

## The Gene Stealer: Chapter 1

---



Tarkus is kind of a dump. I wasn't happy to be making a run out here, but a job's a job, and after my last bust of a shipment, I needed the cash. Ships don't exactly repair themselves you know. Boots up on the dash of my console, I flicked through holo-images of the dust and junk piled sky-high around the crashed stations and starships that littered the planet's surface. Tarkus looked like a hiveworld punk's version of armageddon, wastelands of industrial wreckage that stretched out over continents.

It should have been just an in-and-out job, drop off a crate of industrial egg incubators to *Novahome*, the biggest "city" on Tarkus -- really a crashed starship from God-knows where or when -- and take my creds and skedaddle home. Unfortunately, fate (and an old friend) had other plans for me. I'd barely broken orbit when a message popped up on my screen from Anno, an old friend from my short stint at the Ausaril Technology Academy, asking to catch up over a drink. I answered that I'd be glad to, and spent the rest of the trip world-ward getting out of my pajamas and picking out a

cute outfit. When you're dealing with an ausar, it's hard to tell if you're in for a booty call or just a coffee date.

Tarkus wasn't much of a romantic setting, though. I toe-punched a button on my console as we hit atmos, locking in a landing pad on the side of *Novahome* as our final destination and letting Athena, my ship's A.I., do the rest. *Talon Rogue* rumbled under the decks as her shields lit up neon-bright during the descent, shuddering violently as we passed through an orbiting cloud of old satellites and starship wreckage hanging listless in the upper atmosphere. When we broke through, the planet was still dark, overcast and stormy today. The space-dust that had accumulated on the windshield (forward viewscreen? I never know what to call it!) was quickly washed away by a deluge of rain... which soon turned the whole screen a murky black. Raining oil. Great. I flicked open the topside collection ducts and the landing gear and sat back in the darkness until *Talon* touched down, the bulkheads shuddering as we cruised into the landing bay.

"Good landing," the strong, feminine voice of Athena resonated from the ship's intercom. "All systems locked down, fuel lines are connecting now. Looks like your docking fee has been

covered by one Anno Dorna, with compliments. I've loaded the cargo onto the elevator, just grab it when you get outside. Need anything else, Captain Entara?"

"Just Kaede, already," I sighed, patting the dash as I swung out of my chair, heading for the airlock.

Athena's green, toga-wrapped avatar popped up at the door with a grin. "Captain Kaede."

"Fine," I sighed, grabbing my gun belt out of the coat rack and cinching it on. I probably looked a little silly wearing a lacy short skirt and a 10mm cannon on my hip, but hey, a girl's gotta protect herself. I punched the cycle. "Watch the ship. And no hitchhikers this time."

Athena shrugged. "I'll just blast your heavy metal shit at them until they go away."

"Attagirl," I grinned, ruffling her avatar's hair before hopping out the door onto the deck of *Novahome*.

The city-ship's spaceport was the same familiar slate-grey as the docks back home on Tavros, nothing more than a converted flight deck opened up for near-ground landings. The berth *Talon* was planted in was just a crudely painted square in the middle of the hanger, wedged in beside a dozen other ships belonging to rim-ward cargo haulers and planetary pioneers. The place was crowded, though: absolutely packed with tiny little bodies rushing about in a great big mass, occasionally punctuated by a beleaguered spacer like me sticking half a torso over the waves of locals. The raskvel: tiny, scaly folk only a few feet tall, they all sport lithe frames and ridiculously long ears that just about drag around on the ground behind them, most bearing a variety of piercings and tattoos, and very little in the way of clothes. The way they packed in here, it was amazing they didn't get crushed by landing ships.

A few of them saw me hopping down from the ladder and came wandering over, some bearing official-looking uniforms, others just inquisitive locals with wandering hands I had to slap away. The dock workers handed me a few data slates to sign, chirped something like "Have a nice day!" in a broken English, and scurried off to another junker landing a few berths away. By then, *Talon's* cargo chute had popped out the crate full of incubators and a hover-platform to drag them around on. I shook a purple-scaled raskvel off my leg and beat feet toward the first thing that looked like a way into the ship proper: a huge cargo elevator on the side of the room, packed with raskvel crammed between crates stacked dangerously high.

I clambered aboard just as a few uniformed raskvel were closing the safety gate, pushing aside a few of the little bastards to make room for the hovering box beside me. They complained loudly at me, but were quickly drowned out by a banshee scream from hell as the elevator started trundling down, shuddering with every roll of the gears as it worked its way down into the heart of *Novahome*.

The floor I got out on looked like a cross between a tunnel and a bazaar, a square steel corridor lined with tents and stalls where raskvel and spacers were hawking everything from fried rats on a stick to power armor components. At least it wasn't hard to find the store that had ordered the incubators, since all the doors along the corridor were numbered in big, white paint. Number 88: "Breeder's Delight." Judging by the tremendous hips and grossly swollen belly of the shopkeeper when I stepped in, I was suddenly aware my cargo wasn't meant for incubating *animal* eggs...

"Ah, Captain Entara, right on time!" the shopkeeper beamed, running a hand across her hairless, scaled head to smooth out the tops of her gigantic ears. They rang like windchimes between the myriad metal studs and piercings along their flaps. "I trust you had no trouble finding my shop?"

"No trouble," I said, wheeling in the hover cart, "Pretty crowded out there, though."

The raskvel woman cocked an eyebrow, looking out the door over my shoulder. "Is it? It seems nearly deserted!"

I glanced back at the crowds of raskvel pushing and shoving around each other in the corridor and shuddered. "Right. Uh, where do you want it, ma'am?"

"Oh, anywhere there's room. These newfangled incubators practically fly off the shelves, you know. You should think about buying one for your next clutch, captain. They're well worth the price, if you don't have to sit your eggs for a month!"

I scooted the crates off the hover pallet, trying not to laugh. "Uh, right. I'll think about it."

"Though I suppose no machine can replace the motherly bliss of sitting atop your clutch, nurturing them yourself. Still, I can't blame you younglings for wanting to machine-incubate. Motherhood on the go, and all that."

"Of course," I said, wiping a bit of sweat from my brow (was it hot in here?) and whipping out my datapad. "If you'll just sign here, ma'am."

The raskvel woman produced a pair of almost comically large spectacles from under the counter and held them up to her face as I presented the delivery form to her. "My, that's a rather small font..."

"Just sign, um, here and here," I said, pointing to the big empty spaces at the bottom.

"Oh, well yes, but I can't read the words, dear," the shopkeeper muttered, all but putting her face into my slate.

Oh, the joys of being a delivery girl.

Exasperated, the shopkeep finally put her glasses away and called, "Kila! Come in here, girl, I need you!"

A curtain at the other end of the shop tore open as another green-scaled raskvel girl, this one much younger and markedly less egg-bloated, jogged out, carrying a pair of steel-studded ears waving behind her. "You needed something, ma?"

"Yes, girl, could you read this form to me? My eyes aren't what they used to be. I remember when you were still a hatching I could spot a gorefly from half the ship away. Now I need these damnable things," the matron complained, staring at her spectacles in annoyance. "Oh, how am I going to read your new brothers and sisters their hatching stories now?"

The younger raskvel, Kila, looked from her mother to me with a pair of over-large green eyes, ears twitching as she took the datapad from my hand and made a few quick swipes. "Here ma, let me just forward that to my computer, and we can send the nice lady your signature when we're done."

I flashed the raskvel girl a thankful smile and bolted while her mother was distracted trying to turn on the shop's computer. Tucking the slate back in my pocket, I told the hover pallet to head back to *Talon Rogue* and set about trying to find the bar Anno told me to meet her at. Wading through the swarms of raskvel in the main thoroughfare, I eventually made it to a room marked "The Mess," what should have been the ship's mess hall once upon a time.

The Mess sure lived up to its name. Easily large enough to seat several hundred raskvel (and it was), the Mess was dimly lit and smoky, thanks to several tall, hookah-like devices set up on many tables as well as a pillar of wood smoke coming from the kitchen, exposed to the mess hall thanks to a busted-in bulkhead. Several raskvel chefs in cute white aprons were running around trying to tend to dozens of orders at once. Strangely, most of the wait staff running around the Mess were humans, probably hired in by whoever was running the place. A handy sign pointed the way through the raskvel-packed mess hall to a small side room bar. The place was made up like a 20th century speakeasy, complete with a smooth jazz live on a stage and a thick cloud of smoke hanging on the ceiling fans like a stormcloud. Despite the throngs outside, when the door hissed closed behind me, it was almost silent save the music and hushed murmurs of the patrons, nearly all humans or other spacers. Not a raskvel in sight.

"Hey, Red!" a husky, sensual woman's voice purred into my ear as I walked in, a pair of slender, white-furred arms slipping around my waist from behind. My tail curled in instinctively, but I managed to turn a startled gasp into a happy little moan, melting back into Anno's familiar embrace. Giggling, she twirled me around in her arms to plant a kiss right on my lips, holding me close for a split second before releasing me, our hands interlocked.

Definitely a booty call. Score!

Anno grinned at me, her fluffy white tail swishing behind the back of her stark black catsuit, proudly displaying the Steele Tech logo on the breast. Both of hers were on prominent display, her zipper down just enough to give a tantalizing view of her ample cleavage, which bounced gaily as she took a step back from me, looking me and my outfit over in turn. Her eyes on me was enough to get my red fluff of a tail out from between my legs and wagging again.

"Been a while, Red," Anno grinned, switching back to our shared ausar language as she led me back to a corner booth well away from the band. "You still running errands for your old man?"

Ow. "No, I went independant about a year ago. It's tough, but I love the job."

Her grin widened "Good for you! I figured you for a pilot-girl the second you walked through the Academy's doors."

Well, that made me feel a little better. "So how about you? Didn't expect to find you of all people out here on Tarkus. I thought you were still with the Fleet, anyway."

"Yeah, well, budget cuts, you know..." Anno sighed, rubbing at her perky jackal-like ears. "Plus a few bungled experiments. *Totally* not my fault, but hey. Got a job at Steele as a lead researcher, which is a cool gig. I'm actually heading up our planetary outpost now. Pretty cushy job, if I do say so myself."

A dusky bartender in a short skirt that made mine look conservative swished over and asked if we needed anything.

"Two Sexes on a Meteor, Dal," Anno said with a wink, dropping a credit chit in the waitress's pocket. She popped off back to the bar, coming back with a pair of fizzing pink drinks topped with oranges and curly straws. So girly!

As soon as the waitress was gone and we were sipping on our drinks, Anno's coy little grin returned with gusto. She leaned over her drink, suckling on the tip of her straw, big blue eyes searching over me as mine were drawn back to her chest, and the big, soft mounds of pale flesh barely constrained by her sheer, skin-tight uniform. My panties were suddenly very uncomfortable, and it wasn't just the boobage on display, either. I'd barely kicked back half the drink before I could feel my skin reddening, a heat spreading through my body that made it hard to think. Sex on a Meteor indeed...

Anno seemed to be feeling just about the same, giving a husky little sigh into her drink. "You know, I haven't seen another ausar -- or half-ausar -- since I came out to Tarkus. It's nice to just... just be with someone familiar, here..."

I just about jumped out of my skin when a warm, soft, furry leg brushed up against the hem of my skirt, but the lusty grin from the buxom auser across from me quickly had me leaning back in my booth, enjoying the sensation of her foot teasing its way up the outside of my thigh.

"Mmm, is that a gun, or are you happy to see me?" Anno grinned, breath visibly quickening under her tight, oh so revealing suit.

"That, uh, that actually is my gun," I muttered, shifting my hips under the booth to let her roaming foot slip under my skirt where it belonged.

She licked her lips around her straw as her foot pressed into my crotch, toes teasing at the lacy lip of my panties, heel digging into something else entirely. "Oh, you *are* happy to see me. Or it's the meteor talking... pretty potent, huh? Gods, I haven't felt a knot not made out of plastic in forever," she purred, voice all promises and sensuality as her padded sole played across my crotch. Anno's cheeks flushed dark red as my sex stiffened under her careful ministrations, the head starting to poke out of my underwear and up between her toes.

I wanted it -- I wanted Anno -- even without the druggy drink I'd kicked back. Still, I couldn't help but bite my lip and turn aside, too embarrassed by the sinfully public attention on my cock to look my soon-to-be lover in the eyes. She ran her foot up and down my length, heel teasing the swelling knot between my legs, toes locking in around the crown poking out above it. When she asked if I'd like to go back to her place, I didn't hesitate to say yes.