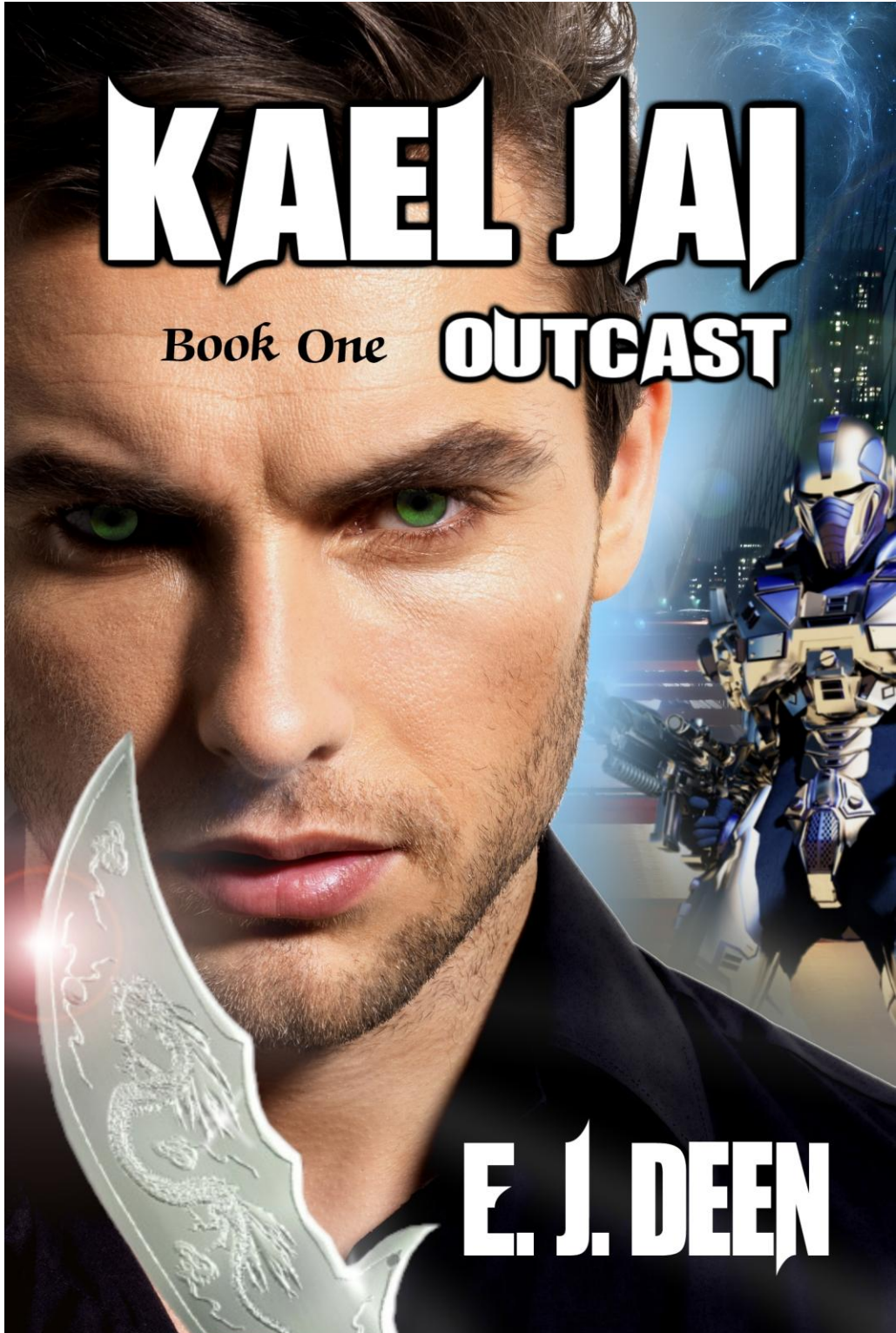


# KAEL JAI

Book One **OUTCAST**

**E. J. DEEN**



# **KAEI JAI**

## **BOOK ONE: OUTCAST**

**BY**  
**E.J. DEEN**

[KaelJai.com](http://KaelJai.com)

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Published in the United States of America.

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# Chapter One

The people on the streets of New York City were bundled up against a frigid winter. Small drifts of snow lay scattered on store canopies and parked cars, and puffs of mist hung in the air from street grates, building vents, and vendor carts as warm air met bone-chilling temperatures. But the chill in the air didn't bother him. His internal temperature remained constant in most weather conditions. His luminous green gaze scanned the crowd of people as he walked along the busy sidewalk, his black leather coat open, revealing the white t-shirt beneath. Snug blue jeans and a simple pair of black leather boots completed his wardrobe. He wasn't even wearing a warm winter hat, unlike the people flowing past him on the city sidewalk. He wasn't focused on them at the moment. Anxiety churned in his stomach, a dread that had plagued him since he'd been dumped on this planet. It was worse this morning. The sense that something was wrong made him jumpy and hyper-vigilant. He was supposed to be safe in New York, but he knew he wasn't. He would never really be safe, and he would never be able to shake the anxiety and the sense of dread that plagued him. Not until he died or he killed Jindom. That was his ugly reality. The truth he carried with him while he pretended to have another life far away from his home. His *real* home.

He could handle having been cast out of his home, but he couldn't handle the fear of what had happened to his province since, or the thought of what would happen to these people of earth when Jindom finally came to kill him. He'd been thrown to earth through a portal, abandoned to fend for himself, alone and alienated from his people. Alienated. Alien. That's what he was considered in this world. An alien. An unknown. It was hard to think of himself as alien, or even different. But to these people on this planet, he was an anomaly, something to be feared, perhaps even dissected. The thought made him grimace.

It had been nearly a full year. He'd managed to survive, keeping to himself mostly, and interacting with humans only when it was necessary. Money hadn't been a problem. Their technology was still limited and full of weaknesses. Hacking had become a must for him in this new society, and he'd siphoned enough money from a few billionaire bank accounts to keep himself comfortable and out of reach.

He looked human, for the most part, although there were some noticeable differences. His body metabolized food differently. He could conserve energy for long periods of time, build it, store it, and manipulate it. He could literally draw energy from nearly any source, including the atmosphere around him. His body was designed to sustain itself on multiple levels, through food, water, oxygen, carbon monoxide, and from sapping energy from everything that gave off energy.

His eyes were different. If one looked closely enough, they could see subtle differences in his irises and pupils. His pupils narrowed in a horizontal, elliptical pattern at certain times. He had night vision and could see as well in the dark as he could in the light. He could smell better than any earth dog, and could hear several different ranges beyond human hearing. He had no sweat glands, his testicles were internal instead of external, he had slight webbing between his toes, and his fingernails were strong enough to be used as daggers if he let them grow. He didn't. Let them grow. He was trying to fit in not stand out.

Oh. And then there was that other difference. He had a retractable barb on the underside of his left wrist, complete with a venom sac that held enough venom to kill at least a dozen grown men in less than ten seconds. The barb was not something he flung around at whim. Instead, he only used it in extreme cases. It took three days to grow another one back.

He was tall, lean but muscular, with broad shoulders and a narrow waist. His skin was pale, ageless, although by earth standards he would be somewhere in his thirties. He kept his blue-black hair cut close on the sides, leaving a wavy mass atop his head. His bright green eyes glimmered as if lit from within. For the most part, he looked like a male model. Between his looks and his six foot five inch height, he turned heads, which was why he tried so hard to be anonymous and unseen.

He was a bit psychic. He knew when someone was lying. He could smell it on them before the words left their lips. These were all normal features on his home planet. But here...on earth...these senses were considered heightened, superhuman, almost supernatural.

He was called Kael. It was an easy name for humans to remember, as it sounded similar to their familiar male name Kyle.

He'd prefer not be outcast, but he'd made a comfortable life for himself here on earth, safe from the war that most assuredly still raged on his planet. There, on Trinoor, he'd been a leader, the young ruler of the capital province of Jai. Until the ruler of the Northern province of Nagarr came to claim the capital for his own. It was the longest, bloodiest war in all of Trinoor's history, a war that broke a centuries old reign of peace among the three provinces.

Master Jindom, the warlord of Nagarr sought to rule over the entire planet of Trinoor. He was evil, insane, brutal and without mercy. After years of battle, one province against two, Jindom had succeeded in casting Kael out of Jai. Kael had been overtaken, betrayed by a spy in his ranks, nearly murdered, then saved by a priest who appeared out of thin air and took him to the mountains where the priests dwelt. Those loyal to him kept him sequestered, hidden, until it became too dangerous. For his own protection, and for theirs, the priests opened the portal and sent him to a place where Jindom would never find him, or so they assumed. The portal was priest tech and only the priests knew how to open it. Surely, they'd all been killed by now.

Scowling at the mere thought, Kael paused in front of a department store window. Despite what the priests had told him, Kael was never certain that he was safe. He knew the madman Jindom would not rest until he found Kael and killed him. He sensed that his world was still in chaos, his loyal followers still fighting to save Jai and keep his whereabouts hidden. Though he'd been nearly a full year on earth, he knew that one day Jindom would send the Sulcrum to find him. He'd chosen New York City because of its dense population. It made him feel safer. But to the Sulcrum, even in a sea of sweaty, perfumed humans, Kael's energy signature was unmistakable. Even on a planet populated by billions, the Sulcrum would have no difficulty in locating him. It was only a matter of time. And when Jindom discovered him...the blood would run thick in the streets.

Kael stood before the large glass window of the store, his gaze both fixed on the display in front of him and on the reflection of the stream of people flowing along the New York City street behind him, alert as ever. Always alert and waiting. In the reflection, he noticed a young, blonde woman on the sidewalk near a stand that sold flowers and small trinkets. She watched him from under her lashes. He could tell by the tilt of her head that she found him attractive. Little did she know the truth of what he was. He barely gave her any thought. He was tense today. He could sense something was wrong in his world. The atmosphere around him felt

different, and he couldn't get his mind off the anxiety. He had an unshakeable feeling that today was his day of reckoning.

Kael smelled him before he saw his reflection in the window. The scent made him tense, and his fists clenched as he prepared for battle. The priest appeared out of the crowd like magic and stood ten feet behind him, waiting. He knew Kael smelled him and saw him. Kael stared at the priest's reflection. He was tall, like Kael, but thinner, his skin even paler in contrast to the paleness of his master. He wore a black leather duster that reached to the ankles of his black leather boots, and his long fingers were gloved, also in black leather. Clearly, he was trying to mask his looks with what he assumed were cool street clothes. Despite the cold winter air, he'd left his head bare. Unusual for a priest. He would have blended into the New York scene with ease, but his long, white-blond hair made him stand out, and his clothes were dated, like a copy of a character in some old sci-fi earth movie. He looked young, maybe thirty-six by earth years, but Kael knew him to be well over a hundred Trinoor years old.

"Master," the priest called to him. "They are coming."

Kael's blood rushed forward in his veins as hormones catalyzed his body for war. He turned around to stare into the grey eyes of the priest, every muscle in his body coiled for action. "The Sulcrum?"

The priest lowered his chin in a brief nod, then looked Kael directly in the eyes. "Jindom himself tortured the youngest of us until he laid our secret bare."

Kael's eyes narrowed.

"Do not waste time on anger, Master Jai. The young one was weak, too weak to withstand the pain Jindom gave him."

"You are mistaken, priest. I feel only remorse over the young one's pain. I take full responsibility. I should have ended this war long ago. But..."

"But you do not possess the savagery that Jindom thrives on. That is as it should be. You are a great ruler, worthy of your calling."

"Was," Kael corrected.

"Your loyal army is still yours to command, master. As it always will be."

Kael stared at the priest. "How many does Jindom send?"

"Just one Sulcrum. Through the portal. But if he doesn't secure you, ships will arrive to lay waste to this planet until you are found and killed."

The muscles along Kael's neck bunched and his teeth clenched so tightly that his jaw ached. "I should have never left. Now, because of me, these people are in danger. And they have no idea we even exist."

"One's own territory makes one strong. But unfamiliar territory brings light to weakness."

Kael's eyes narrowed as he contemplated the priest's words. When the priest turned to leave, Kael's anxiety deepened. "Priest!"

The priest looked over his shoulder at Kael, "Do not worry, master. I cannot go back. I am like you now, outcast and running for my life."

"We should—" Before he finished the thought, the priest vaulted twelve feet into the air and vanished. The priests of Trinoor had the power to manipulate energy fields, a gift that took years of training and afforded them many opportunities to appear and disappear at will. If only Kael had that tech. Maybe he wouldn't feel so anxious now.

Feeling even more tense, and even more alone, Kael took a long sniff to check the air for more visitors. He didn't relish the idea of fighting a Sulcrum with nothing but a Strongblade for defense. How long before it appeared? A hulking, seven-foot tall robot that looked like a man

wearing high-tech armor would stand out in the crowd, any crowd, anywhere. A machine that was made of a metal so polished that it reflected its surroundings and seemed to flux in and out of the atmosphere would be a spectacle among the more primitive race of earth. A Sulcrum had the ability to morph its right arm into a blade, a club, or a phaerig, adjusting its fighting tactic to suit the situation. And it was nearly indestructible, with few weaknesses. Kael was a sitting duck in the New York crowd.

He sensed the shift, a barely perceptible displacement in the air that let him know the Sulcrum approached from behind. The barb under his wrist twitched but remained sheathed. His venom was useless against the Sulcrum. Mindful of the many innocent citizens around him, he strongly considered running. He knew he could never outrun the Sulcrum, but he could at least lure it to a place with less people. Maybe then there would be less collateral damage when he took the Sulcrum's head off.

His gaze shifted to the small woman at the flower stand. A flash of sunlight gleamed off the metal clasp on her coat. And in that tiny bit of metal, he saw the reflection, a movement behind him. No time to run now. The Sulcrum was already preparing to deliver a death-blow to the back of Kael's head. Might as well take the machine down now and be done with it.

The woman's eyes widened. Just as her mouth was opening to scream, Kael spun around, his left arm moving in an upward arc to stop the downward force of the Sulcrum's blow, his right hand balling into a tight fist and thrusting forcefully toward the inner thigh of the Sulcrum's leg cavity. A Sulcrum had only two weak points in its entire body: the bend where the thigh met the groin plate, and a very small pivot just at the top of the throat, beyond the chin, tucked into the neck. If he could disable the power conduits running through the inner thigh, the Sulcrum would go down on one knee, and Kael could use his Strongblade to take the Sulcrum's head off at the neck's weak point.

Just as the woman's scream was splitting the air, Kael's fist rammed into the Sulcrum's inner thigh. As expected, the Sulcrum's leg buckled. As it began to fall forward, Kael drew a thick, short blade from the sheath in his boot and used his entire body to swing upward toward the weak neck point. The arm-blade the Sulcrum had raised at Kael's head retracted backward, shortening in length as the Sulcrum automatically repositioned to strike another blow at Kael, this time aimed at his belly. Kael's forward thrust was abruptly shortened as he side-stepped the blade, but he managed to thrust sideways and connect with the Sulcrum's neck. He missed the weak point but managed to sever at least one energy conduit. Steam poured out of the Sulcrum's neck as it reeled backward, its shiny chrome-colored metal arms wheeling to regain balance. He watched the seven-foot tall machine as it began to right itself. Made of ulbinium, the strongest metal on his planet, the Sulcrum was nearly indestructible. Kael would have to be quick and precise to take it down. The odds were stacked against him, but Kael was one of the best fighters in his region.

The woman at the flower stand screamed again. Kael's heart skipped a beat a split second before the Sulcrum's head began to turn in the woman's direction. In an attempt to block the Sulcrum's gaze, Kael launched himself into the air and hit the Sulcrum sidewise with a double-footed drop kick. Even with all Kael's weight and forward momentum, the Sulcrum was barely moved by the blow. Besides which, it was too late. The Sulcrum's gaze was on the woman. A nearly imperceptible blue beam of energy shot out of both eyes, spanning the ten-yard distance between the Sulcrum and the woman. Kael watched helplessly while the Sulcrum ran a full scan of the petite blonde.



Kael bounced off the Sulcrum and hit the pavement with his shoulder. People were already scattering away from the area, terrified of the huge manlike machine that had suddenly appeared in their midst. Everyone was in movement and everyone was screaming as the scene took place in front of them. But the woman didn't move. She stared at the Sulcrum, watched it start to right itself. Kael lost track of what she was doing. Instead, he used the opportunity, while the Sulcrum was occupied scanning her, to pick himself up off the street and thrust his Strongblade into the Sulcrum's neck. His biceps straining with the effort, he twisted the blade with his right hand while using his left hand to push hard against the helmet of the Sulcrum. The Sulcrum's right arm swung around hard to the right and caught Kael mid-abdomen. The force of the blow nearly broke Kael's ribs and sent him flying backward away from the huge metal hulk, right into the flower stand.

The girl shrieked as she ducked away from being hit by Kael's body as it sailed over her. She fell to her knees, hands over her head, and peered out from under her forearms as the Sulcrum quickly walked toward the destroyed flower stand. Kael lay amongst a pile of flowers, vases, splintered wood and twisted metal. He saw the Sulcrum heading his way and braced his hands backward behind his head against the pavement, drew his knees to his chest and waited two beats before kicking out as hard as he could. His brain registered the fact that his blade was no longer in his hand, nor was it in the Sulcrum's neck, just as his feet connected to the nearly indestructible machine. It was like kicking the side of a building. The shockwave traveled up Kael's spine, sending pain careening through his body and through his skull, making him feel like his bones were going to shatter. Although his bones were much denser and stronger than human bones, a Sulcrum could snap him like a twig. Kael's kick barely swayed the hulk. The Sulcrum's gyros were designed to rebalance the metal body under even extreme circumstances, which left it nearly invulnerable to physical attacks.

"My blade!" he roared in the woman's direction.

She winced, as if startled by the sound of his voice, then quickly looked around. The blade lay four feet away, hovering on the edge of the sidewalk, precariously balanced above a storm drain. One wrong move and the blade could fall down that hole, never to be recovered. Kael's brain worked over the problem as he raised an arm in defense against the Sulcrum's attack. He was still on the ground, still reeling from the pain in his body. As the Sulcrum swung his arm downward, the sharp blade extending from its arm glinted in the wintry sunlight. The blade changed length and size as it approached Kael. Kael grabbed the Sulcrum's wrist with both hands, swept the hulk's right ankle joint with his right foot, and rolled hard to the left, using the downward force and the roll of his body to both absorb and deflect the shockwave of the blow and pull the Sulcrum off its feet. Kael managed to throw it about ten feet distance from him.

"My blade!" he roared again as he jumped to his feet and put a little more distance between himself and the machine. The Sulcrum was already getting to its feet and turning back toward him. Kael glanced in the woman's direction. She had his blade in her hands, but she appeared to be afraid to approach him. Kael didn't want to run in her direction; she might be accidentally injured in the process. Sulcrums didn't care about collateral damage. They weren't programmed to care. They were programmed to kill.

The girl hesitated for a fraction of a second, her eyes darting to the Sulcrum, and then she threw the blade in Kael's direction. Kael took three giant strides toward her, one arm outstretched to catch the heavy Strongblade, leapt into the air and used one leg against a nearby lamppost to stop his momentum and turn himself around to face the Sulcrum. He caught the blade neatly and deftly turned it in his hand, his fingers clenched around the metal hilt. Still in

motion, he launched himself off the pole and met the Sulcrum as it hurtled toward him. The blade sank deep into the weak point just below the Sulcrum's chin and stuck out the other side. Kael gave the blade a violent twist left then right and stepped sideways as the forward momentum of the Sulcrum's body continued past him and rammed into the glass window of the very store Kael had been standing in front of just minutes earlier. Shards of glass flew in all directions as the heavy metal body of the Sulcrum came to a halt in the middle of the now destroyed store display. The woman stared at the machine's head as it fell at Kael's feet.

For a moment, Kael stood with his arm still outstretched, blade extended outward, muscles tensed and bulging, and his chest heaving as he worked to catch his breath. His eyes were glued to the woman. A second later, he vaulted towards her, grabbed her by the hand, and began running away from the storefront as fast as he could drag his baggage behind him. She was small and couldn't keep up with him. Frustrated, he stopped. She immediately slammed into the back of him.

"Ow! Damn you! Where are you taking me!" she yelled at him.

"Away from here," he yelled back. Without saying another word, he picked her up like she was a sack of potatoes, dumped her over his shoulder, and ran down the street with her bouncing against his back. She wound her fingers into his shirt and held on tight to try and stop the mind-numbing bounce of her head.

"I..w-want to kn-know...where the hell you're t-t-taking me!" she shrieked, her words coming out in gasps as her stomach bounced painfully against his shoulder.

Just as the last word was leaving her lips, the Sulcrum exploded in a massive ball of fire that sent bricks, glass, metal, and parts of mannequins flying across the street. Kael kept running. The woman was too winded to scream when the explosion ripped through the store. Sirens howled in the distance, fire trucks and police cars already trying to make their way through the city streets to get to the odd scene that citizens had surely reported. Only minutes had passed since the Sulcrum's arrival, but there was enough chaos and damage on the street to make it look like a terrorist attack.

Another explosion rocked the atmosphere, the sound reverberating off the tall buildings around them. The Sulcrum's head, exploding just minutes after the body's self-destruct.

Kael kept running. He had to get as far away from the scene as possible, as fast as possible. He ran a mile before he finally stopped and put the woman down. Tears streaked her cheeks, and her nose was red and wet from crying. She wobbled on her feet and shoved her long blonde hair out of her face to get a good look at him. Kael was barely panting from the long run. Running with her weight on his shoulder hadn't even winded him. His luminous green eyes stared down into her face, assessing her emotions and her physical state.

"What the hell was that...that...thing back there!" she demanded.

"A Sulcrum," he answered succinctly.

He reached for her hand. She snatched it out of his way so that he couldn't take hold of it.

He frowned. "You must come with me."

"The hell you say! I don't have to go anywhere with you! You nearly got me killed back there!"

He reached for her hand again. Again, she moved out of his grasp. "I want to know why the man in that armor was trying to kill you, and why you are running with me!"

"There's no time for that. We have to get as far away as possible, as fast as possible. Every delay could mean the death of us."

“Why? And why *we*? Why do I have to go with you? What the hell is going on?” She ended in a near-scream of fury and frustration.

“The Sulcrum is not a man. It’s a machine. A very deadly one,” Kael explained.

The woman glanced at him nervously. She looked dazed, confused, and he could smell the terror thrumming through her bloodstream.

“You’ve been imprinted,” he stated.

“Wha-What does that mean?”

“It means that you are in danger. You must come with me.”

Her eyes were beautiful. He’d just noticed. Deep as a crystal clear blue spring on Trinoor. Her hair the color of the corn silk he’d seen stripped from the ears in the farmers market. Skin fair, smooth, and clear. Next to his 6’ 5” frame, she was tiny, probably no more than 5’4”. Not that it mattered. She was under his protection now. Like it or not, he couldn’t leave her.

She opened her mouth to say something, but the words were cut short when he grabbed her by the hand and pulled her down the side street. “We must get out of sight.”

She tried to twist her hand out of his, but his grip was too firm. “Why should I come with you?” She yelled the words at the back of his head.

He turned abruptly and put a large hand over her mouth to shut her up. Leaning down close so she could look into the depth of his eyes, he said very clearly, “If you want to remain alive, you will follow me to the ends of your planet if need be, without hesitation and without argument.”

Her eyes were wide with fear, and he could feel her heart thrumming hard against his abdomen. The energy of it beat the air between them, reaching out to strum his nervous system. His senses were at high alert, and he could see everything about her, smell everything, feel everything, like no human ever could.

“I’m going to let go now. And you’re going to be good and not scream. If you hold me back any longer, I will have no choice but to leave you behind, to protect myself. If I do that, you will die. Do you understand?”

She nodded feebly, her cheeks pinched up above the meat of his palm. She looked like a pathetic little cartoon character on some earth show. When he didn’t let go, she nodded more emphatically and grunted something from beneath his hand. He slowly lifted a few fingers. She didn’t scream, so he withdrew his hand, but he remained vigilante. She gasped once for breath, straightened her shirt, swallowed hard, and nodded again.

“Alright. I’m following you.”

Kael assessed her eyes to determine her truth. Satisfied that she would give him no more trouble, he looked around at his surroundings. Microwave and cell phone towers jutted from the tall building next to the abandoned one they stood beside. He turned and peered into the distance. The energy plant was too far away. This building would have to do, for now.

He went to the door and looked through the glass. A small hallway led to an empty lobby. He jimmied the door and stepped inside. Old broken glass crunched beneath his boots. He pulled the girl in behind him and closed the door, locked it, and turned back to look around at the graffiti-covered walls.

“What is this place?” the girl asked from behind him.

“An abandoned office building,” he said.

“How do you know?”

“I observe.”

Moving silently, his senses heightened and alert, he led her upstairs to the third floor. Glancing around as he went, he eased down the hallway until they came to a small room at the end of the hall. The girl followed him inside, but when he closed the door behind them she seemed wary and nervous. Kael ignored her and assessed the room from ceiling to floor, then went and peered out the dirty window at the street beyond. Satisfied that he would not be battling his way through any more Sulcrums, at least for a short while, he turned to the only desk that sat to one side of the room. He crossed the room and sat down slowly in the dust-covered swivel chair.

The girl looked around the room. "Why would anyone leave their office furniture behind?"

"You ask a lot of questions."

She shrugged. "I've always been curious by nature."

"Questions can get you answers that you won't like to hear."

She shrugged again. "Maybe. Maybe not. You didn't see me running from that big robot-thing, did you?"

His eyes narrowed. She spoke the truth. She was the only one who had stood her ground. Not that sticking around had been the smart choice.

"I know Tae Kwon Do. Been studying it since I was five-years-old," she said as she looked out the dirt-smudged window. "It teaches you to be bold."

"There's a difference between boldness and stupidity," Kael replied.

She turned to frown at him, her arms going across her chest. The position of her forearms thrust her breasts even higher, revealing a tiny bit of cleavage above her sweater. Her breath hung in the air, reminding him of just how cold she must be. The building's windows were mostly broken out, allowing for little shelter against the elements.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"Twenty-seven."

"Your name?"

She hesitated, her gaze turning toward the floor. "You first."

"My name is Kael."

"Kyle," she repeated. "Sounds like a perfectly harmless name. But you're *not* harmless. And you're not human either, are you?"

"Kah-ell," he corrected her pronunciation. "All drawn together in a subtle way. And what makes you think I'm not human?"

"Well, for starters, a man appeared out of thin air and called you master, and then this big shiny, chrome thing stepped out of the crowd and tried to break you in half. Now, I know the military, as advanced as we've become with our drones and weapons and such, doesn't have anything like that hulk, and as far as I know, humans can't appear out of thin air. Not to mention the sword that morphed out of its arm and then morphed back into an arm and then back into a sword, like magic. Plus, my friend swears aliens have been visiting us for ages, and...maybe you're one of them coming back to visit, or coming back to find something, or *take* something—"

Kael stood up, effectively cutting off her speech. She took a step backward. He stopped.

"I'm not going to hurt you."

She repositioned her legs. Kael noticed that she had shifted her center of gravity and she was now on the balls of her feet.

"Your Tae Kwon Do is no match for me."

“We’ll see about that,” she retorted. “Now, if you don’t start talking, I’m going to speed dial my cousin, who’s a New York cop, and you’ll be apprehended, taken to a secret government facility, where I’m sure you’ll be more than happy to talk.”

Kael’s mouth twitched at the corners as he held back a laugh. “You don’t bluff well. You have no cousin who’s a cop.”

Her chin lifted, and he saw the glint of defiance in her eyes. “How do you know that?”

“Because I can tell when someone is lying.”

She opened her mouth to say something, then clamped it shut again.

He smiled in satisfaction. “You and I are in danger. I plan on keeping us safe. But I must remind you that if you limit me in any way, I will have no choice but to abandon you and leave you to fend for yourself. You’ve seen what a Sulcrum can do, so I suggest you work *with* me not against me.”

She gulped hard but kept her gaze firmly on his.

“Now, your name please.”

“Sarah. Connor.”

His frown deepened into a scowl. He was losing patience with this female. “Your *real* name,” he growled as he took a menacing step toward her.

She gulped again and took a step backward. Her back butted against the wall, stopping her from escaping. “Okay! Eva! My name is Eva!” She said the words in a rushed, desperate near-squeal.

He stopped advancing toward her. “Good. We’re making progress. Now, what other talents do you have, Eva?”

Her eyes narrowed. “If you think you’re getting into my pants, think again! I’m not—”

“I simply want to know what you’re capable of that might help us!” he roared.

She jumped at the explosive sound of his voice in the small room, her eyes blinking rapidly as she realized what he had meant. “Oh! Oh, well...I’m...well...I....”

“Do you have a profession in this world?”

She glared at him. “I did until you smashed my flower stand to bits with your big ass!”

His right eyebrow twitched as he tried to hold back his mirth. She looked both comical and beautiful standing there looking so angry. “That’s it? You sell flowers and you know Tae Kwon Do?”

She lowered her eyes and toyed with a frayed thread on her coat. “I was thinking about going to college.”

“What about tech?” After only a momentary pause, he answered for her. “No, I didn’t think so.”

She frowned. “I may not be handy with tech, but I’ve got bigger balls than you do!”

His eyebrow twitched again. “You have no idea.” He wasn’t about to tell her that his testicles were internal. “Enough of this talk. We’re running out of time. So...just...whatever situation we find ourselves in, do as I say. Exactly as I say, without argument. Do you understand?”

“Of course I understand! I’m not stupid!”

He nodded once then turned back to the desk.

“So, what *are* we going to do?”

“Right now, you’re going to be quiet, and I’m going to think.”

“I’m hungry,” she muttered.

He glared at her.

She looked away. "Right. Shutting up now."

"Do you have family?"

Her gaze went to the floor again. "Nope. Mom ran away when I was three, and dad died six months ago. Cancer got him. No siblings. And..."

"No cousins," he finished for her.

"Right." She nodded and turned her back so he wouldn't see her eyes. She gave him about two seconds to think before she turned back and asked "That man...the one who came before the machine thing. He called you Master Jai. Master...what does that mean?"

He answered slowly. "It means that he was giving me the respect due me, as master of the region of Jai, where he dwells and I once ruled."

She smacked her hands together and crowed, "See! I knew it! You're an alien! Jai's not on earth, is it!"

He glared at her. She clamped her mouth shut and huddled in a corner away from the windows in an attempt to stay warm. The room seemed deafeningly quiet, but it only lasted a few minutes. Kael broke the silence when he stood up so abruptly that he nearly knocked the desk over with his knees. She jumped and opened her mouth to scream, but one look from him made her close the sound off before it left her throat.

He nodded toward the door. She huddled closer into her corner and waited.

A word entered the room before the man did. "Master."

Kael relaxed. He'd smelled the priest, but he hadn't been sure. Sulcrum's had a number of ways to confuse their prey.

The door opened and the priest stepped into the room without making a sound, his black leather duster swinging around his ankles as he came to a halt. He turned his head and looked at the girl, then fixed his gaze on Kael. He opened his palm and tossed something onto the desk between him and his master.

"I bought you some time."

Kael stared down at the small diamond-shaped metal pod that had come to rest in the center of the desk. It was the communication device from inside the Sulcrum's head. The priest must have taken it before the head had exploded.

"I do not know how long, maybe a day, maybe two. But eventually they will realize the Sulcrum is no longer communicating signals to home-world, and then they will come."

Eva stepped out of the corner, her eyes glued to the priest. "You're that guy. The one that appeared out of thin air."

The priest barely glanced in her direction. His focus was on Kael.

"She's been imprinted," Kael said.

The priest frowned.

Eva stepped closer, her high heeled boots scraping the floor. The sound seemed overly loud to Kael's sensitive ears and made him painfully aware of just how exposed they were.

"What does that mean?" she wanted to know. "Imprinted?"

The priest turned to look at her. "It means that they now have a genome of the human race. They know how you work, what your weaknesses are, and they can formulate an attack plan accordingly."

"Attack plan? You mean..." she grimaced, her blue eyes going paler.

"They will come and decimate your world," the priest said succinctly.

"But I thought..." Her eyes went to the small metal device on the table. "You cut off the transmission."

“An imprint is sent as it is occurring,” the priefst explained. “But without the portal, it will take time, perhaps several days before the signal reaches Trinoor.”

“Trinoor?” she echoed, looking worried.

“Our home-world,” the priefst answered.

“What about the portal?” Kael asked. “Can they send ships through?”

“The portal can only be manipulated for a short time. One small object can be sent through each time the portal is opened,” the priefst answered. “A person, a Sulcrum, a Rydyr, a Battalia at best. Then the energy required to open the portal again must be restored to full. It will take four earth hours before a person or a Sulcrum can traverse the portal again.”

“What about a Battalia?” Kael asked.

“Longer. A day.”

“So, I have 24 hours between a single attack and the time a ship might arrive,” Kael said.

“That is correct.”

Eva assessed the priefst, his long blond hair, pale silver-grey eyes, high cheekbones, long fingers. Her eyes slowly swept him from the top of his head, lingering around his groin, and then down his long legs to his booted feet. Kael tried to ignore her. Her interest was annoying. She should be covering in the corner, sniveling and begging for mercy, not in the middle of everything wanting to know what was going on.

“And the ships? How long before they reach earth?” Kael continued.

“A month. Maybe more.”

Kael’s shoulders relaxed a fraction.

“But if the Sulcrum doesn’t capture you, Jindom will come with a Battalia long before he sends ships. You know this, Kael Jai.”

Kael’s eyes narrowed. “Yes, I know.”

“I am in communication with a priefstess back home,” the priefst said. “She is hidden but vulnerable. I will know what she knows.”

Kael dipped his head in acknowledgment, his blue-black brows knitted together in a frown of concentration.

Eva had stepped closer to the priefst and had her head tipped back as she looked up at him in fascination. Kael stared at her for a long moment. She was strangely unabashed about her curiosity. “You talk more than this one does,” she piped in, jerking a thumb in Kael’s direction. “He seems limited to short sentences and grunts.”

“He does not need to,” the priefst replied, his gaze still on Kael. “Talk much, that is.”

“What is a Battalia?” she asked him.

“A small ship that carries six, no more.”

“That doesn’t sound like a small object to me,” Eva muttered.

Kael frowned. “Compared to the ships Jindom commands, a Battalia is tiny.”

Eva pretended Kael hadn’t spoken. Her eyes were still on the priefst. “Do you have a name?”

“I am called Sylph. I am the Keeper of Kael Jai.”

“What does that mean, keeper?” she asked.

“It means that he is my guardian, and he will die protecting me if need be,” Kael interjected.

“Cool.” She smiled.

Sylph glanced her way. Judging by the look on his face, he was as perplexed by her as was Kael.

Kael's expression was stony, serious. "I need an army. There's no way I can defend this planet without one."

Sylph acknowledged the comment with a slight slant of his head.

"Why don't you just go to a different planet?" Eva offered.

Kael turned and fixed her with a steely green stare. "Because you've been imprinted. You could remove me from the planet, or kill me, and they would still come and destroy your world."

"They would not know if he had been moved, and they will not stop until his body has been identified," Sylph explained.

Eva stared from one to the other, her mouth forming a silent oh. "Can't you just let it slip that he's been moved?"

Sylph frowned. "I cannot endanger my own Jai."

"Or fake his death," she finished.

Kael's glare deepened. She noticed but she didn't shrink away from him.

"Jindom will never believe that Master Jai is dead unless he sees his corpse with his own eyes," Sylph explained. His tone clearly let her know that he was losing patience with her.

"I thought about throwing her in the river," Kael commented.

Sylph's lips twitched upward in a half-grin that he fought to control.

Eva glared at Kael. "I didn't ask for this, you know. I was just minding my own business, selling my flowers—"

"It was a slow morning for you, you'd only sold one bouquet all day," Kael's smooth, deep voice interrupted.

She huffed a few times in frustration before continuing. "When you came along and brought that monster with you."

"You could have run, like everyone else. Then you would have never been imprinted."

Her breath fogged the air between them as she huffed even more. She folded her arms across her chest and clamped her mouth tightly shut.

"But you were too curious," he finished. "You had to get involved. Too involved. I suspect that's a pattern with you."

Sylph stood vigilant, hearing their conversation but only half listening. His stance made Kael nervous. Sylph would know if anything changed in the field. He would sense it before anyone else could. Kael was not prepared for war. He'd done battle with many, had killed many, but here...on this planet...he felt helpless and alone. Without his army, what good could he do in protecting the innocents of this world? At the moment, he barely had the means to protect himself.

Sylph met his gaze. Kael could see the silver-grey sea of his irises shifting in color, almost like he was traversing different energy fields and it was reflecting in his eyes.

"What is it?" Eva whispered.

Both males ignored her. Kael's gaze was focused on Sylph. "You sense something, brother?"

Sylph's focus shifted back to the room, to Kael. His master called him brother. It was meaningful. It meant that his ruler considered him an equal. This was a real compliment for a priest of Trinoor. Sylph nodded in answer to Kael's question. "I feel a shift. Someone is seeking."

Kael's eyes narrowed. "You mean...a seer?"

"Yes."

"Then they know the Sulcrum is no more."



“Possibly. The scan is weak. It is a very long distance to penetrate.”

Kael took a step closer to Sylph. “Jindom’s wy’tche.”

“It must be, master. Jindom must assume that her scan will be faster than the Sulcrum’s signal.”

“Can she do it?” Kael wanted to know.

“Possibly. She is a strong one, master. Perhaps the strongest of us all.”

“Call me master no more, brother. Here we are the same.”

“I beg to differ, master. You are Jai, and always will be.”

Eva looked from one to the other. “He is Jai. What does that mean?”

Sylph glanced in her direction. “He comes from the capital province of our planet. It is called Jai. When he became ruler, he became Kael Jai. He represents Jai and therefore he becomes Jai. He is the embodiment of all the tenants of the province and what is meaningful to us.”

“Are you also from Jai?”

“I am from the mountains of Jai. I belong to the priedjsthaed. We are the only priedjsthaed of Trinoor.”

“You’re a priest? I thought you were like him.” She looked confused.

“If you mean in race...technically there are three races of people on our planet, each with a different set of features and skills. Kael is of the Sinestran race. I am of the Benagh. Jindom is of the Zolarian.”

“Jindom?”

“The man who is going to kill us all if we keep standing here talking,” Kael informed her.

Eva ignored him. Her gaze once again raked the gorgeous male in front of her. “So, if you’re a priedjst, you...don’t...”

Sylph frowned down at her in confusion.

“Em...you know.”

“Enough talk! We must leave here, find somewhere else to go, somewhere...safe.” Kael drew out the last word in a hiss. He knew there was no place safe. Not without the technology of his world. Not without his army. Just him, one priedjst, and an annoying young woman who never ceased to ask questions.

“Kael Jai is correct. We must leave.”

“Hey, I’m thinking...I have this friend,” Eva began.

“The one who believes aliens are visiting your world,” Kael said.

Sylph raised an eyebrow.

Eva nodded. “Yeah, that one. He’s real techie. He has this room in his apartment. He tracks satellites and listens in on government stuff, you know the CIA and things like that. Maybe he can help.”

Kael didn’t even bother to look skeptical. In fact, she had noticed that his expression rarely changed from a frown or a grimace. “I don’t think so,” he said.

“Don’t say no until you’ve met him and seen his place,” she snapped, her blue eyes fiery with offense.

“I can easily say no before I’ve met him and seen his place. He’s a puny human just like every puny human on this planet, and no match for what is coming.”

“Oh, yeah! You?” She glanced at Sylph. “And you? You’ve got a big knife and a priedjst. That should do the trick. That’s an army if I’ve ever seen one.”

Kael slowly drew his Strongblade from his boot and held it an inch in front of her nose, so close that she couldn't even focus on it without being cross-eyed. She was sure that was an attractive look to the beautiful god he was. "This," he hissed. "This is no ordinary knife. This is a Strongblade forged by the Jai priejsthaed. Nothing is stronger than the ulbinium that makes this blade. It cannot be broken, and it cannot be handled by anyone else without dissolving into nothingness after about ten minutes. It's imprinted to my DNA. It can take the neck off an ox with one blow, and—"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, I get the idea. It's—"

Sylph interrupted. "We must go. *Now!*" Without waiting for a response, he turned to leave the room and slowly disappeared in front of their eyes.

Eva drew in a sharp breath of alarm.

Kael muttered something unintelligible to her.

"That's impossible," Eva exclaimed. "How does he do that? Some kind of technology? Some magical ability? Where did he go?"

"He hasn't necessarily gone anywhere. He could be a mile away by now or he could still be here with us." Kael stopped at the door, then turned and went back to the desk to pick up the communication pod Sylph had taken from the Sulcrum's head.

"Where are we going?" Eva asked.

"To my apartment. I need to get a few things."

"And when will Sylph be back?"

"I have no idea." Kael kept walking, out the door and down the corridor.

Eva followed along behind him. She had no other choice. She watched the long-legged gait, the swing of his nicely muscled arms beneath the black leather coat he wore, the round firm buttocks that fit so nicely into the tight jeans. Two drop-dread gorgeous men had literally fallen into her world, and here she was marked for death. "There's always the crappy lining to that silver cloud."

"What?" Kael stopped so abruptly that she smacked into the back of him.

"I really wish you wouldn't do that," she grumbled as she rubbed her smashed nose.

"As I wish you wouldn't talk so much," he replied. "You bother me."

"Yeah, I got that," Eva mumbled.

"And stop mumbling, whispering, muttering, I can hear every word you are saying. My ears are much keener than your weaker human ears."

She stuck her tongue out at his back and kept walking without saying another word.



Sylvanja stood in her chamber deep in Jindom's summer castle, her brilliant silver-blue eyes clouded over as she searched the cosmos for the Sulcrum Jindom had sent to find Kael. Her white-blonde hair fell in a silken sheet to her waist, and she wore a blue gown that reached to the floor, her tiny waist enhanced by the sash at her hips. She was the most beautiful woman in all of Jindom's kingdom. And the most feared. If she weren't a wy'tche, Jindom would have her as his queen. But even Jindom respected the distance required of her. Sylvanja was nothing to be trifled with. She could bend a man's will, rearrange the molecules in metal, and boil a man's blood with just her mind. Jindom lusted after her like a welter after a bitch in heat. But he kept his distance, and he paid her the respect she deserved. She had served him well for many years, but that could change with one wrong move from him.

Sylvanja was well known in all the provinces of Trinoor, but few people knew she was the sister of Adalayna Sharelle, the ruler of the province of Sharelle. To those who even cared, Adalayna's sister had died long ago, her body never found, no pyre, no farewell, nothing. After a long battle, Sharelle had finally fallen to Jindom. Sylvanja had prevented Jindom from killing her sister, but only just. Sharelle was now his, and Adalayna occupied the lower chambers of his capital palace, in chains, next to her royal guard and her Keeper, the priejst who had sworn to protect her, sent by none other than Kael Jai himself.

As Sylvanja refocused and pulled out of her seeking trance, her eyes changed, returned to their usual brilliant silver-blue. Jindom stood before her, gazing at her like a love-struck boy. She smiled, revealing perfect white teeth in a face so beautiful that it made men weaken when their gaze fell upon her.

Jindom was a ruggedly attractive man, tall, brutally built. He was a warrior, accustomed to battle, well-formed. Many women found him handsome, but his cruel ways were off-putting. His dark-brown hair curled around the collar of his leather coat of arms. His eyes were as black as the orbidian stones of the mountains of Jai, an endless, bottomless pool that held little emotion save anger, vengeance, and hatred of anyone who didn't bow before him. Except for the love he had for her. Sylvanja did not fear Jindom like others did, but she knew that despite his love for her, he would kill her in whatever way he could find if she ever betrayed him. And she never would. Betray him. Unless he sought to take the life of the man she truly loved. Then vengeance would be hers and Jindom would fall.

He reached out, palm up, and offered his hand. She slipped her fingers into his grasp and allowed him to lead her to the other side of the room, away from the crynallum windows where she liked to do her seeking. The chamber was beautiful. The stone floors were polished to a high sheen, inlaid with red and green precious jewels from Mount Tyr. The walls were made of Eneet stone from the cliffs of Sharelle, the most prized stone for building. Wood beams carved from the Cyphir trees of the forests of Denagah accented the vaulted ceiling. All beautifully polished. Even the crystal windows were framed with Cyphir wood inlaid with the white pearlescent shell from the deep sea Dramagh, a crustacean found in the Andova Sea. It was a chamber fit for a queen. Jindom had spared nothing in his courtship of her. She had everything she could ever want, save for one thing. And that was far beyond her reach.

Jindom took a risk and raised her delicate, white hand to his lips to briefly kiss her long, slender fingers. "What have you seen, my beautiful wy'tche?"

"The Sulcrum has been destroyed," she informed him.

Jindom's mind was a wash of chaotic thoughts. She sensed rage in him, disappointment, and a deep need to kill Kael Jai with his own hands. And something else. Fear. It wasn't the first time she'd sensed fear in him. But it was a secret she kept to herself, something to use toward her own ends in the future. Jindom liked to believe he feared no one. But he certainly feared Kael Jai. Kael Jai was the beloved ruler Jindom would never be. Kael Jai didn't need to rule with an iron fist. He had the loyalty and love of his people. Two things Jindom could never achieve, because Jindom didn't have the qualities Kael Jai embodied: fairness, equality, compassion. Jindom only had avarice, hate, and power on his mind.

Jindom brushed another kiss against her knuckles. Sylvanja didn't pull away. But she didn't encourage him either.

"Thank you. You will be well rewarded."

She smiled, a small smile, barely discernible, but said nothing.

Jindom stood up and left her chamber. She didn't ask where he was going. She already knew. He would never stop until Kael Jai was dead.

End Of First Chapter Sample  
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