

Terran Insurrection

Act I: Chapter 3

A human man adjusted his purple tie. Bright blue eyes adjoined his tidy blonde hair and a purple bandana tied around his neck. Meanwhile, a bloody name tag remained on a nearby counter...

‘Hi! My name is: **JACK!**’

His fancy vest, dress shoes, and rolled up sleeves made him look like an American gangster straight out of the roaring twenties, especially with his other pinstriped attire more than anything else, but a single phrase in Latin stuck out thanks to a permanent tattoo embedded into his arm...

Non Sibi Sed Patriae.

Sitting on a hotel bed, the man went about flipping through an old-fashioned notebook. It contained a variety of lists, extremely detailed pencil sketches, and blurbs of personal notes. A screen playing a news broadcast in front of him provided even more information during the process.

“Federal officials murdered in broad daylight!” hissed a non-human newswoman. Footage on the screen showcased a bomb going off in the middle of a city, followed by civilians shouting and screaming. “Just several solar cycles ago, an improvised explosive device detonated at a museum being visited by one of Earth’s vice conductors...” The camera panned to showcase shattered exhibits dedicated to humanity’s first contact crisis, where M14 and AK47 assault rifles alike joined upscaled photos of American or Soviet forces confronting alien lifeforms descending from the skyline. “Authorities say a lone human gunman shot the vice conductor and massacred her entire security detail during the ensuing chaos!”

Digital images or videos popped up on the screen. Depending on the particular angle, they showcased a man dressed as a janitor with cleaning supplies and weapons on his cart visible. Other snapshots focused on his green uniform splattered with predominantly red blood as he fled the scene, albeit they failed to capture his face at any point.

“Investigators have concluded that an employee named Jack Russell is not responsible for the shootings. His nude corpse has been found stuffed inside a janitorial closet. Local peacekeepers have commenced a planet-wide manhunt for the suspected terrorist responsible, and the Sons of Sol are

already claiming responsibility for the attack, but information is still incoming as we report on the scene!”

As the broadcast transitioned to show funeral ceremonies featuring the customs or traditions of several different species, an image of the vice conductor appeared alongside her name. She looked almost like an anthropomorphic moth. One of her distinctive features involved a stunted yet fuzzy antenna, which matched a sketch in the human man’s notebook. He crossed her name off the list. Turning a page, he found another detailed drawing of an alien woman and plenty of footnotes, including more personal information, but this one resembled a snake or a naga with her cobra hood and yellow scales.

Before the news station could continue, the man flicked a switch on the monitor’s side and cut the newswoman off.

Following this, the man got up. He walked towards an adjoining bathroom and grabbed a spray can off a counter. Glancing at the container, a blue and purple label had these ridiculous neon flames and text claiming it happened to be a five-in-one cleaning solution for human men. Plus a highly flammable warning. With that information in mind, the man retrieved a cheap lighter as well before entering the restroom.

The sight of blood welcomed him back to the bathroom.

A crumpled up, dark green uniform remained in the bathtub and shower combo. Some of the water it soaked in took on murky shades of red and black, but it didn’t even compare to the bloody mess at the sink. Pieces of the uniform, dirty pliers, and strips of burnt human flesh or peeled-off skin adorned it. Even the universal latrine designed to accommodate multiple species had all of its toilet paper missing, with only gore-ridden rags or cardboard tubes in a trash can to show for it.

Naturally, the human began draining the tub. He pressed down on the container’s trigger and swept the spray can back and forth to coat it in a cleansing white foam as a fragrant smell similar to cologne filled the air. Finally, he ignited his lighter, combining it with the container to create an improvised flamethrower. Liquid contents expelled from the can transformed into a stream of fire as he set the janitor uniform ablaze, backing away as he burned down everything in the bathroom.

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Cain and Amber ascended into the air.

A precarious elevator on the side of a large apartment complex had a glass wall opposing its entrance. Despite the potential danger, it allowed for an unparalleled view of the outside world. Hovering transports and other vehicles crossed sections at multiple overlapping levels compared to the more traditional means far below. Plenty of people filled the streets. Massive skyscrapers owned by various mega-corporations stayed visible almost anywhere in the city. Raindrops fell down the glass panes or condensed against other areas as the endless sea of neon signs, lights, and advertisements turned the entire region into an oasis amid the darkness.

Amber focused on her damp fur as she shook a foot, then looked back out the window. “At least Bedlam can look beautiful if you can ignore almost everything else about it.” She turned to face Cain. “I bet it’s nice being able to see something like this every day!”

He shrugged. “It gets dull after the first few dozen times.”

“How... positive.” Amber said, scratching her muzzle.

Cain didn’t say anything in response.

Consequently, Amber let her previous words linger in the air for several seconds. “You don’t talk much, do you?”

The elevator made a notification sound similar to a smartphone as its door parted upon reaching its destination.

“Nope.” Cain said as he stepped into a hallway.

Amber followed him with her tail swaying in an annoyed fashion. “I’m only trying to make conversation so that we can know each other a little better...”

“I know.” he replied while still facing forward. “Just be warned that I wasn’t expecting guests. I’m no slob, but I haven’t exactly tidied the place up to prepare for any company and all that.”

She sighed. "I suppose I can understand that."

They both soon stopped in front of a large metal door. Amber took note as Cain slipped out a keycard, placed it inside a slim mechanism to scan it, then punched in four numbers when a virtual keypad appeared on a tiny electronic touchpad...

1-9-6-2

A green checkmark popped up on the screen, ejecting the keycard. Cain returned it to a pocket. With the door unlocked, he held it wide open for Amber and revealed the compact interior.

"Such a gentleman!" she said, snickering before walking inside. The large door closed behind her, and some air blew against her back as she scanned her new surroundings. Although the apartment wasn't necessarily small, it made minimal use of the available space, with a cramped kitchen doubling as a dining area bordering the living room. Any decorations were non-existent. Instead, a couch sat in front of a widescreen television, and an empty pizza box remained on a coffee table, catching Cain's attention as he moved past Amber.

"Let me get that." he muttered.

On the contrary, Amber focused on some dusty boxes. "Did you just move here or something?"

Cain swiftly set the pizza box next to a trash can in the kitchen. "Sort of. I've been here for a few months, just haven't bothered unpacking everything or getting rid of the boxes since I might not be staying here. Haven't decided yet. Hence the lack of fancy furnishings or unnecessary furniture or whatever."

Amber looked over a counter with a small window joining the living room. It would have resembled a designated area for a minibar if it didn't lack any seats or stools, but she spotted a cabinet filled with hard liquor such as vodka on the other side. "It definitely looks like you have your priorities in order!"

"That's what I like to think too." he said, scratching the back of his head. "It's not much, but make yourself at home while you lie low. Help yourself to whatever I have in the fridge if you're starving, but you might need to order your own crap if it's not good enough for you."

Amber's ears and tail perked up. "Oh! Do you have chicken livers?"

Cain blinked a few times. "Excuse me?"

"Raw chicken livers." repeated Amber, sticking out her tongue a little. "They usually saturate them in a salty solution and sell them in plastic cups. They're very nutritious when eaten raw... one of my favorites, actually!"

Cain took off his black jacket with a sneer, revealing a similarly colored polyester T-shirt beneath it. "Can't say that I do. Didn't even know that was a thing till now..."

Amber's tail swooshed behind her. "What about insect powder? Canned fish?" Her eyes went wide. "Jerky?"

He placed his jacket on a coat hanger, staring at the damage from her claws on the back. "I think I have protein powder and potatoes. Would that work?"

She made an exasperated sigh. "I'm a carnivore, Cain."

Cain pivoted in place to look at Amber, just to find her right next to him. She stuck a clawed finger in her mouth and pressed against her gums, showing him sharp and pearly-white canine teeth. Her jaws abruptly snapped, and her teeth created a clicking sound before she resumed speaking...

"I need meat. Although I appreciate everything you've done for me so far, it might not be the best idea to let me go hungry while I'm staying here."

This failed to arouse a reaction from Cain besides clenching his fists. "Is that a threat, Amber?"

Her tail slumped to the ground as she covered her mouth with one hand. "Ah... I didn't mean it like that!" Amber's pointy ears also gradually folded against her head. "I had a human sister and family growing up and I always enjoyed teasing them about our... biological differences. Hopefully you get what I'm trying to say about my diet though!"

"Because I thought the cannibalism was a kalka thing rather than a minaki thing." he replied.

Amber's face scrunched up, and her jaw went agape. "Ugh. There's no need to be... prejudiced about it."

"Whatever." Cain said, walking back into the living room. "Just as long as a sassy little thing like you gets their own food, there probably won't be issues."

"But I need to keep a low profile!" she whined in return.

He used one hand to wave her complaint away. "Then order whatever you need online. Beggars can't be choosers."

Amber practically pouted at his words as she avoided eye contact, frowned, and only revealed a single fang from the corner of her mouth.

"And give me just a second..." continued Cain. "I wasn't kidding when I said you could crash on the couch. Fortunately for you, I got a spare pillow or blanket or two."

With that, Cain vanished into the only hallway. It happened to be right next to the apartment's entrance, adjoining the living room. Three doors concealed the other areas. Opening a closet unraveled one mystery when Cain went about sifting through it, momentarily leaving Amber to her own devices as she approached the couch and the television.

However, Amber spotted an odd gadget on the coffee table. A digital projection meant to imitate a photo frame displayed a picture of Cain... albeit covered in standard peacekeeper body armor. The four-pointed star of the Interstellar Federation decorated it. He posed with several other aliens within a military unit, who also refrained from wearing helmets, toting their advanced laser or plasma weapons while smiling if biologically capable.

Without warning, a pillow flew past Amber's face and landed on the couch, disrupting her viewing experience. Cain then waltzed back in before tossing a blanket to join it.

"Might wanna clean yourself up too before lying down on my precious couch."

"Yes... because it appears to be one of your only valuables." she replied, rolling her eyes. "Ignoring the lack of decor or much of anything else, it's just water. I'm not that dirty either! I think..."

“Have you looked in a mirror recently?” asked Cain, cocking his head to the side. “You look like shit.”

Amber glanced down at her tattered and wet clothes with fur popping out from a few holes. “You have such a way with words, don’t you?”

He sneered. “Yeah. Not trying to be an ass or anything, but I’ve been told I can be a bit blunt or direct at times. Double-edged sword, really.”

“I’ve noticed.” she said, narrowing her eyes. “On that note, I tend to respond to snark with sass. I’d rather not be a poor or disrespectful guest since this is otherwise your home.”

Cain shrugged. “Fair enough. It’s not my intent to be a poor host either, so let’s establish some ground rules.” He held up a single finger. “For starters, you can leave at any time. Might be a problem staying at some stranger’s place if you don’t feel safe. Just preferably give me a heads up or leave a note as a courtesy so that I’m not left in the dark.” As he raised a second finger, he used another hand to make a gesture as if counting his fingers. “Secondly, clean up after yourself and try to replace whatever you use if you’re staying here rent free.” A third finger sprung up. “Last but not least, I enjoy my privacy, so leave my bedroom alone... then ideally you’re on your way in a week or less since I’m still not exactly sure what I’m getting myself involved in.”

As he spoke, Amber nodded her head. “I have common sense, so those guidelines should be easy enough to follow.”

“Any questions or concerns?”

Amber shook her head at Cain’s words. “No. Not for now.”

“Good.” He paused to raise his arms in the air, stretching a little before releasing a yawn. “I’d rather not cut things short, but I’m gonna hit the sack since I have shit to do tomorrow. Preferably I don’t regret any of this. Heard way too many stories from friends about inviting women over for the night, just to realize they were robbed blind by the time they woke up alone the next morning with their wallet, mobile phone, and keys missing.”

Amber made a look of concern. "I'm not going to do any of that, Cain." She looked at him with the dim lights glimmering in her golden eyes. "I'll get my hands on an authentic leather jacket to repay you if you were serious about all of that stuff you said earlier!"

"Eh... we'll see." He turned to walk away. "Just holler at me if you need anything. Good night."

"Um... you too!" Amber said with her tail wagging for a few moments.

Cain undid several locks on his door. He used the thumb on his remaining hand to point at another door. "By the way, bathroom is at the end of the hallway if you wanna tidy yourself up at any point tonight."

She nodded. "Got it!"

From there, Cain disappeared into his own personal bedroom. The door shut behind him, and the sound of several mechanisms clicking or clacking indicated when individual locks became active again.

Amber spent a moment fluffing up her only pillow, spreading out the blanket, and sniffing the couch. The smell of fresh leather filled her nostrils. Besides some sections of the apartment remaining unkempt or barren from a lack of basic maintenance, things appeared new and generally clean. Content with this state of affairs, Amber made her way to the hall, eventually entering the bathroom. Unlike the rest of the apartment, it happened to be virtually spotless with the faint smell of bleach and other cleaners still lingering around, whether it be a fortunate coincidence or not.

Nonetheless, Amber closed and locked the door. She began removing her ruined or utterly drenched clothing, up until hindsight kicked in. Backtracking, she cracked the door open.

"Cain..." she said, directing her eyes at his bedroom door.

Like so many times before, Amber failed to get a response.

"Caaaain..."

His door cracked open upon being unlocked, and only a chain stopped it from fully opening.

"What?"

Only Amber's nose poked out with a single eye visible. "Do you... have something I can wear by any chance? Or at least something you wouldn't mind me... uh... modifying..."

He rolled his eyes and sighed. "You're gonna ruin all my clothes at this rate, princess."

She squinted a bit. "I'm afraid to ask if that's my new nickname."

"You were the one making knights in shining armor jokes earlier," he said, shaking his head. "But yeah, I got some old stuff I don't care for. Gonna get you to respond to that nickname at some point though since it's kind of funny..."

Amber rolled her eyes as Cain went back into his room. She tapped her foot against the floor, but her ears sprung up once she heard him open another door. His voice emitted from it.

"Just pants and a shirt or something?"

"Yeah!" she shouted back.

Although Amber heard some more rummaging for a while, Cain returned moments later, holding some clean clothes. More precisely, a black hoodie and matching basketball shorts. He undid the chain binding his door to the frame before walking out and handing the garments to Amber, who snatched them away with a clawed hand.

She closed her eyes and imitated a smile. "Thanks!"

"Don't mention it," he said, returning to his bedroom.

Amber glanced at the clothes. "Also... is every article of clothing you own black?"

Cain shrugged. "Probably."

The man didn't even allow the woman to respond before shutting the door once more. She scoffed, almost snarling, then closed her own and re-engaged the locks to afford herself some privacy. Amber promptly made short work of throwing off her clothes, kicking some shorts away with a digitigrade foot, then she set her mobile device and other valuables aside onto a sink counter.

A quick look at a mirror allowed Amber to see herself. Black fur highlighted certain sections of her body... including her eyes, muzzle, hands, and feet. Brown fur meshed with the rest in either solid patterns or spots, almost like an African wild dog. Her slim yet lithe and muscular physique happened to be pleasant to the eye by most mammalian standards. One side of her body, mostly an arm and a leg, had some clumps of fur missing or even scars, while the other side remained relatively unharmed...

Pristine, even.

Yet suddenly, the unsoiled section of Amber's body had its fur shrink into itself. This exposed a metallic frame. Beneath it all, absurd amounts of cybernetics grafted or implanted into her body made half her physical form resemble an android. Almost like a prototype. Claws on one of her hands extended to an unnatural degree until they were several inches long. She used them to momentarily peel back part of her silicon face, fiddling with a bionic eye embedded into her mechanical skull, where some tiny moving parts became visible around her eye socket.

Upon accomplishing that, Amber slid everything back into place. Fake fur slid out of her body to give her a much more natural appearance again... all while she smiled and stuck out her tongue at herself. Afterward, she gazed upon the rest of her new environment.

Fortunately enough, the bathroom looked like one belonging to more of a master bedroom since the shower and bathtub happened to be separate. An odd anomaly compared to the rest of the small apartment. Better yet, the tub showed signs of little to no usage compared to the shower due to towels hanging over a glass door and various bottles of shampoo or soap inside. Borrowing one such body wash container immediately remediated several potential issues for Amber as she prepared herself a hot bath, found a few clean towels stuffed inside a cabinet, and took back her mobile phone for good measure.

Mere moments later, a black toe bean dipped into the water to check the temperature. It scrunched up as a result. Content with this, Amber fully lowered herself into the water, a welcome change of pace compared to the cold rain as she let out a sigh of relief.

“Ahhh...”

Some steam even started forming. Before Amber could kick back and relax, her smartphone vibrated a bit...

A message popped up on a screen.

**Adder:** Did the plan work?

Amber laid against one section of the tub and crossed her legs, fully focusing on the phone screen as she held it with both clawed hands and tapped away with her thumbs.

**Amber:** worked like a charm

**Amber:** he fell for the whole damsel in distress act without asking many questions

**Adder:** Were you able to acquire a physical description or other information?

**Amber:** even better

She grinned before tapping to send the next message.

**Amber:** im inside his apartment and need some funds to keep the ruse up