

1. THE MADMAN

The evening city lay decrepit and silent under an incessantly seething pink sky. A sky that hung overhead like a field of bloody cotton candy, bisected by the lightning of constantly raging storms. Every once in a while thunder rolled through the streets, shaking the buildings. This was life after the last Black Rain.

The Rat King Temple was dark. The field behind it was still. Geo checked on Bree. They hadn't been here since before the Black Rain. Since Boris, the late Prince of the Silkers had discovered Geo's command center hidden inside the temple and attacked it.

Bree was tense. She looked over her shoulder at the Luna guards following them. Like Geo, she'd probably had to remind herself that they were now there to protect them, not fight and kill them. Some things took time to get used to.

"Wait here," said Geo to the guards.

"But, sire—"

"Wait here." Geo smiled and stared at the captain of the guard.

"Yes, sire," the captain agreed grudgingly.

Geo took Bree's hand and walked toward the temple.

The big door frame was in rusty tatters, the wood itself melted during the first Black Rain. He placed his helmet over his head and clipped it in place, connecting it with the suit. Bree did the same. He changed the view to night vision. The great hall of the temple came into focus. Rats the size of big dogs swarmed everywhere. Geo switched on the ultrasonic net installed in the temple. The rats dispersed.

Bree took the lead, walking quickly toward the command center in one of the refrigerating units along the eastern wall.

The unit was still locked. So, Boris's people hadn't succeeded in breaching it. Bree input the passcode and the door clicked open.

She entered and switched on the light. Geo followed and closed the door behind them. Everything was as they had left it when they ran away. The table filled with maps, the walls covered in scientific scribbling ripped from Alex's notebook, the pile of dry food in one corner. The mattress still askew.

"This is where first..." said Geo.

"This is where we first," said Bree and grinned.

She unhooked her helmet and placed it on the table. She then began sliding down the insulating suit. It was big, chunky, yet it slid down so enticingly. It settled around her ankles, leaving her smooth brown legs naked. Her breasts pushed against her white t-shirt. Her black hair fell in waves, framing her luminous face, focusing everything on her magnificent smile. She was so beautiful! Geo found himself staring at her. So beautiful and warm and so easy to love. He loved her now even more than before, when he'd loved her secretly and hopelessly.

Bree stepped out of the suit.

Geo unhooked his helmet and pushed down his suit with impatient hands. He stepped out of it and kicked it to the wall. Bree took his face in her hands and kissed him. He lifted her from the floor and took the two steps to the mattress, where he lay her down gently and kissed her back, his hand sliding down to her panties.²