

# Terran Insurrection

## Act I: Chapter 7

Amber strutted back into the living room. Her brown fur reminiscent of a canine vanished in favor of a scarlet red coat, making her look more like a vixen or an abnormal vulpine hybrid. A toothy smile spread across her snout. Unlike before, Amber also had new clothes, including black short shorts and a similarly revealing sports top that fully exposed her slim stomach.

“What do you think?” she asked, posing a little.

Cain looked down at her digitigrade toes, icy eyes moving up to her legs and torso until they came into contact with emerald green ones staring back at him. “Looks good to me.” he said with a shrug.

Amber frowned. “And?”

He gave her a blank stare. “You almost look like a completely new person. Not sure what else you want me to say besides that.”

She crossed her arms. “Don’t make me spell it out for you.”

“What?” asked Cain, cocking his head.

Amber looked away, tail momentarily wagging behind her. “Do you think my new outfit is cute?”

Cain stayed silent for several seconds. “You’re gonna give me whiplash if you transition from arguing with me to flirting like this, princess.”

“It was just a question.” replied Amber with a huff.

“Whatever.” he said, sneering. “I can be dense when it comes to these stupid little games, so I’m not sure if that was an attempt to flirt or not.”

She smiled once more. “I don’t know...” Her tail began wagging again. “Maybe I am flirting. I’ll let you know after we return from the gym.”

“Oh, so that’s how it is.” replied Cain, rolling his eyes. “You know, I was only expecting you to stay for a few days before leaving. Figured the whole situation might have been awkward for you since I’m just some human dude with a few dangerous habits and hobbies...”

“You’re sorely mistaken then.” Amber said, daggers appearing in her eyes. “I’m the real predator in this entire scenario!” She let out a light laugh, flashing her fangs at him. “If anything else, you should be the one worried about allowing a mysterious alien carnivore into your home.”

He scoffed. “Yeah, I’m absolutely terrified. You’re going to live in my bathroom and get your fur all over my furniture at this rate.”

Amber condescendingly tilted her head up and let out a light growl rather than properly replying.

“Speaking of which, still need to get ready myself.” continued Cain, standing up from the couch. “I’ll shower once we get back if you don’t plan on hogging it all the time.”

She snarled. “I don’t need it... for now.” Amber paused to rummage through another nearby package, procuring a brush with angled metal teeth. “Admittedly, I can be high maintenance at times. Keeping all this fur clean and pristine can take a lot of work on my behalf, so forgive me for that if it causes you any issues.”

“It’s whatever at this point.” he said, sighing.

Without skipping a beat, Amber hopped on the couch and began brushing her tail. Repeated strokes straightened out her fur while the brush collected loose strands. Cain himself let out a grunt. He walked down a short hallway and approached his bedroom door, unlocking one of its many mechanisms. However, a few happened to be undone already. After opening the door, Cain glanced inside to find nothing obviously wrong, then he glared back at Amber before his voice filled the air once more.

“Were you in my room too?”

Amber stopped brushing her tail and gave him a dumbfounded look. “Excuse me?”

“You heard me.” replied Cain with a growl of his own. “I put several locks on my door. Only one is still engaged and the second lock is only partially done. I’m not accusing you of anything, but I can’t think of anyone else who would or could have done something like that.”

“That explains all the clicking I keep hearing whenever you go in there.” Amber said, closing her eyes as she nonchalantly resumed her grooming. “Like... how would I even break in there anyway?”

He rolled his shoulders, shifting his head left to right. “I don’t know. You tell me.”

“Well, I didn’t!” Amber said with a roll of her eyes. “It’s the one place in your apartment you specified as off-limits, and I’m respecting your rules. Are you sure you weren’t drunk or something when you woke up this morning before walking out like a zombie to gulp down some more liquor? Because that might explain it!”

Cain’s face momentarily scrunched up. “Uh... yeah, that could be it.” His eyes averted her gaze. “My bad. Wasn’t trying to accuse you of doing that, but I always keep most of the locks engaged whenever I’m not in my room. Might be losing my mind.”

She tilted her head to the side. “Why do you have all those locks on your door anyway? It’s kind of weird.”

“Yeah, I know.” he said in a low tone. “It’s a dumb habit I picked up over time. Used to have a problem where people would go into my room to steal things if I wasn’t there or others in the peacekeepers pulled dumb pranks whenever I slept, so I just started putting a bunch of locks on my room. Made me feel more... secure. Only did it for my shitty little apartment too in case I got a roommate to cut down on my living costs, company coming over, or just various security reasons in general.”

“Wait, what sort of pranks?” asked Amber, kicking her feet back and forth. “That sounds a tad extreme if you started doing that as a result.”

Cain made a dismissive wave. “Ah, you know. Someone would get pissed off at me and waltz inside wherever I’m sleeping to punch me in my stomach before running off or something. Fun times.”

Her ears folded against her head. “Oh.”

“Sometimes just one lock wouldn’t stop them either.” he said, shaking his head. “But yeah. I’d rather not go on a random tangent, so I’ll be back real quick.”

True to his word, Cain shut the door and disappeared. He re-emerged mere minutes later, wearing athletic gray shorts and a black tank top with matching sneakers.

“Alright... you ready?” he asked, returning to the living room.

Amber set her brush aside in favor of typing away on a smartphone. “Almost. I’m taking the liberty of arranging some alternative transportation since I’m not riding on your godforsaken motorcycle again.”

Cain scratched the back of his head. “I planned on walking there, actually.”

“Where is this gym, exactly?” she asked, opening an application. “I might not bother with an automated cab if it’s not too far away.”

“It’s this place called Fitness Universe.” answered Cain, gesturing with an open hand. “It’s pretty big. Accommodates a variety of species, but it’s a bit casual. One of the only gyms in the city. It’s only several miles away, so it’s not a big deal walking there and back since I consider it part of my little workout routine more than anything else.”

She narrowed her eyes. “No thanks. I’d rather ride there in peace without getting my fur drenched again...” Amber then hopped off the couch. Her tail swayed in synchronization with her hips as she walked to the apartment’s entrance, eventually looking over her shoulder. “Either way, our cab should be here in a few minutes if you’re ready to leave.”

Cain stuck his hands in his pockets to double-check for essentials such as his phone and wallet. “Yeah, I’m ready. Gotta say though, behavior like this is how you earned your nickname if walking a bit is too good for you.”

Amber sneered, then faced forward and opened the door. “In this weather? Are you crazy?”

“It’s just water!” he replied, joining her as they exited the apartment. “I for one am grateful for all the rain if it’s the only reason why this planet is habitable.”

“Because Bedlam is such a wonderful place.” she said in a sarcastic tone.

In the end, Cain closed the door before its own automatic locking mechanisms kicked into action.

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An automated cab barely hovered off the ground. Light rainfall and neon lights dazzled all around it as a door opened at an angle like a DeLorean, revealing a surprisingly spacious interior. Cain didn't even hesitate to move toward it. On the contrary, Amber lingered on the sidelines as she watched Cain walk through the rain before he sat inside, then he looked back at her.

“Come on, princess. It's not so bad.”

Amber groaned before staring ahead with a more determined look in her eyes. She dashed across the road with an abnormal degree of speed, nearly leaping into the cab before the door automatically closed behind her. Cain recoiled in his chair as she landed on all fours.

“Jesus Christ!” he exclaimed, laughing afterward. “Real impressive, princess!”

She stood back up, wiping down her shorts. “At least you got a laugh out of it...” After saying this, a flick of Amber's tail spread some water droplets across the floor as she sat on an opposing seat. “I almost never see you smile otherwise.”

Cain held his hands up. “It's not my fault. I've been told smiling might be seen as a sign of aggression by some non-humans. Wouldn't want to provoke a dangerous alien carnivore such as yourself if you think I'm baring my fangs at you.”

“Sure, sure...” replied Amber with a toothy grin of her own. “But I'm different!”

As they spoke, Cain shifted in his seat while the automated cab ascended into the air. He spent several seconds looking out a window as they joined a flurry of other traffic with holographic advertisements barraging their visuals. “On that note, still find it really surreal how you act very human compared to the rest of your kind. Like you imitate our smiles and shit. I'm assuming it's

learned behavior from your human foster parents, but you still apparently enjoy playing up the fact that you're an alien despite that."

"It's a mixed blessing, really," Amber said before crossing her legs. "I've found that I get along more with humans compared to other minaki, ironically enough. They might think I'm cool or interesting while my own kind will give me flak for not being familiar with our language, culture, and mannerisms... but I stopped caring at some point."

He leaned back into his seat, spreading out his arms. "Damn. Guess that potentially gives us something in common."

Her ears perked up. "Elaborate."

"I don't wanna get too sentimental or anything," replied Cain with a sigh, "But I grew up in an orphanage. Never got adopted though. Instead, I just went into the military at the ripe age of eighteen to escape all that." He cocked his head up. "What about you?"

She blinked a few times. "What about me?"

"More specifically, how did you end up being a smuggler? Did you have foster siblings or something? Was your human family nice?"

Amber didn't respond for a few moments. "I don't like talking about myself too much."

He leaned forward and rested an arm on his knee. "Aw, come on. Don't be like that! You don't have to talk about anything you're uncomfortable with, but I've been pretty open about myself so far."

"Then did you have any brothers or sisters growing up, Cain?"

"Allegedly," he answered with a nod. "Long story short, both my parents died when I was around three years old. I had a one year old younger brother though. However, got no clue what happened to him after we got separated... can't find any information about him online or anything."

Amber's tail drooped down with a frown. "The more I hear about your past, the worse it gets..."

Cain clenched his fists. "Don't pity me. It's all in the past and I don't go around crying about it since a victim mentality accomplishes absolutely nothing. For better or worse, those experiences turned me into the man I am today, and the strongest steel is forged by the fires of hell as far as I'm concerned." He leaned back more and let out a deep sigh. "Regardless, now it's your turn to tell me something about yourself. I'd rather not talk about myself too much."

She looked to the side. "Oh, I don't know..."

"Anything, really, if only to kill some time." he said before staring at her.

Amber glanced downward. "Well... I did already mention that I had a human sister growing up." She unsheathed the claws on her hands before resheathing them. "She'd do stuff like helping me file down my claws or brush my fur when we were growing up." Her tail wagged without her input. "I always won any games of hide and seek since it was easy enough to track her down by her scent."

Cain nodded. "Sounds like you had a healthy relationship then. I'd imagine your foster parents were well-off too if they were willing to take you under their wing."

"They were!" she said with a toothy smirk and a nod of her own. "I'll admit that I got kind of lucky. They were an upper middle-class family with a really big and fancy home within a gated community. I'm still not sure if they adopted me for more political reasons... but..."

Suddenly, Amber stopped speaking as her ears and tail perked up.

"So they were collaborators?" asked Cain without a hint of emotion.

Amber's fingers and toes curled up. She didn't say a word in return.

"Something wrong?" asked Cain, chuckling. "Don't worry. I'm also a dirty traitor considering that I joined the peacekeepers. Just makes me really curious now if that somehow transitioned to you becoming a smuggler at some point."

"I... might have said too much about myself." she replied, practically facepalming.

He shook his head. "You still don't trust me?"

“It’s not that, it’s just... ugh.” Amber huffed and puffed a bit as her tail swayed to the side. “I’m just cautious. In hindsight, I should have just fed you some false information about myself, but I don’t think I have anything to fear from you.”

“At least you’re being honest now.” Cain said, shrugging once more.

She locked her eyes with his own. “Trust is the foundation of any sort of relationship anyway, so it might be time for me to be less... disingenuous.”

Cain grunted. “Fair enough.”

Without warning, the automated cab came to a complete halt. A notification popping up on Amber’s smart device indicated a successful transaction. Lights within the vehicle flashed on as the doors opened, showcasing an expansive gym embedded within a section of the urban jungle as precipitation resumed washing over the general area.

As before, the rain didn’t faze Cain. “You want me to pay for the ride back, by the way?”

Amber’s body locked up as she looked outside. “No need to fret about that. I have more pressing concerns than a cab fare...”

Cain stopped in place before turning around. “Do we need to get you an umbrella or-”

Within the blink of an eye, Amber darted out of the cab. Her movements were simultaneously swift and graceful as she broke into a full-fledged sprint towards the gym. She also screamed during the process, sending Cain into silence as he watched on in complete bemusement.

“Fucking hell.” he said with another chuckle.

Following this, Cain casually strolled to Fitness Universe. He passed by some more advertisements, including a more gargantuan hologram resembling an alien hydra. It dwarfed him on an elevated platform at a few dozen feet tall, soliciting attention to an emporium as all three of its heads spoke or made individual facial expressions.

“Zmaj imports!” it said with its central head. “Quality products built to stand the test of time!”



Cain soon joined Amber by the gym's entrance as she squeezed water from her tail.

"I think you're right," she said with a hint of disdain. "I might need some more clothes and accessories for all this crappy weather." Amber paused to lift one of her feet, glancing at the bottom. "Even my paw pads feel freezing now..."

"Actual shoes would be a good start," he said, walking through an automatic door.

Amber's tail swayed behind her as she followed him. "Have you ever worn digitigrade footwear? Most of it is uncomfortable to say the least."

Ignoring this, Cain made his way directly towards a reception area. Amber froze upon seeing how massive the interior happened to be with the gym itself comparable to a warehouse. Loops on the ceiling allowed the moth-like besharam to fly through an elaborate course, and an adjacent area with a swimming pool visible through a large glass window let kalka take advantage of their serpentine forms to swim through it. Humans and minaki alike were sprinkled through the many other areas, including a corner devoted to various workout equipment, a cafeteria in the corner, and an oval race track located far in the back.

Most prominently, a holographic Fitness Universe logo emitted in the middle of the entire gym.

"So who exactly is your guest during this fine afternoon?"

These words brought Amber's attention to Cain as he spoke to another human. Unlike Cain, the receptionist at a central desk appeared slightly overweight and had a beard and long hair to accompany his glasses. A younger kalka man also wearing a Planet Fitness employee shirt simply ignored the ongoing conversation and played around on a tablet.

Cain used a thumb to point over his shoulder. "She's the minaki right there."

The receptionist grabbed a vape pen on a counter to place it in his pocket. "I'll just need her to sign in alongside authenticating your silver membership real quick."

"Silver membership?" Cain said, parroting his words. He patted one of his own pockets. "I forgot which one I have, but didn't you just verify that I'm a member here?"

In response, the receptionist sighed. "I did, but the authentication system doesn't let me know your actual membership type. Only Silver Medal Fitness Universe members can bring a free guest now."

"When the hell did that policy get implemented?" asked Cain, clenching his fists.

"A few months ago." answered the receptionist. "Do you have our app on your smartphone by any chance? I might be able to verify things that way."

Cain gave him a death stare. "Nope."

The receptionist let out a far more resigned sigh. "Okay. I'll have to look up your name then. Ugh." He looked at Amber. "If she could come over here to give me her name and a fingerprint, that might save everyone some time."

With a swoosh of her tail, Amber approached the central desk. "Where?"

"Right here." said the receptionist, pointing at an electronic touchscreen right as it flashed on.

Amber stared at it, finding all-white blanks. One asked for her name, and the other had a designated area for a finger or handprint. Narrowing her eyes, a cybernetic implant on one of her fingertips discreetly shifted to give her a brand new fingerprint, away from any prying eyes. She used the padded finger to press against a designated space before writing a similarly fraudulent name with a claw.

'Rosa Luxemburg'

A subsequent green circle swirled before transitioning into a checkmark as it processed everything.

"And... everything looks good to go!" announced the receptionist. He swirled in his seat to face Cain again. "You have what appears to be a Legacy Bronze Membership, which means you're still allowed to bring a guest, but any new members will need a silver one or above. Just keep that in mind in case you cancel or fail to renew your membership since you'll be downgraded accordingly."

Cain let out a grunt. "Wonderful."

The receptionist returned to fiddling with his vape pen. "But that's all." He stopped speaking to huff and puff on the mouthpiece, glancing at Amber before smiling and winking at her. "Sorry about that, Rosa. Let me know if you need anything else!"

Amber giggled a bit and put a hand on her mouth. "Thanks!"

From there, Cain gestured at her and moved forward. Amber dutifully followed him. Once they were a decent distance away, he began grumbling under his breath.

"Bunch of fucking bullshit."

"I know, right?" replied Amber with her eyes narrowing.

Cain pointed at some distant sirens mounted on the walls. "You see that crap?"

She cocked her head at it. "I do. Why?"

"Those alarms go off if you do something completely normal when you're lifting weights," he explained with something boiling inside him. "For example... dropping them a bit too hard, grunting, or accidentally banging some together. Then that fat fuck we just talked to will waddle over to wherever you are to check it out. One time I unintentionally set one off and he came to lecture me about not creating a hostile environment for newcomers and he even threw in a little tidbit about toxic masculinity. I wanted to fucking kill him. Wouldn't be surprised if him and his neckbeard ended up on a registered sex offenders list in the future."

"I mean... a gym like this is supposed to appeal to as many people as possible." Amber said, frowning. "Not asshole bodybuilders."

He shrugged. "I know. Wasn't trying to cause trouble. Just pisses me off since this place has a business model that would literally go under if everyone actually used their membership. They more or less depend on casuals coming in, buying a long-term membership, then never using it to rake in a profit. I guess it works well for them, but any other gym I've gone to doesn't care about any of that crap since the members are more serious about it, albeit rough around the edges."

Amber observed the multitude of gym-goers from many different species going about their business, but the place did happen to have a sparse number of members despite its size. “Why do you come here then if you don’t like it and feel the need to rant about it?”

“It’s one of the only gyms in the city.” replied Cain, shaking his head. “God knows I’m not going to try setting up a home gym in that cramped apartment. At least the food court is nice sometimes.”

She looked at a facility in the corner. There, vending machines lined the walls, and self-serve stations allowed members to get anything from water, protein shakes, and fruit-flavored smoothies. “You mean that place over there?”

Cain moved in its direction. “Yup. Might hit it up later.”

Three minaki sat on one of the many tables available at the food court. “Wait... is that him?”

Amber’s artificial ear barely picked up the sound of their voices. Looking toward the trio, she spotted a large and emotionless minaki man at the front and center. Another one with crimson fur had bandages on his snout, not to mention a matching leather jacket with multiple metal studs spread across a chair.

“Yeah, yeah!” said the red minaki, snarling. “I recognize the scent! That’s the human motherfucker who jumped me and punched me in the face when I wasn’t looking!”

Meanwhile, Cain remained oblivious to their conversation until he spotted a familiar face. Upon seeing the man with a broken nose, a wide smile spread across his own as he stared directly at him. The crimson one lunged forward on the table before baring his own fangs. Consequently, the most senior minaki placed a hand on his chest and spoke in a deep yet distinctly alien tongue.

“Not here. Too many other people.”

His words alone calmed the young minaki man down and made him recompose himself.

Amber looked at Cain with her eyes full of concern. “Friends of yours?”

“Ah, don’t worry about it.” he said, pivoting in another direction. “I think that’s a dude I had an unpleasant encounter with earlier. Not sure if he and his buddies would try anything, but I doubt they’ll do something in broad daylight.”

“Maybe this is why some people might get the impression that you’re a jerk.” Amber said with plenty of snide in her voice.

Cain placed a hand on his heart. “I just treat people the way they treat me. Well, usually...”

“Sure you do.” she replied, looking at the rest of the gym. “But ignoring that, what do you tend to do first?”

“Sometimes some stretching first.” he replied, stopping in place. “Not always though. Might skip that whole process in favor of jogging around the indoor track or something. Whether we do stuff together or separately is your call since I’m up for whatever.”

Amber walked by him, brushing her bushy tail against his leg. “I think it would be good for us to be gym partners. I’m not familiar with how all this stuff works, so maybe you could show me...”

Cain smirked. “Could be fun. You particularly interested in anything by some chance?”

She moved in front of him while staring directly at the indoor track. “Well, you did say you like to jog first...” A more devious expression formed on Amber’s face as she looked back at him, slightly lifting one foot. “I bet I could wound your pride by beating you in a race.”

“Only one way to find out.” he replied, smiling.

With those words, Cain trailed behind Amber as they went to the start of the track. The minaki trio merely observed in the far distance, biding their time while one gave the two the stink eye.