



Chapter One

“Mate or die.”

The guttural words made Devlin Gray’s arms tighten on the woman in front of him. *Bloody hell*. For a second, he felt like he was in a very bad nightmare.

Then Taylor Cates shifted in his arms, her body tensing. The alien raptor who’d spoken banged his weapon on the bars of their cell.

They’d been caught sneaking around the alien factories—an ugly blight of buildings the invading aliens had erected north of Sydney on the scenic Australian Central Coast. But the Gizzida aliens weren’t here for the scenery or the beach.

They were here to enslave and destroy the human race.

Devlin and Taylor had been stripped of their weapons, armor, and boots. He’d even had his shirt torn off by raptor claws, so they both stood in this dank cell in cargo trousers, Taylor having been allowed to keep her thin, olive-green tank top.

And to make this dramatically worse, the aliens wanted them to mate.

His mind turned over, searching for a way out of this unreal situation. He was good at that, and he *always* found a way out. He’d spent his entire adult life as a spy, and MI6 had spent a lot of time and effort making him one of the best.

Devlin studied the otherwise empty cell. The enclosure consisted of a carved stone wall at the back, and black, scaly bars forming the other three walls.

And one giant reptilian alien, with glowing red eyes, aiming a weapon at them.

A stone bench was carved into the rear wall. He sat down, pulling Taylor forward until she straddled him. He felt her jolt.

On this mission, he’d seen Taylor Cates at her best. She was a hell of a soldier, and not much had rattled her.

Until now. With the alien still watching, Devlin leaned forward, pressing his face against the side of her neck. She started again.

“Easy,” he murmured.

“You have a plan, right?” she whispered.

“I’m still working on it.” He didn’t have much to work with, but he had to find a way out of here and back to their base at the Enclave.

He glanced over her shoulder at the alien again. It was staring at them through the bars. Devlin suppressed a sigh. He’d pretty much been faced with shitty situations ever since the Gizzida ships had first appeared in the skies, almost two years ago. He’d been on an assignment in Sydney, the capital of the United Coalition of Countries. During those first few, horrible days, the aliens had rained down on the Earth and decimated humanity.

He nuzzled Taylor’s dark hair again. In the sunlight, the dark-brown strands gleamed with red, but down here in the bowels of the alien facility, it looked almost black. “I don’t think they know exactly what sex is like for us.”

The human scientists had no idea if the raptors were male or female. They suspected the aliens weren’t capable of reproduction, as their method of operation seemed to be to conquer other planets and put other species in their genesis tanks, which fused Gizzida DNA into the victims, turning them into raptors.

“So?” Taylor asked.

“So let’s fake it.”

Taylor pulled back a little. “What?”

She had beautiful amber-colored eyes that made Devlin think of a glass of his favorite cognac. Those wide eyes sat in a creamy-skinned face that could have graced magazine covers.

“Let’s put on a show. Would you be up for that?” He hoped to hell she was. He was asking a lot, but this was the only way he could think to keep them alive.

She frowned. “Let me think. Pretend to have sex, or die?” Those gold-brown eyes rolled. “Tough choice.”

Devlin fought a smile at the biting sarcasm. That she could still find humor in this situation was pretty amazing. “So, let’s—”

Suddenly, she arched her back, letting out a long, drawn-out moan.

Devlin’s hands clenched on her hips. *Damn.* That sexy noise went straight to his cock. She started moving against him, with a graceful shimmy of her lean, strong body.

He glanced over her shoulder, and saw that the two raptors who’d dragged them down here were watching them.

Devlin let his head drop back against the wall. “Nice work,” he murmured. “Keep going.”

“Oh, yes.” She said it loud enough for their captors to hear. She leaned her arms back behind her, her hands gripping his knees.

Her full breasts pushed against the thin fabric of her top. His gaze zeroed in there, and he couldn’t look away. He saw a thin silver chain resting against her chest, several small charms hanging from it. She moved faster, her body brushing over his again and again. He could smell her—healthy sweat and the musk of woman.

God, this was supposed to be pretend, he shouldn’t be turned on right now. He’d noticed that she was attractive, of course, long before they’d ever set out on this mission to uncover what was happening in these alien factories.

But he didn’t allow himself to fraternize much. The Enclave was filled with human survivors trying to make the best of a bad situation. But his work on the intel team kept him busy, especially since his boss, Santha Kade, had fallen pregnant. Besides, Devlin had learned that while he was a very good spy, he was very bad at relationships. Hell, the last woman he’d let close had almost killed him.

He did better on his own.

Devlin forced himself to study each charm on Taylor’s necklace, and to not look at how her breasts pressed against the fabric of her top.

“Ready to bring it home?” Taylor whispered.

Devlin’s throat was too dry to answer her. “Yes. They’re watching.” A new raptor had joined the other two.

Small husky cries came from Taylor’s throat. Damn, she was pretty convincing, and for a second, Devlin wondered what she really sounded like when she came.

She kept moving, and he knew his fingers had to be biting into her hips. Devlin fought to keep his unruly body in check, and forced his own groan out, loud enough for their audience to hear.

Taylor slumped forward, collapsing against him.

Devlin had a clear view of the raptors. The newcomer didn’t look happy. He strode toward the cell, the others following behind him. He was a little taller and a little slimmer, with the same red raptor eyes, but his somehow seemed very cold.

The new raptor grunted and snarled at the other two, and one rushed forward to unlock the cell. Devlin's hands tightened on Taylor.

The newcomer raised a clawed hand and slapped one of the guards on the back. Then his red gaze turned to Devlin.

This alien looked very angry.

Shit. This didn't look good. Devlin tensed and felt Taylor do the same. "Something's happening. There's a new raptor on the scene."

The newcomer strode through the door of the cell, towering over them.

Taylor heard the angry snarls and guttural grunts of the raptor language behind her. Beneath her, she felt Devlin's body tense, coiled for action.

She hated the raptors. With every ounce of her being. They'd come here and destroyed the Earth for no reason but their own selfish desires.

God, she missed her squad right now. If Squad Nine was here, they would kick some raptor butt.

But they weren't here. It was just her and Devlin. She lifted her gaze to his.

Even in the gloomy confines of this shithole, she took a brief second to admire his face. It was worth a look or two. Sharp cheekbones and full lips, and eyes so dark they looked black, but this close to him, she could see they were a deep, midnight blue. He had a face that inspired a woman to sin. Not to mention that mouth-watering British accent of his. More than one woman at Blue Mountain Base, and now at their new home, the Enclave, had wondered how to melt the cool exterior of Devlin Gray.

Suddenly, rough hands gripped her arms, claws biting into her skin. She was yanked off Devlin.

"Hey!" he shouted and leaped to his feet.

The two raptor guards brushed past her and slammed Devlin against the wall. He struggled, but the raptors were both well over six-and-a-half feet, and carried a lot more muscle mass than humans. The only way humans had a fighting chance against the aliens was with the high-tech armor the squad soldiers wore. It had a built-in exoskeleton that enhanced their strength.

But her and Devlin's armor had been torn off them and left in a pile outside their cell.

Taylor was violently swung around, and she looked up into the glowing eyes of a tall raptor. The eyes would have looked perfect on a demon, but there was something especially cold and calculating about the way this alien watched them.

He spoke in more grunts to the guards, both of whom hung their heads. If Taylor had to guess, she'd say these guys just got their asses handed to them.

"I am not so easily fooled." The tall raptor's English was accented and halting, but clear enough.

Her gut cramped. She guessed her and Devlin's show hadn't been quite good enough.

"I am in charge of this research. And you will give me what I want."

Great, so he was some sort of raptor scientist. Most of the raptors were just foot soldiers. They plowed into a battle without too much strategy or thought.

But some of the aliens were smart. And they were the dangerous ones.

"I'll call you the Doctor, then," she told him.

His gaze narrowed on her. He reached out and grabbed her necklace. With a hard yank, he tore it off her, the charms at the end of it tinkling together.

"Give that back!" She surged forward, anger searing her. Her parents had given her the charms. After she'd joined the Army, she couldn't wear a bracelet, so she'd had them put on a chain. It was the one thing she had from her life before the invasion that meant something. Her mother had selected most of those charms for her.

She snatched at it, one charm coming off in her hand. The raptor shoved her back a step, studying her necklace. She quickly slipped the charm she'd snatched into her pocket before he noticed. Then he shoved her necklace into his trouser pocket. Raptors all left their gray, scaled chests bare, but wore armor-like trousers and heavy boots on their bottom halves. When he pulled his hand out, he was holding something else. He held out his palm.

Several flat, black patches rested on his scaled skin. Taylor frowned. What the hell were they?

As she peered closer, one of the patches moved. *Eww*. The aliens' technology had a lot of organic features built into it, and most of it was pretty gross.

The Doctor yanked her closer. She dug her bare feet into the stone floor. She didn't want to touch those wriggly black things.

The raptor held up one of the patches, bringing it toward her. Horror flooded her veins.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Devlin surge against the raptors holding him. “No!”

She tried to yank away from the Doctor, but he held her in a firm grip. That wiggling black patch moved closer to the skin of her shoulder.

Suddenly, there was the sound of a scuffle. Devlin broke free and jabbed an elbow in the throat of one raptor, who gasped for air. Then he jammed a punch into the stomach of the second alien.

But as the first raptor clutched his throat, making a horrible rasping sound, Devlin’s punch barely affected the hard muscle of the second. The second raptor punched Devlin in the chest, hard.

Devlin slammed into the wall, his face contorted in pain.

The raptor smiled and stepped closer.

The pained look vanished from Devlin’s face. He circled the raptor, jamming hard hits against the alien’s back. As the alien stumbled and shouted, Devlin yanked a jagged knife from the raptor’s belt and slammed it between his opponent’s shoulder blades.

She’d seen him fight before, and his quick, lethal fighting style took her breath away. But this time, he was fighting to help her. Something bloomed inside her. Long ago, Taylor had once been helpless, with no one to fight for her. She’d grown up ensuring she could fight for herself, but that didn’t mean seeing someone risk themselves for her wasn’t damn touching.

As the dead raptor fell to the floor, Devlin pulled the knife out and spun. He advanced on the second raptor who was still gasping for breath.

“Enough!” the Doctor bit out. “I cannot have you damaged.” Before she realized what he had planned, the raptor yanked her hard against him, grabbing her head, and wrenching it to the side. “I will break her neck.”

Devlin froze. The second raptor attacked. He slammed a hard punch into Devlin’s head, driving him to his knees. The raptor blade fell from his hand, clattering on the floor, and broke in two. The raptor followed with another hard blow that snapped Devlin’s head back.

Taylor tasted bile in her mouth, never taking her eyes off Devlin. He knelt there, dazed. She could see some swelling and bruising starting around his left eye.

The Doctor moved again, and slapped one of the black patches just below her collarbone.

Fiery pain dug into Taylor. She grimaced. It was like being stuck with a hot knife. She looked down and saw the black patch moving, sucking onto her skin, and she could feel some part of it burrowing into her skin. “Ahh!”

The Doctor slapped a second one on the other side of her chest, and the pain doubled. A cry escaped her lips.

“Taylor.”

She lifted her head, her gaze locking with Devlin’s midnight one. He stared at her—direct and intense—like he was willing the pain away from her and into himself. That composed gaze steadied her. After a minute, the pain subsided.

Devlin didn’t fight when the Doctor moved toward him with the final patches. The other raptor held Devlin’s arm tight. As the Doctor pressed the patches to Devlin’s bronze chest, he gritted his teeth and made no sound.

This was Devlin Gray. Cool strength. Lethal cunning. He didn’t show any frustration or anger, nothing that his enemies could use against him. And Taylor knew he’d be running every possible escape scenario through his head. Trying to find a way out.

While the raptors were busy with Devlin, she scooted backward. She spotted the remnants of Devlin’s tattered shirt just through the bars and snatched it up. Then she saw something else on the ground...something useful. She crouched slowly and grabbed that too, sliding it into her pocket with the ruined shirt.

The Doctor spun and Taylor froze. Two strides, and the raptor sank his claws into her hair. He pulled her up roughly, spinning her to face Devlin.

“This time, you mate.” The Doctor shoved her forward and she collided with Devlin. “We will monitor your bodies as you do.” He nodded at the patches.

“It is not our way to mate under duress,” Devlin said. “We choose our mates.”

The tall raptor cocked his head. “She is not attractive to you?”

Taylor licked her lips, sensing Devlin’s gaze on her.

“She’s very attractive.”

Taylor felt a flush in her cheeks. *Jeez, get it together, Tay.*

“But that’s not the point,” Devlin continued. “On our planet, mating is consensual, not forced.”

The raptor seemed to take that in, thinking for a few seconds. Then he shrugged. “I do not care. I have my orders.” He nodded to the other raptor.

A flash of movement caught Taylor’s eye. The raptor guard had pulled his knife, and, like the other one, it had a jagged black blade. He shoved it into Devlin’s shoulder.

“No!” she cried.

She took one step and felt the sting of a blade at her throat. The Doctor’s blade was smaller than the guards’ knives, but still sharp.

Once again, she looked at Devlin, and the slow slide of blood down his shoulder.

It looked like they’d run out of options.