

Chapter 1

Imdiko Egilka peered through heavy drapes that concealed his presence in the brothel's dimly lit playroom. He watched as a six-limbed Isetacian female crouched over the prone body of the Crown Prince of Kalquor.

Egilka had to remind himself about how pissed off he was with Prince Clajak. It wasn't easy to stay angry with that gorgeous, muscled, and naked body lying there. Clajak lay relaxed and enraptured, helpless under the Isetacian's hypnotic song. Looking at him, Egilka experienced his own moment of helplessness. His whole body seemed to have lost its strength.

Egilka licked his lips, feeling primal lust surge in his groin. Even without the royal pedigree, Clajak would never want for intimate companionship. He was too delicious. All Kalquorians, including their few women, were genetically predisposed to muscularity. Clajak had worked on his natural endowments, making himself a physically stunning specimen. The Dramok prince's body couldn't be more chiseled, everything proportioned in a gorgeous flow of tendons, sinew, and strength. Artists might weep over such a model of perfection. Egilka felt an unwanted longing to go to Clajak and trace every single line that separated one muscle from another. Preferably with his tongue.

Damn the man. Of all times for Egilka to recognize the assets of his Dramok-to-be, this was the worst. The kid who'd been like a little brother to him all these years had grown up. When the hell had that happened?

The prince's long hair spread under his head, gossamer strands begging to be stroked. It was not the typical black of the Kalquorian race. Instead, Clajak's hair possessed the sheen of tempered steel, as if the strands had been dipped in metal. It made him exotic, as if he wasn't already screwing with Egilka's head simply by being beautiful to look at.

The Imdiko wanted to walk over and stroke that hair. It was the first time he'd wished to do so. Before it had just been different, a mutation shared by Clajak's Nobek father Emperor Yuder. Instead of aging Clajak it underscored the youthfulness of his handsome, strong-jawed face, a face turned soft with dreamy pleasure.

The Crown Prince wore a smile for good reason as he gazed up at his companion. The Isetacian female sang to him. The tune coming from her toothless mouth was hypnotic to most within hearing distance. Despite her appearance –gray skin broken up by the hard ridge of bone down the middle of her back, a bulbous head circled by two rows of tiny eyes – Clajak's expression couldn't have been more rapturous. He drowned in the sweet trill of her voice, his senses consumed by her entrancing song. His nervous system had been snared in the lovely trap of her tune. It was the way Isetacians caught prey for their meals on their home world, prey they preferred to swallow alive. Even knowing the deadly reason for the adaptation didn't erase the sweetness of the floating notes, however. In the brothels it made Isetacian prostitutes all the more popular with clients.

Egilka would have been caught up in it as well, if not for the plugs in his ears. He wasn't on Dantovon to enjoy the hundreds of thousands of prostitutes it boasted. He wasn't there for the voyeuristic thrill of watching a man get laid in a brothel either. He was here to haul Prince Clajak back to Kalquor, as ordered by the Imperial Clan itself. Once the two men were home, they were to be clanned ... as they should have been a week ago.

Egilka and Clajak were not as close as most Kalquorian men who would become lifelong companions. Their union had been arranged years before, when Clajak was only ten years old and Egilka twenty-seven. For a long time, Egilka had felt more of an older brother to Clajak. As the Imdiko trained for his eventual role as one of the three emperors of Kalquor, he'd watched his Dramok-to-be grow into manhood. The feeling of a sibling bond had remained strong until recently.

These days, their relationship had turned tumultuous. The closer the time came to be clanned, the more Clajak avoided Egilka. His behavior, reckless and brash since his teens, became more

irresponsible. Even his parents, the Emperors and Empress of Kalquor, had lost all patience with their only child and heir. The young man performed his duties as Crown Prince, excelled at them even. However, he made it a point to enjoy himself to distraction with lovers, drinking, and parties. His reputation throughout the Empire was fodder for gossip and rumor.

Now there was this matter of running off at the moment Clajak was to offer clanship to Egilka and fulfill their contract to become lifemates. The unexplained abandonment stung because Egilka had thought Clajak liked him, at least as a brotherly friend. Despite their differences in age and behavior, they had gotten along. Well, except for that one time, but they'd made up, hadn't they? Clajak seemed to harbor no ill will over the altercation that had happened five years ago.

"He's afraid of not being able to live up to his responsibilities. As for your union, it's just cold feet, Egilka," Empress Irdis had told him. "Clajak still looks up to you. He respects you. You must not take it personally."

Egilka tried not to. He supposed someone as young and indulgent as Clajak found him to be stuffy and boring. Perhaps that assessment was true. The Imdiko was a research scientist, and he was the first to admit he'd let his passion turn into something of an obsession. Between training for eventual rulership and his work on solving the issue of Kalquorian women's infertility, he was more business than pleasure ... a stark contrast to Clajak.

There was nothing to suggest the two men were each other's type as far as romance was concerned. Even upon reaching manhood, Clajak had never shown the first moment's interest in inviting Egilka to his bed. That had been something of a relief to the Imdiko. It was hard to look at the younger man he'd watch grow up and think of him as a lover, no matter how handsome he was or how outrageous the tales of his exploits.

Until this moment. Until Egilka had seen that strong, sturdy body lying there, ready for love. A body built bigger and more muscular than Egilka's. A body Egilka could well imagine touching, kissing, and fucking. All at once he saw Clajak as a man, not the boy he'd often been babysitter and guide to.

Egilka swallowed and tried to calm himself down. His pricks had swollen in response to Clajak's gorgeous repose, making his body as eager as the Crown Prince's. The Imdiko's traitorous eyes caressed Clajak's cocks with a hungry gaze. The twin tapered staves stood straight up from his reclining body, wet with natural lubrication. Egilka bit his lip. Clajak would fill him deliciously with the smaller prick, the perfect size for rear entry with a woman. The larger cock would take some serious stretching. The sweet bastard was endowed. It had been a long time since Egilka had enjoyed a lover, male or female. He'd been too busy with work and getting ready for the clanning ceremony.

The clanning ceremony. Egilka shook himself, dragging his brain back to what his priorities were. Getting Clajak back to Kalquor so they could hold the ceremony was what Egilka needed to concentrate on. He was letting himself get distracted from his main purpose over eye candy. Sumptuous, brain-numbing eye candy, but unimportant for right now.

Egilka dragged his gaze back to Clajak's handsome face. The Dramok was glassy-eyed from the Isetacian's song, his mind sunk under her spell. He wouldn't notice a herd of Tragooms thundering through the room at this moment.

Egilka eased out from behind the heavy velvet draperies and approached the sleeping mat on which Clajak lay. The Imdiko nodded to the prostitute, and she gave him a toothless smile as she sang on. He'd paid her handsomely to help him capture his wayward intended Dramok ... an entire day's wages in fact.

The Imperial Clan would reimburse him fully, he knew. Hell, Emperor Yuder had offered to back Egilka's research team for an entire year if the Imdiko brought Clajak home. Out of his own pocket, no less. The Nobek monarch was irate over his son's absence and the wild speculation that surrounded it. Even Emperor Tidro, as mild an Imdiko as could be imagined, was beside himself with fury over Clajak's humiliating treatment of Egilka.

Ignoring the throb of hurt that he didn't want to feel, Egilka set to work. While the Isetacian sang, he bound Clajak's ankles and wrists to the sturdy pillars at each corner of the billowy mat. He double-checked the soft ties to make sure they were secure, but not in any danger of compromising Clajak's circulation. Clajak's heavy-lidded eyes never blinked as Egilka made him helpless.

With the Dramok secured, Egilka interrupted the Isetacian's song. "He's incapacitated now. You may go."

She nodded and rose from her crouch. As she exited the small, drapery-festooned room, Clajak's eyes fluttered. His blue-purple gaze sharpened and he stared up at Egilka in surprise.

Egilka pulled out the ear plugs that had protected him from the Isetacian's song. The sounds of soft music playing over the brothel's system drifted lazily in the air. Lovely music to listen to while exacting payment from a lovely but selfish man. A man that was making Egilka feel more amorous than angry. Damn him.

He couldn't divert from his purpose, no matter how good Clajak looked. Keeping his eyes squarely on the younger man's face, Egilka said, "Hello, my prince."

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Clajak cursed in his head to see the sharp-featured man standing over him. Where in the hell had his intended Imdiko come from? Where was the Isetacian with the wondrous voice? He jerked his arms and legs and discovered he had been tied securely. Fuck and damnation.

Though his ever-present temper wanted to take hold, Clajak's better sense prevailed. He unleashed his trademark smile on his captor. "Hello, Egilka."

Egilka scowled and crossed his arms over his chest. "Oh good. You do remember the man you were supposed to clan a week ago."

Clajak kept his charming smile in place, though something inside his gut withered at the Imdiko's tone. Egilka sounded angry. Of course, he had every right to be upset. Clajak thought he also detected a thread of hurt, but that was probably wishful fancy. He was nothing but a child to his promised clanmate. Just a child who Egilka would never take seriously or waste a moment of desire on.

Putting up the devil-may-care front he'd perfected, Clajak gave Egilka his most innocent expression. "Was that last week? I am so sorry."

"I'm sure you are." The dry tone said Egilka didn't buy it. When had Clajak ever been able to fool the man? For such an aloof person, the Imdiko missed nothing.

Ah, you delicious, duty-driven creature. Just once I'd like to see you look at me the same way you do your chemistry set. Come down from your intellectual cloud and play in the dirt with me.

Like most Kalquorians, Egilka was muscled. His frame wasn't heavy, however. He had a lithe, wiry build that had put pleasurable thoughts in Clajak's head since puberty. His features tended to be a bit stark what with the sharp planes, but their symmetry was perfect. When his attitude softened, he was downright beautiful. When he smiled, which happened far too seldom, Clajak's heart never failed to quicken. The mustache Egilka had grown a couple of years ago was bushy, taking the edge off further still. Clajak had thought more than once about how soft that mustache would feel as he kissed Egilka.

When Egilka glared, as he did now, he had a wonderfully dangerous quality. His purple eyes snapped with anger. The dark face, left bare by Egilka's long black hair pulled back in a tail, promised threat.

As a child, Clajak and his playmates had pretended to be ocean pirates. When the prince grew into an adolescent, his fantasies of freedom and pillage aboard a ship had continued, but with a more mature edge. He envisioned standing on a rocking deck with Egilka at his side, the Imdiko wearing that very glare, though aimed at their trembling prey. Together Clajak and Egilka would plunder pleasure cruisers foolish enough to chance their territory and then celebrate their exploits with wild sex in their shared cabin.

Stupid kid stuff. Childish fancies in which Clajak had imagined Egilka saw him as a grown man. An equal. A lover. Not a duty, which was the last thing Clajak wanted to be. Unfortunately, duty was all the prince was to his betrothed.

Being caught running away by his intended had surely not elevated Clajak in Egilka's eyes. Once again he felt like a little boy around the Imdiko, fighting not to squirm in humiliation. Yet there was something else that made Clajak want to squirm for entirely different reasons.

Dreams of being a pirate were long gone. However, being tied up and under Egilka's stern gaze was prime material for newer, more adult fantasies.

Perhaps that was why an invitation burst out, one Clajak never intended to make. "I would love to make up my oversight in the best way possible." He glanced at his still avid cocks to make sure Egilka got the message.

The Imdiko's eyes widened. For an instant he bit his lips together. Was that lust? Desire? Clajak could hardly breathe for hoping.

Egilka's typical composed and distant expression masked his face once more. "Save it, Clajak. You can play with all the young Nobeks you want once you get home and clan me like you're supposed to."

Clanning with Egilka would take all other Imdikos off the menu. Not that Clajak cared. He'd wanted his intended for what felt like forever. The tiny tremor he'd caught from his soon-to-be clanmate made him think he might get to realize that wish.

Don't fuck this opportunity up. Maybe he wants me too, now that he's had a peek. Come on, Egilka. For once see me as I am, not the kid you agreed to clan.

Clajak pretended his heart wasn't drumming fit to jump out of his chest. He gave the Imdiko a self-assured, cocky smile. "Aw, Egilka. Look at me. *Look*. Do I look like I'm pretending to want you?"

Egilka's gaze shot to Clajak's gleaming wet cocks. He jerked his head away quickly, as if he'd looked before he could stop himself. His scowl deepened.

Yet the spicy scent of Kalquorian male arousal drifted from him, and the front of his gray trousers bumped out. Clajak licked his lips. The Imdiko *did* want him, at least for sex. That was a start. A chance to win Egilka was all the prince had ever asked for.

In a husky voice Clajak invited, "Why don't you untie me, my Imdiko? I'm not going anywhere. It's past time we got acquainted better anyway, don't you think?"

Egilka looked at him again, a long look that took Clajak in from head to toe and back again. The aroma of arousal grew heavier. A slow, calculating smile spread over Egilka's face.

Clajak's breath caught. As always, Egilka's smile softened the stark cheekbones and chin, and his white teeth gleamed behind the mustache. This was not the kind smile the Dramok had seen before, however. This was a dangerous smile, one that made Egilka sexy as hell. Pirate sexy. Sexy, beautiful, and fucking scary.

A thrill of fear slammed Clajak's gut, and he yanked at his unrelenting bonds. He wanted Egilka, but he wasn't sure he wanted this version of Egilka. Especially not if he was helpless.

The Imdiko looked amused at Clajak's efforts to pull free. "Getting better acquainted, as you put it, might not be such a bad idea. However, I think I like the position you're in, my handsome prince."

Oh no, this was definitely not one of Clajak's fantasies. Bottoming was for other men, not the Crown Prince of Kalquor. His fangs unfolded from the roof of his mouth to display behind his flat set of teeth.

He warned Egilka, "I'm a Dramok, Imdiko. I do not submit."

Egilka's slit-pupiled eyes glimmered with amusement. "You don't have to. The ties will do all the surrendering for you." He turned from Clajak and contemplated the fabric-draped walls. "Let's see what kind of goodies are in this room."

Clajak knew the manner of toys and tools available in the brothel's playroom. The inventory hanging on the walls behind the wine-colored fabrics was vast and varied. If Egilka was pissed off at him for postponing their clanning, Clajak didn't want many of those items in the Imdiko's hands. He jerked hard at his bonds and cursed at flash of pain as they dug into his flesh.

"Damn it, Egilka! Let me go."

Egilka tossed a glance over his shoulder, smirking at his captive. "You owe me, my prince. You took me away from my research at a most inopportune time."

Egilka's research. Of course he would bring that up. In Clajak's opinion, the man spent far too much of his time buried in experiments and not enough having fun. Duty was fine, but life demanded some pleasure too. It was Egilka's one downfall. He was probably more pissed off that he'd had to leave his work than over the fact that Clajak had stood him up.

Thinking such thoughts, Clajak said, "You didn't have to come after me. I would have gotten home sooner or later. I have no problem clanning with you." *My problem is that I'm not so sure you want to be clanned to me.*

He didn't dare tell the Imdiko that for fear of discovering it was the truth.

With his back to Clajak, Egilka shoved at the draped walls, not finding what he wanted. "Your fathers and mother are not as patient as I am. You've embarrassed them, you know."

Clajak stilled his efforts to escape. He could handle his fathers and mother being angry with him. What he couldn't countenance was their disappointment or being the source of their humiliation.

"Fuck. How bad is it?" he asked Egilka's back.

"Even Tidro and Irdis are inclined to have you restricted to your apartments for a year. They talked about handing you over to your aide's Nobek for discipline."

Clajak's hair stood up at that idea. Nobek Raxstad was a behemoth. His muscles had muscles. Dramok Korkla's clanmate was easygoing for his breed, but still a brute when the situation called for it. Clajak did not want to be under that man's hand when it came to punishment.

Still, Raxstad would be better than his father Yuder. No doubt the Nobek emperor was ready to flay Clajak alive.

Somehow managing to keep his tone light, Clajak said, "If Mother and my Imdiko father are that upset, I can only imagine how Zarl and Yuder feel."

"They were thinking of lining up several disciplinarians for the honor of beating your hide off. I was assured I would be the first in the queue. Yuder offered me lessons on how to use a whip for the occasion."

Clajak winced. Of all his parents, Nobek Yuder was not one to suffer his son's lapses, of which Clajak had experienced many since puberty. "Shit," he swore. Whether Egilka punished him or not and even if he was handed over to Raxstad, Yuder would likely get his licks in too.

"Mmm-hmm," the Imdiko agreed. "We never did get to that instruction. However, I have had some experience with one of these."

He turned from the wall to show Clajak the thin flex-reed switch he'd found. Though it was called a reed, it was man-made. Used improperly, it could slice flesh to ribbons.

Clajak didn't know the extent of Egilka's experience with such a tool. He swallowed hard as Egilka approached. "You don't really want to discipline me with that, do you?"

Egilka smiled. The happy expression would have made Clajak's heart turn over if not for the reason he wore it. "It will make me feel so much better. You have no idea how pissed off I am right now."

Among other things, Clajak thought as he glanced at the Imdiko's still swollen crotch. "It will hurt like hell."

"Exactly." Egilka looked him over with an air of ownership.

The expression made the Dramok bristle. He liked Egilka looking at him. He liked how aroused the Imdiko seemed to be with his cocks swelling his trousers and lips wetly parted. However Clajak did not care for being looked at like property.

His tone forbidding, Clajak said, "You should remember who the leader of the clan is, Imdiko."

Egilka raised an eyebrow. Despite his obvious erections, he played the big brother role once more. "We're not clanned yet, youngling. Zarl and Yuder gave their full permission for me to exact payment for what you put us all through."

Hating that superior tone, Clajak snarled, "Fine. Beat me if it makes you happy. I never would have picked you for a sadist though."

Egilka grinned. Clajak's body thrilled to see the dangerous look return. Heat sang in his cocks to be looked at like that. He still didn't want to be on the bottom if Egilka decided to explore their sexual compatibility.

In a low, threatening tone, Egilka told him, "You have no idea what I'm capable of, my prince."

No, he didn't. Clajak had long wanted to find out – but not like this.

Egilka laid the switch across Clajak's belly. Its presence there would remind the Dramok of how he would soon writhe under its bite. Egilka went back to the walls, looking and selecting items, keeping them hidden from Clajak's sight.

Clajak didn't want to squirm when Egilka came back to the mat. He managed to keep still – barely. The prince kept his expression as bland as possible as Egilka sat down next to him.

Egilka looked over his naked, prone body again. The Imdiko's eyes smoldered, and the hard planes of his face softened as desire announced itself on his expression. Clajak's heart sped up to see the bald want on Egilka's face. How many of his fantasies of Egilka had included him looking at Clajak that very way? Too many to count. Now that it had finally happened, Clajak was in no position to capitalize on it.

You sneaky bastard. You're supposed to be on your knees before me, looking up at me like that. Eager to please me and be pleased in return ... not eager to make me pay.

Egilka stared at Clajak's cocks. Egilka's hurt feelings, Clajak's parents' disappointment, and the coming punishment had done nothing to diminish their hard demand. Long, thick, and glistening with arousal fluids, they jerked to be regarded by the Imdiko. A pearly drop formed on the larger one. Clajak bit back a groan at their persistent ache.

Egilka groaned for him. "Ancestors help me." He drew a deep breath, as if to gather his strength. With a more determined air, he said, "Let's start with this."

The Imdiko bent forward, his lips parting. Clajak cried out, scarcely believing his good fortune. Warm breath enfolded his primary cock an instant before Egilka's mouth closed over the sensitive tip. Egilka kept driving down, swallowing half its length before coming to a halt.

Clajak shouted as his groin blazed to lust-filled life. His hips bucked forward, shoving more of his eager prick into the Imdiko's mouth. Egilka made a coughing sound and backed off. Clajak's loins throbbed with the loss of that sweet mouth on him.

He masked his disappointment with a jibe. "Am I more than you can take? My Imdiko, I thought you would have enough experience to handle a youngling like me."

Egilka's face colored. He gave Clajak a reproachful look. "Some of us don't spend day and night fucking everything that doesn't run away. I work for a living."

Clajak's thoughts were torn between surprise that the other man might not be as experienced as he'd thought and the insulting hint that Egilka thought he did nothing but screw.

"Hey, I have plenty on my plate too. My duties get done and I – ohohohohohOH!"

Egilka had bent over his demanding cock once more, taking its slick length with determination. Clajak's eyes bulged as he felt the tip bump the back of the Imdiko's throat. Egilka swallowed, accepting the prince's full measure.

Clajak stared at him, feeling the softness of the Imdiko's mustache brush his groin, seeing that arresting face intent as he slowly released his burning cock. "Fuck. Fuck. Fuck," the Dramok gasped as Egilka's raspy tongue rubbed the sensitive underside of his prick. "Oh you beautiful, wonderful, fucking Imdiko."

Egilka let him go with a smile that was pleased. "You liked that, huh? I'm a little out of practice perhaps, but I remember a thing or two."

"Out of practice? Egilka, I could spend an entire night fucking your sweet, warm mouth. I'm beyond sorry I haven't clanned you yet. Swallow me again."

Instead, the grinning man sat up, taking his delicious lips and tongue away from Clajak's raging dick. The prince's hips strained up in desperate demand.

Egilka wrapped his hand around Clajak's primary member, his grip tight. Clajak moaned in want, pushing hard into the firm circle of palm and fingers. Then he saw what was in the Imdiko's other hand. He tried to wrench free, but his ass would shove only so far into the mat beneath him.

"Oh please no," Clajak begged as Egilka inserted his needy cock into the tight black circle of the ring. The Imdiko ignored him as he snugged it tight to the base of his stave. The cockring constricted Clajak, keeping him hard and ready ... and unable to ejaculate.

Clajak wailed in irritation. "You bastard! A cockring is worse than being switched."

Egilka's chuckle filled with evil. "That's only the start of your troubles, my prince."