

## Part 11. Naltag



**When they reached the interface**, Jeremiah said, "Need councilman or enforcer to open. Was a nice stroll. He started back down.

Naltag use the tech on per's arm to override the locking mechanism. An instant later, the electronic barrier dissolved. Jeremiah didn't ask how. He exited the compound first, appraising the tech with appreciation.

"An all-knowing switch."

"A bit like that, yeah," Naltag agreed.

The air was humid above ground. Naltag had acclimated to three damp cold of the compound, but per preferred the warmth. Jeremiah drew in deep breaths, and per knew the child was savoring the time Outside.

Night rendered the landscape a mystery. Instead of a brown Dust Bowl, the ground was a foreign surface dusted in full silver. Or partial silver. Thick clouds obscured most of the moon, a winking eye peeking and then leaving again. The metal husks seems like new monsters, lit here and there by the slivers of light spilling from above. Per watched the child as he struggled for words to describe a sight he'd never seen.

"Do men love unnaturally where you hail?"

It was as if the location had emboldened the child to ask such a controversial question.

Naltag wanted to answer, but didn't want to anger or disgust him. Not all at once. Gradual acceptance made deeper grooves.

"There is no unnatural love where I hail."

Spots of moonlight aided the search for the interstellar communicator. Per passed Jeremiah the white egg, and the child inspected it eagerly. He ran his fingers over the surface, searching for openings. The smooth tech gave away nothing, and he handed it back.

"Harder to figure than an archive tomb."

"She wakes at my touch," Naltag said.

"She?"

Unintended disrespect poison the word. And Jeremiah's world, items were never personified, I'm certainly not with a female pronoun. Naltag just smiled and kissed the egg. It awoke with a glow brighter than the moon. Brighter than the sun, fully illuminating the surrounding landscape. To Naltag, it felt like they were under a dome, enclosed in a dust bowl of light and metal. The air was still, except for the buzzing, which built by the second. A single spear of light shot out from the device, discharging into the sky. Then, everything settled into the dark deep silence once more.

Jeremiah was breathing hard. "What was it?"

Naltag tucked the egg back into the sack. "The light carried a message to the planet I share, to alert them that I've made contact."

Per forgot to use the compound jargon, and Jeremiah's face shone uncomprehending.

"More like you coming?" he wondered aloud.

"Not for awhile."

The child searched the sky, as if anticipating a battalion of flight cruisers that might surround them. His fear was understandable, as the history of the planet was rooted in strong and foreign agents conquering a weaker populace. The last show of strength and resulted in the Wasteland before them. Naltag wasn't certain the path the humans were on wouldn't lead them to the same violent outcome, all these centuries later.

Glancing at the armband, per shook pers head. Only 1 and a half quipu le .

Naltag was sworn to make a decision, and needed to, soon.

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