Seventeen - Perfect Organism

Madeline took notes with her data pad while Donna peeked into the cage of the writing creature before them.

The Company had sedated it for transport to Perseus 9. Lining the walls of its enclosure were layers of the strongest material known to man, Trimonite, with the final touch being the yellow, blocky Weyland-Yutani logo painted on the outside. The creature inside was hissing and spitting and still making scratches on the surface.

With a push of a button on Madeline's data pad, smoke filled the cage entering through a tube at the top, and as it filled the cage with milky white, the creature screeched more. Its strange biomechanical body glistened beneath the bright lights of the lab. The alien's long tail wrapped around its body like a strange cat as it sat on its haunches. The sharp point, used for piercing its prey, swung dangerously back and forth. It still hissed viciously every time Donna came closer.

This was the first time Donna had one of them. Her dark eyes analyzed every detail of the strange black alien. She spoke into a recording device while Madeline continued to write.

"We have here the *Internecivus raptus*, known colloquially as the "Xenormoph" or "bug." The specimen is both vertebrate and coleopteral in appearance, with a protective dark exoskeleton. Previous studies have concluded the creature's skin is made from protein polysaccharides, a substance similar to chitin. This indicates that the specimen has natural resistance to environmental factors such as heat or cold." Donna walked around the metal rectangular enclosure of the Xenomorph to get a better glimpse. She had a flickering instinct, powerful and intense, to never let the alien out of her sights.

"This Xenomorph has a long, elongated head that curves back like a banana. There's an absence of visible eyes, so I assume it must have echolocation like bats or electroreception like we see in sharks to detect the electromagnetic fields animals produce. This specimen has strange structures along its dorsal side. They're long and curved, appearing to look mechanical despite the organism being organic." She stopped to crouch down so she could see the dark alien's features better.

The Xenomorph leaped and crashed against the side of the cage, clawing at the walls. Donna immediately jumped back in fright, clutching her chest to calm her rapid beating heart.

"I've never seen such a thing..." Madeline murmured, circling the creature as she took photos of it with the tablet. "Dr. Traegar, why did The Company put this thing in a flimsy cage? If it's this dangerous, why aren't there extra precautions to prevent another mishap?" She turned her brown eyes to Donna, who stood away from the cage, staring at the Xenomorph. Dr. Traegar's chest heaved as she forced herself to calm down, knowing the Xenomorph couldn't reach her.

Donna smirked darkly. "It's being held in a container made of Trimonite. There's also an acid-proof lining." Her thumb jabbed in the direction of the unconscious Xenomorph. "This thing isn't going anywhere anytime soon."

The younger woman swallowed the rising lump in her throat. A shiver shook her body as she put some distance between the cage and herself. There was no way out, not with the many safety precautions The Company had put in place, but there was a slim chance. Too many accidents had occurred around this species, according to the reports.

Could this be the hubris of man? The very thing that could one day wipe out their species? Just looking at it in repose filled her with disgust. Madeline imagined the cosmic horrors that could come about because of this...parasite of an alien.

"It's alright, Madeline. It won't escape. Not here, anyways." Donna assured, her dark mood lightening. A small smile so ened her features as she patted Madeline on the shoulder.

She scratched an itch on her side as she nodded, her ponytail swaying back and forth with the motion of her head. She felt anything but agreement.

Some hours ago when their other specimen arrived, the construction was completed. All around them were bright white LED lights that caused the black linoleum floor to shine beneath their feet. The walls, at various intervals, had white padding that insulated any noise. Machines whirred here and there around the room. Some were working to keep the laboratory's air cold and sterile, while others would be needed to conduct experiments.

They completed their initial observation, taking note of every feature and abnormality on its body. This was the first time The Company had agreed to let Donna anywhere near one of these specimens. They were created by an ancient race of aliens. A scientist by the name of Dr. Elizabeth Shaw had traveled several light years aboard the *Prometheus* to find the origin of humanity. And, by God, did she find it. They found the "Engineers", as Dr. Shaw had coined them. These Engineers, enormous, hairless, and muscled, were also hyper intelligent.

She had been lost in space but was eventually collected by a salvage crew. This information had been electronically delivered alongside the Xenomorph in a digital file the length of a textbook. Madeline pulled it up now, and the information was dense. Everything she needed to know about the creature's discovery was here and coupled with Ashaki Sawyer's account of the infestation on LV-318, any gaps could be easily filled in.

"It's an endoparasitoid, meaning it lives in a host during the early stage of its life. They take traits from their host before they break free of them." Madeline read from the Weyland-Yutani report. Horror came over her, knots forming in her stomach as she continued to read aloud. "When they extricate themselves from their host, normally from the chest, they then find somewhere to hide away so they can grow into an adult."

She gulped down her rising bile while ice creeped along her veins and chased the warmth away. She had to swipe the screen to another program so she didn't have to see the included images of the ravaged chest cavities of unfortunate victims. Why Dr. Traegar was so eager to have something so dangerous around was beyond her understanding.

Madeline had her own information from the Company records. Weyland-Yutani had an awful track record of keeping the Xenomorphs safely contained. Something like that could happen here, and against these creatures, there was very little a person could do but run and pray.

Her mouth tightened into a hard line as she suppressed her fears. The last thing she wanted to do was go against the person who had personally vouched for her to even be on this project. Everything she had done up to this point would be for nothing if she excused herself from this project.

She watched in silence as Dr. Donna Traegar geeked out over the creepy alien species lying unconscious in a cage. Sometimes it was best to keep quiet.

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Donna shut the door to her small o ice and dropped into her leather chair with a sigh. She kicked o her clogs and massaged her tight calves.

A nice soreness appeared along her upper back and shoulders. For most of the day, she had been taking in every character of her new specimen, which meant standing and crouching all day. The Xenomorph took her entire focus and a few new aches and pains were the result.

She was endlessly fascinated. Even now in her o ice, she wanted to return to the cage for more observation.

Already, she was considering a schedule of tests. The creature was a perfect killing machine. That much was obvious, and she wanted to run it through an obstacle course of horrors to really see what it was capable of.

Ideally, she wanted to put Ashaki Sawyer in a cage with it, and see what happened. A morbid curiosity bloomed within her to observe how the woman would react to her old acquaintance. But this was purely a desire born out of wicked intent and had no scientific purpose. But if presented the opportunity, she'd fudge up a reason and her team would go along with it. A er all, their careers depended on her, and if they spoke out against her, their careers would su er.

She had no room for dissenters in her lab.

However, thinking about Miss Sawyer reminded Donna that she needed to check in with Kade Stanton's crew. Knowing their progress would distract her now that she had completed the initial assessment of the Xenomorph. They were late with their delivery, and without o ering a status update either. She gave him a call from her desk.

"Dr. Traegar," Kade's rough voice rumbled through the built-in speakers on her screen, "nice to hear from you again."

Donna rolled her eyes, already exasperated with the bounty hunter.

"Hello Stanton, I'm calling in regards to my asset, Ashaki Sawyer. Have you collected her yet? I was told that I would receive her in a fortnight, not four weeks." Aggravation lanced through her voice as she tried to remain calm. She popped the top o of her anxiety meds and downed two, wanting the artificial calmness that came with them.

A request to share data appeared in the center of her computer screen. She clicked 'ACCEPT' and immediately star charts popped up in various rectangular windows, canvassing her default black and yellow Weyland-Yutani logo background. Clicking on each one brought up small data readouts.

"As you see before you, we've been able to reverse engineer her satellite tracker beacon for her ship, *Star Chaser*. The ship in question was found reduced to a half melted pile of junk." Di erent parts of the data highlighted itself as he went through the findings.

"What? What could possibly have the technology to blow up a ship?" She wondered aloud, her eyes narrowing in question.

Kade brought up an image of a Predator, a Yautja, "We believe she's with a Predator, ma'am. They have the technology and her tracker puts her in the heart of their known territory. We are preparing for an encounter as we speak, plus travel time, so the delivery date has been extended.

She *needed* that woman so she could start her work! Without her, it was all for naught! If there was a problem, Kade should've contacted her two weeks ago. Besides, how hard could it be to pick up one woman despite these challenges? Were these men not the best of the best? Anger burned Donna's insides at having to wait *longer*. Every day that passed without her drained her funding. Not to mention the extra pay these men were wringing from her with their excuses.

This delay was unacceptable.

"I need my asset sooner than that. My entire research depends on her!"

"Then why have it solely based around one woman? Aren't you nerds supposed to be smart? I thought you people have contingencies and back up plans. Our lives are in danger every second we track the woman." He hissed in frustration.

"Find her! Now! I don't care what personal costs are at stake! I'll double your rate to get her to me in two weeks." Donna barked.

She didn't wait for a response and clicked the 'END CALL' box at the bottom of her screen with a hu .

How dare he call her a 'nerd' when he was just a lowly hired gun!

This was *her* project and she'd be damned if these idiots, supposedly the best team Weyland-Yutani had, were struggling. And so ungrateful too, if it wasn't for her, he'd still be sitting on his ass eating away at his savings account at some Oasis bar.

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"That bitch!" Kade slammed his fist into the metal desk.

Papers dri ed in the air while a cup of pens lay in a sad pile near the wall, victims of his outburst. His chest heaved with anger. Hastily, he raked his fingers through his dark hair, yanking through the waves of thick locks.

Every time he talked to Donna Traegar he was le in a bad mood. She reminded him of a mad scientist with a healthy dose of bitch juice, just enough to piss him o . Her patience was very thin, and on a short fuse. He had learned the hard way of this in the past. Apparently making her wait was enough to flip the switch into psycho territory. If he had been raised to hit women, Dr. Traegar would be one of the first cunts in line...when they finally met of course.

At this point, she fucking deserved it.

Richard walked in shaking his head. From the carnage across the floor, he could already guess who Kade was speaking to. This was such a common occurrence to the point that his crew knew when he had spoken with Donna Traegar.

"I see the good scientist has once again le you in a sour mood." The sandy blond observed, kneeling to gather Kade's fallen writing utensils.

Kade grunted in acknowledgement, turning to the shelf on the wall where he kept his 'medicine', a fine bottle of Jack Daniels whiskey. It was the only prescription when he needed to take the edge o .

He drank it straight from the bottle. The warm, fuzzy heat went down his throat and immediately spread to his limbs. Drinking was better than finding something to hit. Anger management classes in the past had only taught him pacifism, virtually doing nothing, so instead he drank to calm himself in moments of intense rage.

"She wants the woman... *soon*. Sooner than we can get her." He took a long sip, knocking it back. "I told her of the danger, yet as always, she knows best. Right?"

The audacity of that woman!

Kade snorted in derision.

"Ah," Richard lounged in one of the plush chairs that faced Kade's desk, his face neutral as he steepled his fingers at his chest. "she will have to be patient like the rest of us. Things like this take time."

"Exactly! I told her but no, that lunatic knows our job better than we do apparently." His knuckles turned white on the whiskey bottle's neck.

"Did you tell her we're trailing the alien's ship?"

"Partially. I wasn't given the chance to finish. She hung up on me." Kade hu ed, taking another long sip of his whiskey.

Richard hummed low in his throat as he watched Kade turn to the vid-screen on the side wall, both of them taking in the two blinking dots that moved through a zoomed-in star map. A small red dot floated in front of their own bigger green dot. They had been following the alien spacecra at a far enough distance that they had evaded detection. Their radar was masked so that they would be invisible to anyone, including the Yautja. Testing the limits of masked radar had lost many human lives, but not wasted ones. Their sacrifices were necessary in order to better humanity's progression.

"I wonder where it's going now," Richard considered the red dot.

Kade shrugged, "We'll just have to find out."

The door opened, catching both mens' attention. Carlos sidled in with Dennis at his side, their eyes sweeping around the room and taking in the mess that Kade had made of his o ice. Dennis smirked while Carlos muttered something in Spanish before speaking up.

"If they touch ground, which one of us will see action first?" He made his way further into the room, cracking his knuckles. "I'd love to kick some *puto* alien's ass. A Yautja would be the ultimate challenge!" A smirk lit up his face as he came to look at the two moving points on the screen.

Dennis rolled his eyes, "You don't want to fight one of those things, man. Haven't you seen the videos of them tearing men apart?"

"He's right," Richard added, "Carlos, that's suicidal. If you try to fight that thing then kiss that vacation with your girlfriend goodbye."

Carlos sco ed, "Yeah, yeah. I know. I just want that sweet payday. I got places to be so I can spend it!" He swiped the Jack Daniels from Kade and took a sip, his face screwing up as he swallowed it. "That casino on Alpha Centauri is calling my name, gentleman. There's already a Poker table waiting for me and my lady."

It was Kade's turn to sco , shaking his head. "If we don't capture her soon, and without casualties, then you won't get your little trip to the casino. No vacations for a good while. We're all fucked. No money. No nada." Kade retrieved his bottle of whiskey from Carlos and set it on the desk.

The entrance of Landon completed this little impromptu meeting of Kade's crew. He leaned against the door frame. Everyone was here for the next steps from their Captain.

"Gentleman, what we have in store for us will not be easy. I'm not sure how we'll separate Ashaki Sawyers from the Predator without casualties, but when we do, we'll get the biggest payouts in a long time. Double." The leader of this motley crew sat against the edge of his desk, clasping his hands in his lap. "But it's a huge risk. I can't guarantee any of your lives. That's impossible, but that goes for every mission we've been on together. However, I can guarantee that this is the biggest challenge we've faced yet. I want you to rest up, eat well and drink well, and be ready for what's to come."

Everyone was quiet as Kade's words settled in, the jovial atmosphere turned grim. It was the harsh reality the crew needed. They could joke all they wanted but it didn't help lessen their fears. Yautja were vicious and deadly. Entire squadrons of men had been eviscerated, their skulls and spines removed from their corpses. Any one of them could end up on this Yautja's mantle.

Dennis was the one to speak up first, rising to his feet. "Since we're all in danger of dying, we might as well party it up. I'm not moping around like the rest of you idiots." He le the room quickly, sliding past Landon, a deep sigh heaving his chest.

"Fuck it." Groaned Richard, following in Dennis's footsteps. Landon silently joined the others in taking his leave to party; a smirk already plastered on his face.

Carlos twisted his lips and stood up. "I'm going to join the others. Getting shit faced is better than sitting here sober waiting for our deaths."

"Come on, man." He smiled wide, eyes lighting up. "Let's have one last hurrah before shit gets heavy."

Kade considered it for no longer than a few seconds before his own face cracked into a smile and he said, "Yeah, fine. Let's get wasted one last time."

His friend clapped him on the shoulder and led him down to the mess hall.

"Might as well enjoy each other for as long as possible." Kade chuckled, "You ugly bastards are going to learn that I remain undefeated in drinking games."

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A/N: As always, let me know what ya think! :)

Continue reading next part