and back teeth.

His unsuit had been torn on several places and the strange fluids within the brellan's mouth were starting to seep in onto his skin. Which had begun to tingle in a rather odd and alarming way. It made him worry about the pre-digestive properties that the creature's saliva might have, and what might mean for his overall health.

A thunderous roar rumbled through the dripping maw as the publican said something. He couldn't tell what it was, mostly due to his translator being broken, but also as it hurt his ears too much for him to hear. Whatever the conversation had been, it was mercifully short at least. Of course, that left him precious little time in which to once more try and get his potential consumer's attention.

"Hey, Tavish... stop eating!" Stefan cried weakly, as he tried to move around enough for the creature to notice him. "I'm in your mouth, spit me out before you swallow me!"

However, the heat and tingling had already started to drain his strength even further. Which meant there was little he'd managed to do when light spilled in around him as another load of food was introduced into the brellan's cavernous mouth. And he was again forced to endure, and try to survive, the firsthand experience of brellan ingestion.

The deadly maelstrom of mastication resumed around him and his cries were lost amongst the other noises within the bartender's sloshing mouth. The creature's writhing tongue tossed him in with the fresh mass of slimy food, and it was all he could do to keep his wits about him enough to fight against the current. Which swept him ever closer to the massive teeth that soon clacked and ground together mere centimeters from him.

But despite his efforts, they did still managed to catch him now a then, which further tore and ripped away his unisuit. Until he was more or less naked within the brellan's ever-churning mouth. Which, notwithstanding his current panic, was a rather interesting feeling and gave him an intimate perspective into the matter.

Had Stefan not been fighting for his life or terrified beyond all reason, he might have found the experience a bit more pleasant. The feel of the creature's tongue against his bare skin wasn't all that bad, and the saliva the bathed his body tingled in an oddly calming kind of way. Which, the longer it soaked into his bare skin, did seem to actively relax him more and more.

Not enough to allow himself to slip between the mashing teeth without a fight, but he did note how some of the tension eased away. Nor was it enough to keep the scrappy human from somehow avoiding the yawning pit of Tavish's throat when he swallowed again.

The little human wasn't quite sure how he'd been able to once more manage it, but he was grateful for it nonetheless. However, his energy had been all but spent in the effort. And he knew that if he couldn't find a way out of his current situation, his fate had been all but sealed.

The grim certainty of death washed over him as he lay gasping for breath on the creature's wide tongue. It filled him with a renewed sense of panic that mustered the last ounce of his strength for a final effort to escape. And he expended it by crawling across the slimy expanse toward the faint light that peaked in through the barman's distant front teeth.



**T**avish slid the drink across the bar to Ki`shara with a somewhat proud expression at his handiwork. She accepted it with an alluring smile, that widened all the more as she took a tentative sip of it. Of course, the little growl that accompanied it as she did so made his heart skip a beat and stomach knot up.

As she was clearly quite keen on him showing up to try his luck when the time came. In fact, if the furtive glances and powerful strength of her scent were any indication, she might be willing to have a go even sooner. Which would likely be much more enjoyable for both of them if she wasn't trying to kill him at the same time.

"Thank you, I've been looking forward to this all morning," she said as the drink was conveyed to her lips for a more thorough quaff. Which dumped enough liquor down her throat to easily swim in. "These humani drinks are quite good, surprisingly," she continued after swallowing, "And you seem to be the only one that knows how to make them properly."

He nodded in reply as their eyes met for a brief, meaningful moment, which made him eager to ask her what plans she had after his shift ended. "It pleases me to hear that I can properly satisfy your needs," he said slight bow of deference toward the gratified female.

She chuckled at his not-so-subtle attempt to flatter and charm her with the open submission in his tone. But it was how the low, rumbling growl of her mirth had elicited such bevy of emotions within him that truly amused her.

“I’m sure you are...” she said, with another meaningful look of open appraisal at him.

The way her eyes had danced over him was all his body needed to make the decision for him. Which sent a wave of sensation through him as certain functions started to get him ready for a good rut, as well as keep him alive to enjoy it. The tip of his rod already poked out against the constraining fabric as it slid out from his relaxing pubic-slit. While heat built up with a steady and alarming pace as it spread out through him.

The arousal had soon gotten so strong that he didn’t notice the small movement in his mouth, at first. But after a second or two, the little tickles on his tongue managed to break through and he paused to investigate the object. As, if anything, it gave his mind something to focus on and keep himself from letting things get out of hand.

While Ki`shara might’ve welcomed the ritual mating howl that loomed in his chest. The other patrons, especially his employer, would have found the scene rather inappropriate, considering the surroundings. An act that only those too immature and inept would ever fall prey to.

So, he tossed the small object around on his tongue for a moment while focusing on its odd taste and interestingly smooth texture. It was definitely a piece of meat, which certainly shouldn’t have been in the dish. Which made him wonder if that was the reason the meal had been returned. Perhaps Dalgorma had accidentally tossed a piece of meat or something similar.

After he’d given the item a thorough probing from his tongue, he still couldn’t quite identify what it was. Although, whatever it was had indeed been moving, which meant it was alive and probably didn’t want to be in his mouth. And he decided to let the thing out and examine it a bit closer.

However, just as he positioned the unfortunate creature on his tongue to spit out, a hand brushed up against him. He looked over to see Ki`shara pressing against the soft, downy fur of his arm. She gave him a soft smile and again rubbed it along his arm as though to call his attention to her. The sudden gentleness of her touch startled him, and he swallowed reflexively without thinking.

His concern for whatever he’d accidentally gulped down lasted but an instant. As it, among several other things, was quickly forgotten when he saw the look she held for him.



**T**hings had finally been going good for Stefan. He’d scrambled forward some distance along the slick, somewhat pliant flesh of the creature’s massive tongue. Which had shifted and writhed under

as he went in a way that suggested his presence had been noticed in some way. A turn of events that filled him with a palpable sense of relief.

The great muscle under him twitched and sloshed him across it for several seconds, then wrapped around his small body. As it prodded, poked, and tasted every inch of him while investigating the unfortunate human. He was so relieved that it drove the last of his energy from him and he fell limp with exhaustion.

Tavish seemed to be maneuvering Stefan towards the front of his mouth, as the cavern filled with low, thoughtful sounds that rumbled around him. Where he expected the creature to retrieve him. So, sure that he was at last about to be out of danger, he relaxed and focused what little energy he had on enjoying the feeling of the brellan's tongue as it pressed against him.

Stefan felt as though he was being maneuvered close to the front teeth, and prepared himself for rescue. But just as quickly as it had started, it stopped. Which left him sprawled out near the center of the brellan's tongue instead.

A sense of motion played with his gut as Tavish turned his head and the flesh around him suddenly tensed. Then, to quickly for him to have reacted, the slick landscape around him shifted and surged in a fluid pulse that sent him sliding backward to plunged down the brellan's throat. Which latched onto him and squeezed his nearly naked body down with a loud gulp.

As he sank ever deeper, it was hard to tell which hammered harder, Tavish's massive, house-sized heart or his own. The latter of which beat with a frantic, anxious terror of what was surely waiting for him at the end of that confining tube.

At first, thought that he would be lucky enough to suffocate long before being dumped into the barkeeper's stomach. But he'd been swallowed pretty much alone and with plenty of life-sustaining oxygen. Which doomed him to endure the brellan's upper stomach, for a time at least, while being very much alive. And probably a very short stay within the lower stomach, if he was particularly unlucky.

Which would be an experience that promised to be rather unpleasant for him, if what he'd heard about the brellan digestive system was correct. Of course, it had been a topic he'd found rather fascinating at the time, from a technical perspective. But the prospect of getting to learn about it firsthand was a little ironic... as well as something that gave the phrase *mind-numbing terror* a whole new meaning entirely.

At long last, the pressure around Stefan eased before being squeezed out into an open space. Where he fell a short distance before splashing into a thick, slimy substance that clung to his flesh. He managed to struggle back to the surface and found himself with a pitch-black, cavernous space, filled with questionable fluids and an utterly horrifying stench. Although, the searing pain of his flesh being melted away didn't quite manifest as he'd expected, which calmed him down a little.

It was like being in a large, sloshing swimming pool full of hot, bubbling pudding that stank like a chemical dump threw up on a compost heap. Given the relative mildness of his surroundings, Stefan found it a little amusing and interesting at first. And he did his best to poke around and investigate his surroundings for a minute or two while things were still calm.

As he did, he realized that it was probably a bad idea to trudge along blindly, so, he activated an ocular implant that allowed him to see in the complete darkness. Which he'd all but forgotten about having with everything going on. The device spun up and, with a quick flash, the grim world around him slowly illuminated and came into sharp focus.

Which only revealed more slimy muck, and the sight that greeted him almost made him turn it off and try to deal with the dangers of the dark. As he lay at the edge of a massive pool of frothing, churning liquid. While the fleshy, pulsating walls of Tavish's forestomach lay a good ten or fifteen meters away from him.

The exact distance flashed across his vision, as well as several other disturbing statistics. However, he quickly switched it off. The last thing he wanted just then was to be reminded exactly how minuscule he was to the colossal creature that had eaten him.

He had little time to do much else, as the chamber gave a sharp lurch. The convulsion churned the contents of the caustic chamber violently around for several long seconds. In which Stefan found himself caught up in a wave of chyme and other fluids that quickly overwhelmed his diminutive form.



Tavish put a hand to his chest as his upper stomach groaned and gurgled for a moment. He wondered if perhaps it had been a bad idea to have eaten from that plate of food. As his digestive system seemed to be taking offense at it for some reason.

Of course, there'd been that odd, fluttery feeling that tickled his forestomach just before it started getting active. A sensation that may have been from the last bit he'd swallowed, which could have been some small animal that Dalgo had mistakenly added to it. The old fellow was known to get somewhat creative at times when he got bored or felt inspired.

Although, it could've also been due to the increasing amount of attractive females that were sitting down at the bar and eyeing him suggestively. Ki'shara had just left a little while ago, but made it quite clear of where she was going to be over the next week or so before she did. Especially when her cycle took over. And he was already looking forward to that challenge with an unusual amount of eagerness, for a brellan male at least.

Since then, there had come to be no less than three females seated before him. All of whom watched with rapt attention as he mixed drinks with an amazing amount of natural skill. Their

respectively golden-orange, speckled-red, and violet-green eyes danced with amused fascination as they watched his hands move with precision and speed to grab and upend each bottle. Then linger on him for a moment with interest and subtle contemplation when he placed the completed drink before them.

Each time they did, a brief surge of energy shot up his spine that made his innards tighten. It was an intriguing sensation, and while he'd always enjoyed the attention, it hadn't quite affected him like it was that day. Not that he was complaining at all about it.

However, the increased excitement had started his stomachs groaning again, and had demanded more attention with each passing moment. So, despite his misgivings about its quality, he snuck another quick bite of food from the plate to silence it. Which tasted far better than the last and was greedily swallowed after only a couple cursory mastications.



The swirling muck finally settled down enough for Stefan to make another attempt at getting his footing. Not that it would really do him any good though, as the liquid around him had risen at an alarming rate. While also having gotten far more inhospitable.

All while starting to sway and shift from the brellan's movements as he toiled at the bar. As Tavish was likely unaware of the doomed human trapped within his withering gut. Which was far more depressing to him than if he'd been purposely eaten.

As, if he'd been caught and made an appetizer by the monstrous creature, then, at the very least, his fate would've been known to someone. Even if it was the creature that had just casually added him to the menu. The only hope for him now lay in whether enough remained of his body for a mucker to find and try to identify.

He tried one last time to contact someone, but his comm-net link had been damaged. Either from the initial fall or what happened afterward, he couldn't tell. Not that the information would matter all that much or be of any use to him.

The thundering gurgles from below him increased and the chamber heaved again. Which was followed by another mass of food that landed in the growing digestive soup with a watery splat. It seemed to have been only partially chewed and, as such, might serve as a suitable life raft.

So, he worked his way through the thick, waist-deep sludge and scrambled onto it. Just as the creature's forestomach began to seep something particularly dangerous-looking from the fleshy walls. Which caused the fluids around him to bubble and froth rather ominously.



Tavish flipped a bottle high into the air, where it spun several times as it soared high above him in a long, graceful arc. While, at the same time, he grabbed another and poured some out into a glass. Before setting it back down in time to catch the tossed bottle and do the same. All to the delight and amazement of those watching, especially the ever-present females.

He topped off the drink with a dash of deep blue liqueur from a third bottle, then placed it before the expectant customer. "Here you go," he said with a little wink as the older female examined the drink with a critical eye.

She reached out, picked it up, and, after a couple of sniffs, took a tentative sip and swished it around her mouth for a moment. "What is it?" she asked in a skeptical tone after swallowing the small mouthful of tart alcohol.

"It's what the humani call a 'Lavender Sunrise', or something like that," he said while starting to mix another drink. "It was a popular drink on one of their worlds a couple centuries ago, from what the records say," he continued as the bottles spun through the air once again. "But I did make several changes to it, as the original concoction just didn't have the right kind of... *punch* for our pallet."

She gave the drink a second, and more thorough, critical inspection before putting it to her lips again. "I see," she replied with a genuinely interested expression.

Her gaze strayed over him for a few seconds, as though seeing him properly for the first time. She took her time and examined the way his small frame moved as he served the next customer. Intensively studying his demeanor and deference displayed as he spoke with those around him.

What she saw was rather pleasing. Despite his young age and lack of other desirable aspects, she found herself considering his possible worthiness. Not just as a mate, for she had plenty of prospects available to fulfill that simple role. But something far better suited for him, should he prove truly worthy of it.

She took another swallow of the strange drink, letting the surprisingly delightful mix of flavors distract her from the strange, humani-style chair she sat in. It was an impressive feat in itself that the little creatures didn't crumple over in anguish after sitting in them for as long as they often did. As it was, she'd only been seated for a few minutes and had started to get a cramp.

Of course, the massive weight of her ample breasts may have contributed to it more than anything else. As they'd all grown large from the numerous litters she'd blessed the world with over the years.

The glass met her lips again and she realized, with regret, that it was empty. "I wish for another," she commanded as the empty glass clanked down onto the bar before her.



The authoritative tone of her voice made Tavish spin on his heels and step up to her with an instinctive drive. Some of the others at the bar shot her a quick look of mild agitation at her impatience, especially the females. But none dared do or say anything. As age has its benefits within brellan society, especially when her Keige-muan`a had that particular weave and coloration.

“Of course, matron,” he said with a slight bow, then removed the empty glass and began preparing a fresh drink.

She observed Tavish for several more seconds, then finally came to a decision and gestured to the many bottles behind him. “Do you have any Desc`a-yanthy?” she asked, her tone casually inquisitive but quite formal.

He paused for a moment and glanced down at the long row of decanters, then reached for one with a dark, amber fluid in it. “Yes, we do,” he answered as he held it up to show her.

She gave him the kind of alluringly toothy smile that only a brellan could pull off. “Ah, very good,” she purred with delight, “Serve me, worthy male, and set out a second empty glass. I’m sure you know the one I’ll need.”

He swallowed, a little anxious, and unsure at what she might have in mind. With a nod, he grabbed two glasses and filled the larger of which with a healthy amount of the rich liquid. She smiled at him picked up the glass, letting the air fill with the powerful scent of harsh fermentation.

Her deep, golden-blue eyes bored into him through the growing haze above the glass for several seconds. Then brought the glass to her lips and emptied it into her cavernous mouth. She swished the liquor around for a moment, all while her eyes stayed fixed on his.

Then, in one, smooth motion, she picked up the smaller glass and, after using her tongue to form a guide, drained some into the glass. When it was a little over half full, she stifled the flow of liquid and held it out to him as she swallowed the rest with a single, mighty gulp.

Tavish stared at the liquid for a second as it swirled around the glass, not sure if he could believe it was all really happening to him. It was an old Brellan custom, one that most knew of but very few ever saw, let alone participated in. A simple gesture, the sacrifice of sustenance taken from her very maw, that symbolized the desire to have him join her Jinsh`i alza.

He stared at the small mixture of saliva and Desc`a-anthy for a moment, then reached out and took the glass from her. As he lifted it to his lips, he realized that this might be a rather important moment in his life. One that meant his fortunes had just changed for the better.

His heart hammered in his chest as he tipped the turbid contents into his mouth. Where the harsh taste and overpowering strength of which nearly made him choke. But he managed to control the bout of coughing that rose from his chest and gulp it down without letting it show.

Her muzzle split in a satisfied smile as she nodded. “Very good,” she said and leaned back in the chair to try and get as comfortable as she could. “Now then, finish serving me that oddly delicious human drink of yours. We can discuss matters further when you have the time, and when I can sit properly and relax.”

He bowed and went back to mixing that last of the ingredients together. All while his upper stomach began to groan and do small flips from the sudden addition of the strong alcohol. Of course, the wave of excitement and apprehension over what had just taken place did its fair share as well.

“I really love this job,” he muttered to himself, as it was all he could think to say just then.



A thunderous groan echoed around the massive chamber as it gave a series of sudden lurches that sent Stefan tumbling down into the sea of mushy slop. Which was soon followed by a torrent of harsh, chemical-smelling fluid that poured in from the creature’s throat. Several hundred liters, at the very least, mixed with the already liquefying contents and flooded the fleshy cavern even further.

It was all he could do to just keep his head above the growing tide of harsh enzymes and alcohol. His unisuit had been shredded to the point of uselessness during his short experience in Tavish’s mouth, so, it offered him none of the limited protections it otherwise would have. Not that they’d have been enough to keep him alive.

The Brellan digestive process was relatively unknown, for the most part, although, it was quite efficient once it got going. Which the poor human would quickly find out as the cavernous sac churned and bubbled with increasing activity. The heavy fumes from whatever the creature had just drank made his head throb and ache more with each labored breath.

It combined with the other dangerously caustic fluids to attack his exposed skin in alarming and painful ways. He’d somehow expected the process to start slowly, like how people had always talked about it. Instead, the moment he had become fully immersed in the swirling sea of chyme, his skin burst into flame.

The few, tattered scraps of his clothing were stripped away, soon followed by his naked flesh. All while the few pain suppression and medical implants he had did their best to mitigate the assault and repair the damage. But there was little they could do. It was like trying to keep a candle from melting in a blast furnace, all they really managed to do was prolong his suffering.

He cried out in pain and tried to will his numbed limbs to move. Perhaps if he could get to the side of the stomach, he would be safe, or at least be able to try one last time to get the giant bartender’s attention. But all he did was little more than flail about the acidic sludge and stir up more activity around him.

As his feet did their best to propel him against the soft flesh of the stomach, something popped in his left leg and a wave of excruciating pain rushed up it. The sensation was so forceful that he couldn't stop the agonized scream that surged out with it. Which rewarded him with a mouthful of corrosive slime that tasted strongly of chlorine mixed with turpentine.

It burned the delicate flesh of his mouth and choked his throat. Which caused him to reflexively swallow to try and clear the blockage. Where it seared the soft flesh of his throat as it descended to begin digesting his own stomach from within.

The pain from his destroyed leg had been blinding, but the fire that erupted from his belly was pure torture. It doubled him over as he curled up in reaction to it. Which resulted in him sinking into the muck as it continued to eat away at him. All while each moment became more excruciating than the last until he longed for death to claim him.

However, the reaper seemed as though it wanted to deny him that one mercy. As another mouthful of food plunged into Tavish's upper gut and it convulsed with enough force to swirl and mix the contents of it around for a moment. Which happened to deposit him onto the newest piece of partially chewed mush. Where he lay in excruciating pain while coughing and sputtering as he got his bearings.

It left a large pool of blood and viscera from his heavily damaged lungs. Which Stefan took as a bad sign as he used the lull to try and take stock of his condition. A task that was rather difficult through the searing pain and numbness that dominated his entire body by that point.

He couldn't see anything from his right eye, which made him thankful for the implant in his left, or else he'd be completely blind. But then again, being able to see his surroundings and what they had done to him probably wasn't that good of a blessing. Nor could he feel anything from that side of his face either, for that matter. And it gave him the terrifying image of half of his head having been reduced to just bone by already.

A quick glance down showed that both his legs were gone as well. Their absence left nothing but two, small, half-dissolved stumps of bone and sizzling flesh that stuck from his hips. Which was another thing he didn't want to dwell on. As he'd also noticed that all the soft tissue between his legs was gone, leaving a large, gaping and bleeding hole behind.

Tavish's merciless gut had been quite busy on the rest of Stefan's body too, but the partially digested human wasn't allowed any more time to investigate. As it again gurgled and convulsed with a violent wave that tore him away from his small raft of food. Which dumped him back into the digestive sea that eagerly resumed breaking him down for further processing in the lower gut and beyond.

It quickly etched away the last of his skin and exposed the softer flesh below. Which was a welcome mercy, as it hastened the process. To where he soon lost consciousness after several more

seconds. Even so, those final few moments still seemed to last for an eternity. Until the welcome solace of oblivion claimed him.



Tavish spent the next hour or two mixing drinks and busying himself around the room to ensure all the patrons were enjoying themselves. He'd even had a chance to speak with and serve drinks to several humani on the small balcony set into the wall. They'd been a little nervous, but friendly and offered some pleasant conversation.

It was just after he had finished asking a rather anxious looking humani female if she wanted anything that he remembered Stefan. With everything that had transpired he'd forgotten about the little fellow that he hadn't been seen for some time. The concerned bartender went back to where the little ape had been working and did a quick search of the shelves.

Tavish found the panel closed and the area cleaned up, except for a tiny satchel and little case of tools behind one of the bottles. He examined them closely for a moment, out of idle curiosity, and wondered why they would've been left there. When it occurred to him that, perhaps, Stefan had needed to leave and would be coming back later to finish the job. Which is why he'd left all his tools behind.

So, he shrugged and finished the rest of his shift without giving the matter much more thought. After all, there were far more important things on his mind than a humani's idle whims. Such as, Ki`shara's looming season and her all but formal request for him to join her in seclusion for a night... or two. And, of course, the old matron's surprising invitation to join her congress, which was the more exciting of the two by far.

While he doubted his position would be all that high within it, the perks would be well worth it. Besides, some of the older matrons tended to get rather randy in their old age. To the point where they'd often desire male company between their seasons, and she seemed eager enough to enjoy his company. Which he'd likely enjoy quite a bit more without his mate trying to fuck him to death.

He turned the bar over to the next publican and gathered his things to leave. As he left, he cast a final glance toward the shelf, a little disappointed that his new friend had disappeared without saying anything. But the little creatures are rather flighty at the best of times. Besides, he was sure the little creature would turn up at one point or another... which was far truer than he thought.

## -Epilogue-

The large, hazmat dump truck left the tunnel system and pulled into the vast, open, underground space of Mucking Station 11-95B. Its bed alarmingly close to being overloaded with a large mound of semisolid, greenish-orange mush. So much so, that some of it streaked down the sides and left a long, putrid trail of slime on the roadway behind it.

It stopped at the inbound weight-station and the vox inside the small watchhouse crackled to life. "Delivery from residential area 21-Alpha," the driver's muffled voice said through the comm.

The stifled speech of the driver wasn't all that surprising, as brellan scat isn't the healthiest of substances, and its scent alone can often be strong enough to render someone unconscious... or worse. So much so, that the trucks filtration system could easily get overwhelmed sometimes. Which meant that most drivers had to wear a full respirator system while in the truck, or risk passing out while traversing the large tunnel system between stations.

The station attendant checked the scale's readout and started making the applicable log entries. "21-Alpha?" he asked while typing the information into the system. "That's over a hundred kilometers from here, why did you bring this load of monster shit all the way over here?" He chuckled and added dryly, "I can't imagine that was a pleasant drive."

"The pumping station is down for maintenance," the driver replied with a shrug. "A Brellan social gathering of some kind overloaded the system and they had to shut everything down for a thorough inspection and cleaning."

"Fucking hell, that's a lot of waste," the attendant replied as he entered the last of the information, "That why I've always avoided working at the pump works... Alright, go ahead and dump it in processing-pan six."

The driver nodded and put the truck in gear. "Roger that," he said and drove off toward the offload area.

As the truck made its way across the busy area, he again tried not to dwell on what he'd just witnessed a little over an hour before. But just as on the long drive to the station, the event lingered in mind.

While he'd always tried to avoid collection duty, his truck had been the closest one available when the call came in. Which, of course, meant there'd been no choice in the matter.

The dwelling, he noticed when he'd arrived, was an older, more traditionally styled one. Occupied by an ancient female matron and, as such, didn't have a proper waste extraction system.

He'd gotten there just in time to see one of the massive creatures squatting down in preparation to relieve itself.

The beast had been male and far younger, as far as he'd been able to tell, than the home's regular occupant. But what had really caught his eye, was what lay under the beast's stubby tail. Which, once it had lifted out of the way, revealed a pucker the size of a garage door. One that had already begun to twitch and distend as the disgusting horrors trapped within it was already trying to be disgorged.

His arrival had been early enough that there had been time to position the truck directly under the brellan's hulking ass, so that the creature could shit right into the back of it. It had been an alarming sight to see the furry monster's massive rump descending towards him until it hovered just a couple of meters above the empty truck bed. Which was then made far worse when his hole relaxed and a flood of soft, mushy waste oozed out to fill the truck's bed. Until the flow filled it to maximum capacity... then some ways beyond.

The driver's thoughts returned to the present as he reached the pan and backed his truck into the assigned space next to the large depression. Where he quickly dumped its load of semi-toxic sludge into it for processing and left. More than glad to finally be rid of it.

Two technicians approached and activated the overhead sprayers that doused the steaming mound in chemicals and water. The soft rain soon liquified the bulk of it and allowed it to flow into the piping for further processing and disposal. Which left the larger, mostly indigestible, objects inside it behind to be sorted through.

It caught the eye of one of the techs, and he knelt to pick it up. "Hey Kelso!" he called to the other as he stood with it in his hand. "Have a look at this," he continued while holding it up for his colleague's inspection, "Looks like a T-1180 or 1190... doesn't it?"

Kelso took the small, palm-sized device and turned it over in his thickly gloved hand several times while giving it a critical examination. "Yeah," he said with a grim nod, "That's an 1190 alright, and it's really beat up too." He chuckled mirthlessly and added, "Looks like someone had a really bad day."

"Oh fuck..." the other tech muttered in horror as he again knelt to rummage through the debris, "And the last one of his life as well."

He stood with a piece of bone about half as-long-as his arm that. One that had been stained an alarmingly familiar shade of cobalt blue.

Kelso nodded and bent down himself. "Yup, no doubt about it," he said as he picked up and examined the corroded remains of what had once been a skull. "Where did this load come from?"

"I'm not sure," the tech replied with a shrug, "I didn't see the paperwork. I'll go get the dock supervisor so we can report it, I guess."

Kelso shook his head and scoffed. “Nah, don’t bother. It’s not as though it’ll lead to anything other than a load of paperwork for us, and another series of boring safety briefings. Besides, the memory canister is gone. So, unless they can extract enough DNA from these for an ID match, which is unlikely, there’s nothing that could be done.”

The other tech nodded sagely and sighed through his industrial respirator. “I guess there’s no point then. So, who do think he was, just some poor schmuck that waddled out into the open at the wrong time?”

Kelso shrugged and tossed the skull into the collection hopper to be processed. “Maybe, who knows... all that matters now is which bin to stick the remains,” he said as he picked up a large piece of fibrous matter that had somehow avoided the attention of the brellans formidable digestive system and dumped it into the hopper as well.

He thought for a moment, then chunked the implant into a separate hopper for non-organic waste. It was better that way. Despite how he might feel about yet another person having found their way into a Brellan’s fucking stewpot, forgetting about it was the better option.

After all, nobody from Colony Management would care, if they bothered to take any notice of it. And if they did, it would only lead to them asking questions that neither he, nor anyone else, could ever possibly find a good answer to.

They spent the next hour in silence and finished processing the last of the massive turd. Then cleaned and left the pan to await the next offsite delivery, which would likely arrive too soon for their liking.

A special thanks to all my Top Tier Patrons, including:

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Aeztard

Gladin8