

IC H A P T E R XVI: F I R S T C O N T A C T

Elena

Vincent looked vacantly at the red walls of the canyon surrounding him. He sat at the bottom of the canyon, his knees drawn up, the sun beating down on him. A few feet away the canyon wall cast a pool of refreshing shade on the ground below, but Vincent paid it no heed. He wasn't sure how long he had been here, wasn't even sure how he had gotten here. The passage of time was difficult to tell in his transformed state. Hours, at least, judging from the fact that the sun was now well past the midpoint in its daily journey through the sky.

Elena.

Not that it mattered. He could think when he was the Chaos beast, but not in anyway like he did when he was not. Transformed he was ruled by his emotions. Perhaps that was part of the reason he hid them so well when he was his normal self. He could reason, but only to a limited extent. He knew he had been looking for Elena, he knew how hopeless it was, he knew how it was tearing his heart apart to think that she could be gone. He knew, after all his attempts to force any emotion from him, to wash himself clean of such things, to forget in fact that they had ever existed, that he had not succeeded. Somehow against his wishes, he had fallen into the trap.

Again.

Lucrecia.

Vincent felt his head throbbing. He shook it fiercely, as if by doing so he could toss all thoughts out of it, but it only made it hurt worse. He stopped and bowed his head. He saw blood running down his right arm, the result of a run in with the canyon wall as he had frantically flown through it, looking for a sign, a sign that might show that by some miracle she survived.

By some miracle.

There were no miracles for Vincent Valentine. They were reserved for those blessed by God, not those condemned. He had been weak, he realized. After all those years, being experimented on by Hojo, in the coffin, helping Avalanche. He thought that maybe after all that, God would be merciful. He had begun to think that perhaps he had finally atoned, finally paid for his sins, and that maybe he could have this one little thing. But now he realized just what a fool he had been. There was no atonement. There would never be. It was all just God's way of having a little fun with him. The only light at the end of his tunnel was the flickering flames of the fires of hell.

Victoria.

All of them gone. This was Vincent Valentine's curse. The moment he let down his guard, the moment he had let Elena into his heart, he had signed her death warrant. It wasn't enough for him to die, oh no, not when he could be made to suffer. Not when he could be made to see those he cared about die over and over and over again.

He felt the rage welling up inside himself. With great effort he forced himself to remain calm, to try to concentrate on something else, the dirt walls around him, the heat that beat down upon him, the buzzing of some unknown insect off in the distance. He breathed in, slowly and deliberately. And after a few moments the rage subsided.

He didn't want to transform again. It would do no good right now, and he needed to be able to reason. The urge to transform had left, but even so he knew it was not far away. The urge had been strong ever since they had arrived here, even more so than it had been on earth, and in his present emotional state it was on a hair trigger, and he knew the slightest thing could set it off.

He took one more deep breath, then stood up slowly. The canyon ran north south, narrowing and heading downward at the southern end. A dry stream bed ran along the bottom of it.

He looked up at the canyon walls above him. He could see no sign of the ship they had come in. Was not even sure where he was in relation to it. Not that he really cared. He had no intention of going back.

He started to walk slowly along the riverbed, headed south, down out of the mountains. He didn't know where he was going, or what he was going to do, but he did know this, no one else was going to die because of him. He couldn't go back. He was too weak. He knew that someday, somewhere, he would do this again, would let someone else into his heart, with disastrous consequences. No matter how hard he tried not to, he realized now he was not strong enough to resist. The only way to prevent this from happening over and over was to cut off all contact. Eventually the others would accomplish

their mission, and they would return to earth. Then he would be alone, and could no longer hurt anyone. Only then would he be safe from this curse. Perhaps Hojo had done him a favor when he locked him up in the coffin. Vincent had not hurt anyone in there. Perhaps it would have been better if he had stayed there. So he would make this planet his coffin. Not literally, but isolated in the same sense.

He looked ahead. No vegetation grew along the cliffs here. The insects had gone silent. The rocky walls loomed up forbiddingly around him. The planet did not look very hospitable. Perhaps this would turn into his coffin in a literal sense. The supplies were back on the ship. He would have to fend for himself if he continued, and it might well be that he would quickly starve to death, or more likely die of thirst, or anyone of a dozen other untimely ends. But he did not fear that. When Hojo had been performing his experiments Vincent had wished for death, had prayed for it. After that he had little to fear from the desert around him. Nor did he fear being alone. Most of his life had been spent in solitude. It didn't matter. Nothing that happened to him mattered anymore. All that was important was that no one else be harmed, no one else be poisoned and die because of him. His own death would be a small price to pay in return.

Normally it was almost impossible to sneak up on Vincent. His preternatural senses could detect the slightest sound, the slightest movement of anyone or anything nearby. But right now, naturally enough, his thoughts distracted him. With his guard down he did not notice the barely perceptible disturbance in the air or the shadow sweeping down the cliff face.

His first indication that something was amiss was when he was struck suddenly from behind, knocking the wind out of him. He staggered forward. He felt long arms wrap around him and suddenly he was lifted up. He twisted his head around to see a gray skinned creature with huge wings beating on the air as it carried him up. Gasping for breath, he tried to turn to beat on the beast with his clawed hand, but he could not get any leverage, and the blows were not damaging. He tried to turn around, but the creature's arms were gripping him tightly, preventing movement. He flailed angrily at the creature, even as he felt the rage flaring up inside him.

He did not resist, and suddenly the urge to transform overwhelmed him. With a bestial cry it began. The creature holding him had started to level off, and was turning toward the city below when the transformation took place. The sudden change obviously took it by surprise, for as soon as the transformation occurred it dropped him with a startled cry.

The wings of the Chaos beast snapped open, and it turned in the air. The other creature was flying nearby, looking at Vincent, or what he had become, with a look of shock. With a sudden surge of his wings, Vincent dove straight at the creature. It made no attempt to get out of his way. Instead it just stared at him. As he approached he heard it cry out, and then his arms reached out, his claws slashed, and blood flew. The creature belatedly tried to fight back, but it soon became apparent the Chaos beast was both larger and stronger. The smaller creature soon realized he was outmatched, but not before he had been severely wounded. Quickly it tried to turn away, to run, but the Chaos beast drove down upon it once more, before it had a chance to escape. Vincent raked his claws along the creature's back, tearing a huge gouge and almost separating one wing from the creature's body. It gave out one last shriek and plummeted to the ground.

The Chaos beast circled slowly around, eventually coming to land not far from where the other beast had fallen. It landed softly, folding its wings behind it. For a moment it just stood there, a strange look of concentration on its face. It bowed its head, and suddenly it seemed to diminish somehow, and Vincent once more regained control.

He stood there in silence, breathing heavily. Even though the other creature had been no match for him, it had still taken a lot out of him. And the process of transformation was itself tiring. He would have liked nothing better than to sit down for a while in some nearby secluded spot and take a nap, regardless of the danger. But he couldn't. Not now. Something was troubling him.

He looked around slowly until he spotted the body of the creature he slew. He made his way over the rocks until he stood before it. He remained there looking down at it for a very long time. He felt a strange feeling looking down at the creature. It looked uncannily like the Chaos beast, and that bothered him a great deal. The odds of it being coincidental that they had flown halfway across the universe to run into a creature almost identical to the beast he transformed into was too incredible for a rational man to accept.

He slowly eased himself down onto a large rock, still looking at the beast in front of him. Now he was feeling something else. The other alternative, of course, was that this wasn't a coincidence. That somehow these creatures and the Chaos beast he became were somehow connected. He realized that the feeling that was now growing in him was a sense of excitement. Was it possible? Could he believe this connection? How could that make any more sense than a coincidence?

There was something else too. The reason he had come to inspect the creature was not because it resembled the Chaos beast. It was because of something else. The creature had cried out right before he attacked it. As the Chaos beast, Vincent

could not reason very well, but even so the cry had not sounded like that of a beast, it had sounded like more than that, more coherent. It had sounded like language.

He stood up slowly, shaking his head. Now he was sorry he had killed the creature. There were so many questions, none that could be answered by the body in front of him. But he didn't really have much control over what the Chaos beast did, and it had only acted on instinct, assuming the creature was a threat. The deed was done and there nothing more he could do about it. But where there was one, there would very likely be more. Perhaps if he found one alive, he might be able to get some answers. Answers he so desperately needed.

He started down the slope once more, a look of resolve etched on his face.

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"It's too hot!" Yuffie whined.

Barret just glared at her for a moment. From the steepness of the slope to the weight of her backpack, she had been issuing a constant string of complaints since the moment they had started down the mountain.

"Why did you even bother to come along?" he questioned.

It had taken them over two hours to reach the canyon floor. There were no trails, and the mountain was steep and treacherous. A number of times they had been stymied, and Barret had thought Ellengio on the verge of turning back, but each time they had found a way. Now finally they had reached the bottom, but they were all exhausted both mentally and physically. Yuffie had been complaining a lot, but he had to admit that at least this one about the heat was legitimate.

They been searching the canyon for almost an hour now of any sign of Elena's body, but had found nothing. Not surprising, really. The land around them was jagged and broken, the walls of the canyon riddled with cracks. If she had landed in any one of them, they would have to be right on top of her to see her. It was quite likely they would never find any sign of her at all.

Yuffie was perched on a large outcropping of rock, one shoe off, slapping it against her hand to try to remove the fine grit that she had been complaining about a few minutes earlier.

"What do you mean, why did I come along?" she snapped. "To help you find Vincent, of course. And you should be happy I came. You know if you run into any trouble you're going to need me."

Barret just looked at her skeptically.

The sun was right above their heads now, shining directly down into the canyon, and even right beside the cliff face there was no shade. Barret wondered how long they were going to stay down here. There were only about four or five more hours of sunlight, and he wasn't looking forward to the trip back up the cliff. It had taken them two hours to come down, he figured it would take longer to get back up. They only had about an hour more or they would not make it back to the ship before sundown. He didn't relish attempting to climb on those cliffs in the dark.

He looked around and saw Ellengio and Cait further down the canyon. He strolled over to them, kicking up dust from the dry riverbed beneath his feet. By now the dust covered all of them, giving both their skin and hair an odd reddish tint.

"How long do you plan on staying down here?" Barret asked.

Ellengio hesitated for a moment.

"I was hoping we would be lucky and would find some sort of sign quickly," he finally said. "But that may just be wishful thinking. If we don't find anything, we'll start back in about another hour or so."

"Do you think he found her body?" Cait asked.

Ellengio shrugged.

"There's really no way to tell. You both know him better than I. Whether he finds her or not, what do you think he will do? Is he going to come to his senses and come back to us on his own? If we find him, will he come back with us willingly? Could this so unbalance him that he might become hostile, even to his friends?"

All good questions, Barret thought. Unfortunately, he didn't have the answer to any of them.

"Difficult to say," Barret replied slowly. "Vincent was always a little strange, and I don't think anyone in our group ever really understood him, or could predict what he would do. But, if nothing else, I don't think he would ever attack us."

"I find his transformations very interesting," Ellengio observed. "How long will he stay that way, do you think?"

"I don't know," Barret said. "It never seems to last very long. But it's all controlled by his state of mind, and I'd have to say that isn't in very good shape right now."

For all Barret knew, the trauma of this experience could keep Vincent in his bestial state for a long time. Permanently, perhaps? Barret wasn't sure, but he didn't think that was possible.

"So there's a possibility he could still be transformed when we find him," Ellengio mused. "Will we be able to reason with him?"

Barret shrugged. Why was Ellengio asking him all these questions.

"I don't know," he said. "I just don't know that much about him. Not many people did. The only one who really knew him was Elena, and I'm afraid asking her is no longer an option."

Ellengio nodded.

Yuffie had finally succeeded in removing the offending particles from her shoe, and had now replaced it. She walked over to them.

"Hey, you guys just going to stand around here all day, or are you going to search?" she demanded.

"You should talk," Barret growled. "All you've done so far is annoy us with your constant complaining."

"Who's complaining now?" she questioned sweetly.

"We have been searching," Ellengio said in a no nonsense way. "Instead of standing here discussing it we better get on with it. We don't have a lot of time."

Barret just gave Yuffie a nasty look. Ellengio started heading down the canyon, the others following behind, but they hadn't gotten very far when they heard a shout from in front of them.

"Hey, I found something."

Altim had seemed least fatigued by the long trip down the mountain and had gone ahead while the others waited for Yuffie. Now they saw him standing by a jumbled pile of rocks not far ahead, beckoning to them.

They increased their pace and soon came up beside him to see him looking down at the carcass of some kind of manlike creature. Barret looked down in surprise.

"Is that Vincent?" he heard Yuffie exclaim.

Barret was thinking exactly the same thing. But Ellengio, who had stooped down to examine the body, shook his head.

"No," he said. "This creature is smaller than your friend, and the skin tone is a slightly different shade. But I would say that the resemblance is rather remarkable."

The creature had obviously been in some kind of battle, for it had fierce looking wounds across its body, a particularly deep gash ran down its back.

"What happened to it?" Yuffie questioned.

"It obviously ran into something nastier than itself," Barret stated.

He looked up into the sky, shading his eyes. There were a few puffy clouds scattered in the sky, but otherwise it was clear. Unless those wings were just some kind of fancy ornament, which seemed very unlikely, the creature could fly. They had been on guard for danger, especially anymore of those rock-like creatures that had accosted Cloud's party, but he hadn't thought to keep an eye on the sky.

"This creature almost exactly matches the skeleton we found in the cave," Ellengio stated.

"Skeleton?" Barret said. He hadn't really paid much attention to all that Ellengio had told them, but he vaguely remembered Ellengio's explanation of the cave where they had found the book. "You mean those Chadara things?"

"Uh huh," Ellengio agreed.

"The one's that helped the Cetra?" Altim questioned.

Ellengio looked up at him, then nodded.

"I see you were paying attention," he said. "Yes, it looks like they still exist, at least. This gives me hope. Until now I wasn't sure that this race was still here, but now we have proof. There must be more, and it is quite possible we may be able to communicate with them, to enlist their help against Jenova. This is a very good find indeed."

"But it's dead," Yuffie pointed out quite unnecessarily.

"Of course it's dead," Barret said with a snort. "We'll just have to find some live ones."

"Take a look at this," Cait said.

He was standing a few feet away looking at the ground.

The others came over to him. He pointed in front of him. In the dirt they could clearly make out tracks, the footprints of booted feet.

"Vincent," Yuffie said.

Cait nodded.

"The pattern does seem to match the design of the boot in my data banks."

"So he was here," Barret said, looking slowly at the creature nearby. "Do you think he did that?"

"The wounds on the body would seem to match an attack by a beast with large claws," Ellengio stated. "But we don't know for sure. Still, things are starting to look up. Now we know for sure Vincent was here, and we have a trail to follow. We also know that he has transformed back to his normal self."

"The tracks follow the river down to the plain," Altim, who had started ahead once again as soon as he had been shown the track, pointed out.

"He's heading away from the ship," Ellengio said.

"Perhaps he's confused," Yuffie suggested.

"Perhaps," Ellengio replied, his voice sounding doubtful.

He stood there for a few moments in silence.

"Well, are we going to follow?" Yuffie said impatiently.

"Yes, of course," Ellengio said suddenly. He looked up at the sky, trying to gauge how much time they had before nightfall.

"I was hoping to get back before it gets dark," he continued. "But if we don't find him soon that will be impossible. I don't want to turn back now that we've got a clear trail to follow. We have enough equipment and supplies to remain out here for a few days, it that's what it takes. I just wish we had some way of communicating with the others."

Barret nodded. It would have been nice to be able to tell the others what was going on, and the fact that they had found some sign of Vincent. But their PHS was useless without satellites, and they had no other way to communicate. He was severely tempted to send someone back (Yuffie sprang immediately to mind) to let the others know what was going on. Then he thought of something.

"Cait, can you communicate with Reeve?" he asked.

Cait shook his head.

"Reeve had no communications device with him when he left the ship."

"Can you communicate with the ship?" Ellengio asked.

"Sure," Cait said.

"Why the hell didn't you say so!" Barret blurted out.

"I was going to," Cait replied slowly.

"When, next month?" Yuffie questioned.

"Never mind that," Ellengio said. "Can you tell Cid that we've found Vincent's trail, but we don't know how long it will take to find him, and we might not be back for a day or two."

Cait nodded and stood there for a few moments. It seemed weird to Barret that Cait could carry on a conversation over the radio inside him without saying anything.

"Cid acknowledged receipt of the message," Cait said finally. "He said the others aren't back yet either."

"It might take them a while too," Ellengio said.

"All right, let's get going then," Yuffie said.

They looked down the canyon to see that Altim had once more gotten far ahead of them.

"Hey Altim, wait up," Barret called, and they all started once more down the trail after him.

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Elena screamed.

She clawed frantically at the air as she plunged downward. Without thinking about it she shut her eyes tightly. Only one thought filled her mind now, shutting out everything else in the few seconds she had left, the overwhelming certainty that she was going to die.

She almost cried out again as she felt a jarring impact. But she realized a moment later that it was not the impact with the jagged rocks below. Something was wrapped around her, and though the wind still whistled by her, she could tell she was no longer falling.

She opened her eyes to find gray clawed hands wrapped around her body.

"Vincent!" she cried out, the relief crashing like a wave upon her. She looked up at him to see violet eyes peering down at her curiously.

Instantly her relief was replaced by icy fear.

Those were not Vincent's eyes.

Frantically she reached inside her jacket, her hand clawing for her pistol, but the holster was empty. Irrationally she hunted her pockets, but there was no weapon there. It must have slipped out in her fall.

Angrily she drove an elbow into the creature's side.

"Let go of me!" she shouted.

Then she looked down.

They were flying above a narrow ravine. She could see a dried up river bed along the bottom of it. The ground below was rocky and, she couldn't help but notice, very far away.

She stopped her struggling.

"Don't let go," she changed her mind.

The creature gave no sign that he had heard her. They soon reached the base of the mountains and the ground below them leveled off. Before her Elena could see the buildings of the city quite plainly now, their cream color a sharp contrast to the red rock of the mountains. She stared at the structures as they approached. The rounded edges of the buildings and the large elliptical windows, (at least, she thought of them as windows, but they contained no glass), were like nothing she had seen on earth. There was no one in the streets, but as they came closer she occasionally caught a glimpse of one or more of the creatures looking out the windows.

The beast holding her suddenly dropped down, seeming to be headed right for one of the buildings. For a moment she thought it was going to run right into it, and she grabbed holds of its arms in fear, but then she realized it was heading for one of the windows. A moment later it had flown through and they landed inside a darkened chamber.

There were other creatures inside. Elena counted four of them. The beast that was holding her let go and she stumbled and fell to the floor. She had no idea what this creature's plans for her were, and for all she knew she was at the top of the

dinner menu for the night. She didn't think she would have much of a chance fighting against so many of them, especially without her weapon, but she wasn't going to just give up. She got up, prepared to defend herself as best she could.

But the creature was ignoring her. Instead it walked over to the others and started talking. Talking? She stood there for a moment in surprise. Though the sounds were harsh and guttural to her, there was no doubt that the creatures were holding a conversation, though she could not understand a word of it. The creature that had brought her in pointed to her a few times, and the others looked at her with keen interest each time.

She looked around. The room was large, taking up the entire floor. There was one of those large windows in the center of each wall. In the center of the room were four large objects that resembled, the only thing that came to her mind were bean bag chairs. Except for the creatures, there seemed to be nothing else in the room.

She walked over to the objects, glancing warily at the creatures. The one that had caught her looked at her for a moment, but then went back to his conversation. After going through all the trouble of capturing her, he now seemed totally uninterested in her. The objects were made of some rough woven fabric. She could see a brown cottony substance through the spaces in the weave. The objects were elliptical and much larger than a chair. She reached down and pushed on one of them. It gave easily. She glanced over at the creatures once again, but they weren't even looking at her. She sat down, and sank deeply into the cushiony fabric. The effect was similar to a water bed, and almost as comfortable. She decided this must be the creatures bedroom.

She got up out of the bed with some difficulty. It gave so easily that it was hard to push herself up, and she nearly had to roll off the side to struggle out of it.

She walked over to one of the odd windows. They were much bigger than windows she was used to. But of course they would have to be if the creatures used them to enter the building. She looked around suddenly, and saw that there were no stairs, no way down to the ground or the level below. The windows were the only entrance. She realized she had to adjust her thinking. If you could fly, there was no need for stairs.

Or roads, for that matter. What need would anyone have for roads when you could fly?

She stood close to the edge of the window and looked out. The window came all the way to the floor, and there was no guard or handrail. You didn't need a handrail when you had wings. If you fell, you could just fly. Unfortunately, that option was not available to Elena. They seemed to be on the third floor. Most of the other buildings only had two, and she could tell she was higher than them. She stooped down and examined the outside of the building. It seemed to be made of some kind of concrete, and was very smooth. There were no handholds. No possibility of her climbing down. She looked at the ground below. There was nothing down there but hard packed dirt. She just might survive the drop, but she wasn't ready to risk it, at least, not yet.

She stood up, looking back at her captives thoughtfully. No wonder they were ignoring her. They knew that without wings of her own she couldn't escape. She was as much a captive up here as if the room were enclosed in iron bars.

She had thought at first that these creatures must have occupied this city after it had been abandoned by another race, but from the way it was designed it was almost a certainty that these creatures themselves must have built it. They had a language and they had brought her here realizing that she could not get out without wings. It all pointed to the fact that these creatures were highly intelligent. Maybe even as intelligent as humans. Were these those beings that Ellengio had mentioned? The Chardans, Charlana something like that. She couldn't remember the exact name, or the details of what Ellengio had told them about the race. She only remembered that they had helped the Cetra.

"What are you going to do with me?" she asked.

The creature that had caught her stopped his conversation and they all looked at her. For a moment there was silence.

"What are you going to do with me?" she repeated.

The creature tilted his head. Then shook it slowly.

"Pandalione gal tempestar," the creature said.

"What the hell does that mean," she muttered. She hadn't expected them to understand her. She had just said it to try to surprise it, to make it realize that she too was intelligent. For all she knew, these creatures could be looking at her in the same way she had looked at them when she had first seen them.

"Charlotta," she said, trying to remember what Ellengio had called them.

The creatures just looked at her curiously.

She folded her arms in exasperation. What was that name? Chardala...Char...Cha..."

"Chadara!" she exclaimed.

The creatures eyes widened.

"Chadara," it repeated, walking quickly over to stand in front of her.

"Yes," she said. She pointed to it. "Chadara."

"Chadara," it said again.

"Yes," she said excitedly. "You, Chadara. Me," she turned her hand around and pointed to herself, "human."

The creature stared at her.

She pointed to it.

"Chadara."

She pointed to herself.

"Human."

She did it several times.

The creature did not respond.

"Don't you get it?" she exclaimed. Perhaps they weren't as smart as she thought.

Slowly the Chadara brought it's hand up. It pointed to itself.

"Chadara," it said.

"Yes!" Elena exclaimed.

It pointed to her.

"Hooman?" it said timidly.

"Yes!" Elena nearly shouted.

"Yes," the Chadara repeated.

"That's it, you've got it," she said.

The Chadara turned to the others and started talking again. She heard him say 'hooman' a couple of times, each time pointing to her. The others all started to talk rapidly. For a long time it went back and forth, all of them sounding suddenly excited. She wasn't sure exactly what was going on, but she was hopeful that it meant something good.

Suddenly all the creatures except the one that had brought her turned and walked over to the window. They stepped out as if walking out their front door. In a moment they had all disappeared into the sky.

"Where are they going?" she asked.

The Chadara turned back toward her, but did not speak.

"My name is Elena," she said, pointing to herself again. What the hell, it had worked the first time. "Elena," she repeated.

The Chadara looked puzzled once again.

"Elena," she said again, slowly. She pointed to him.

"And you are?"

The Chadara tilted his head.

"Chadara," it said.

"I know that part," she said. "I want to know what they call you. What your name is."

She pointed to herself again.

"Elena," she said.

The Chadara still obviously did not understand.

"Hooman?" it said.

"Yes, human," she replied patiently. "That's what I am, but that's not what I am called. My name is Elena."

The creature just shook it's head.

Elena sighed. For all she knew, these creatures didn't even have names. But they must refer to each other somehow. But it didn't look like she was going to get her point across this time. At least she had made some kind of contact, she figured she should be happy with that.

"Human," she said, nodding.

"Hooman," the Chadara replied seriously. Then it stepped past her, headed for the window.

"Hey, you're not going to leave me too, are you?" she questioned. But even as she spoke it spread it's wings and lifted itself into the air. A moment later it was gone.

She stood there looking out the window for a while. A light breeze was blowing from the east, from behind her, stirring her hair. It felt good in the afternoon heat. In fact, the room was quite comfortable. The walls seemed to be excellent insulation from the heat, in spite of the fact that there were large holes in it. At least she could remain here in comfort.

She walked slowly away from the window, back beside the beds. She stood there for a moment looking at them thoughtfully. She wanted to get back to the others, to at least let them know she was alive, but they had said they needed allies here, and she had made contact, however inadvertently, with the Chadara. She seemed to be in no danger of ending up on their dinner table as she had initially feared. She decided that trying to communicate with these creatures was much more important than escape, at least, for the moment. She slowly eased herself back down on one of the beds. She had to admit, they were damn comfortable.