

Summary:

Feral is trying to create a coalition with other countries to protect the planet from another possible invasion from space. He hadn't counted on meeting someone special.

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Chapter 1: Pleading for Cooperation by ulyferal

Feral grumbled to himself. The first hour of the conference had not been a stellar success. It was he that had requested a special conference with the military leaders of the world be held on the subject of alien invasions. It had been prompted by the two close calls Megakat City had endured.

The Chief Enforcer for Megakat City felt strongly that the world should be involved when the next alien crisis occurred instead of his city bearing the brunt of the attack. It was just chance and good luck that they had been victorious. He just didn't feel safe about leaving it at that.

So here he was, after a lengthy battle with Mayor Manx on the need for it, trying to convince his peers that a coalition was necessary. So far he had been encountering a stubborn wall of indifference. If it didn't concern them they weren't interested.

"I think you are over exaggerating the danger, Commander!" Admiral Tyku of the Sandeval Bay Confederation said flatly.

"The Ci-Kat-A had come the closest to taking over our city. It had been a complete accident that our Deputy Mayor stumbled on their hidden nursery." Feral said tightly.

"Oh yeah! That...how many times?...cursed tower of your Mayor's? You should just bring that place down and be done with it." Colonel Spikner of the Tamloren Empire said snidely.

Feral grit his teeth and tried to retain his composure as he continued to argue his point of view.

A beautiful tenor voice spoke up, "I for one agree with Commander Feral. Only timely intervention, their specialized weaponry and a bit of luck, saved the rest of us from a war we may very well have lost. Whose to say we won't encounter more aliens. The odds went up when more than one came our way. Are you all so willing to risk the chance that the next invader might decide they liked one of us better? How many of you can say you have adequate weaponry to vanquish them? There are always bigger and more powerful things out there and it makes sense for us to work together and be prepared for it."

Feral couldn't look away from the handsome cheetah male in the richly made uniform he wore. He didn't know who this was but was pleased he understood the problem so well. He would make a point of meeting him later.

I agree! Turning a blind eye to this now could mean the death of us later!" A voice shouted passionately. The voice belonged to a tiger female from the Tymurr Federation.

Soon after her outburst, the room degenerated into a shouting match between the 'Alien Protection Coalition' faction and the 'let's not get involved' group. Feral tried to recapture their attention but finally gave up in defeat. It seemed a better option to let them hash it out first before trying to get anywhere right now.

Feral hoped by tomorrow, cooler heads would prevail and perhaps a consensus of agreement could occur. Sighing in frustration, he got off the stage and detoured around the bickering groups of conference attendees. He headed for the buffet table that had been set up a short time ago in

the room beyond the one the meeting was being held in.

He wasn't really hungry so went to the wine server. He got a soothing brandy and moved to a quiet spot near a wall of windows that looked out over Megakat Bay. He slowly sipped his drink and tried to unwind.

"May I join you?" That same wonderful tenor voice he'd heard moments before said from just behind him.

Feral turned and stared a moment at the handsome cheetah. Now close up, Feral could see his beautiful emerald eyes. His uniform was red and gold, fitting him snugly revealing a powerful and lean physique. His hair was a short fall of spun gold that came to his shoulders.

"Certainly. Forgive me for staring but I don't recall where you are from." Feral said politely.

"Not a problem. This is my first time visiting your city. I am Lt. General Tanlir from the Kingdom of Asszeria. I am very pleased to meet you." He said warmly extending his paw.

"A pleasure to meet you." Feral said warmly as he shook the paw. A momentary jolt of something he couldn't name zipped through him. Outwardly, he kept his face relaxed but inwardly he was shaken by the sudden heat he felt at that touch.

Tanlir felt something as well though he also didn't let his true feelings show. 'Goddess, what was that?' He thought in giddy surprise. Swallowing he tried to ignore the strange sensation and returned to the subject at hand.

"I found your plea for a Coalition to be very moving and a correct assessment of our world's risk from outer space." He said easily.

"Thank you. I wish the others could see it as well. Though we in Megakat City have been the focus of many a weird event that doesn't mean another visitor couldn't just drop in on any one of the other countries on the planet." Feral said passionately.

"Oh, I believe you and I sympathize with your struggle to get others to see it as well." Tanlir agreed.

"And I believe you as well," The tiger female said as she came to stand beside them. "Greetings Commander Feral, I'm General Shenar from the Tymurr Federation." She said reaching out to shake Feral's paw. She was a beautiful silver and black striped tiger wearing a dark blue uniform that fit her well toned form well. Her brilliant sapphire eyes sparkled with excitement. Her hair was a deep blue black and hung down past her shoulders but was tied in a pony tail with a silver cord.

"Thank you, General Shenar. I appreciated your support out there." Feral said with a smile.

"You're welcome. I salute you for trying to insure all our safety. This insular behavior will be the death of us all." She said firmly.

"May I suggest we take a table and continue our discussion there?" Tanlir asked.

"Great idea. I'm hungry and this looks like a great spread. Seems a shame to ignore it." Shenar said with a grin as she made her way to the buffet table.

Tanlir and Feral joined her. Feral filled a plate with a small selection of protein, still too stressed to eat much, and made for the table Shenar had picked out. The table had a great view of the bay.

For next few hours, others joined them at their table and the discussions were passionate and

lively. Feral was pleased to note the number of supporters he had managed to gather. By the time he left for his room, later that evening, he felt more confident.

He said his farewells to his dinner companions and made his way to the bank of elevators. He was tired but his mind kept going over what he could do to win over the rest of the hold outs tomorrow. Intruding on these thoughts was his undeniable reaction to the handsome cheetah, Tanlir.

Though it wasn't unusual for conference goers to dally with others to relieve stress or enjoy a casual fling, he hadn't intended to do so this time. The conference was being held in Megakat City and he could simply go home but decided he needed to stay on hand in case any of the attendees wanted to talk with him so he had taken a room.

So as he waited for the elevator, he couldn't understand why he felt such a strong attraction for Tanlir. He really needed to stay focused on his mission here but he couldn't shake his mind's insistence on fixating on the male and his wonderful scent that teased his senses.

It wasn't as if he didn't occasionally have a fling with a fem or tom. He was sexually active but lately he came away from each encounter unfulfilled and unhappy. He realized that he felt unsatisfied because not all his sexual parts got involved. It never mattered before but lately it began to grate on him, leaving him feeling frustrated but being an hermaphrodite left him with few options in solving it.

Males didn't mind him dominating them but there were none he would allow to do the same to him much less take him as female and females enjoyed his company but he was the one unfulfilled when they were done. Megakat City was a bit prejudiced about his odd sexuality but outside the city he knew very well how valuable he was and he had no intention of ending up on the slave block being sold to some ridiculously wealthy tom who wanted him for his rareness rather than for himself.

So though he found the cheetah very attractive, he firmly decided to keep his distance despite what he felt just being near him. He stepped into the elevator and punched the button for his floor.

Tanlir had noticed the occasional looks Feral sent his way even when the imposing Kat obviously didn't realize he was doing it. The cheetah couldn't shake what he'd felt when he had taken the Kat's paw. He liked males well enough and would indulge in a moment's pleasure with one especially on trips like this. However, he hadn't intended to do that at this very important conference and certainly not with the one sponsoring it. Also, he was in a competition with his five brothers to mate and breed the next heir to the throne and that meant a female.

But he couldn't shake the feeling he got when he looked into those golden eyes. It so distracted him that when Feral had gotten up to get more wine, Tanlir committed a mild sin...he took a deep sniff to taste the Kat's scent. It was considered bad manners to check out another's scent in a public setting and without the permission of the person themselves but he really needed to know why he was reacting the way he was.

He jerked in shocked surprise when an amazing scent filled his nose. He quickly moved back from the table a moment to compose himself while his mind worked furiously. 'An hermaphrodite! How rare!' He thought in shocked amazement. He had only encountered one in his life but that one had been mated. This one was not. It sent a thrill of excitement thrumming through him.

After he'd said goodnight to Feral, he had planned on returning to his room and compiling his notes on the conference so that he could report his opinions to his father but as his guards took up their posts at his side when he left the meeting room, he realized he just couldn't let this chance go by.

He sent one of his guards to the front desk to ask what room the commander was staying in. When he returned with the information, they made for the elevator. General Shenar got on with

them.

"Would you be interested in sharing a little play time?" She asked, swishing her tail and fluttering her eyes at him in invitation.

"I'm honored but I have a prior commitment. If it doesn't work out, may I call on you later?" He asked smiling warmly back.

"If I haven't found anyone else, certainly. Have a good evening." She said with a smirk then got off a floor before his.

He sighed inwardly. She was quite a fetching thing and if he wasn't already twisted up about Feral he might have taken her up on her invitation to play. If things didn't work out with the tom he might see if she was still willing later.

The doors of the elevator snapped open and they walked down to the correct door. He signaled his guards to remain outside as he knocked.

Feral opened the door. He stared at Tanlir in surprise, he'd removed his coat and undone his tie revealing his well built chest pushing against his shirt. "Was there something you wanted?" His deep baritone voice asked.

"Your pardon Ulysses, may I come in and speak with you in private?" Tanlir asked politely.

Feral eyed the two panther-cross guards on either side of his door, questioningly.

"They are mine and will wait out here." The cheetah explained.

Privately wondering why Tanlir needed guards, Feral stepped back and gestured for the cheetah to enter. The room wasn't as ostentatious as his own but it was large and comfortable, especially the kingsize bed.

"What can I do for you?" Feral asked courteously, crossing his arms over his chest.

"I wish to satisfy my curiosity about something that has been plaguing me since we shook paws earlier. I know you felt the same thing but like myself, intended to ignore it because of the importance of this conference. However, I am guilty of a small indiscretion." Tanlir admitted softly, moving slowly closer to the tom.

Feral eyed him in confusion. The cheetah was closing in on him and he didn't know whether to move away or stand firm. The handsome Kat's bewitching emerald eyes sent tendrils of heat through him.

"Umm, what indiscretion would that be?" He asked, his voice going low and husky as he reacted to the approaching Kat's unspoken desire.

Tanlir shivered at the sultry tone. "I couldn't resist checking your scent out." He murmured stepping even closer.

Feral's eyes widened and he felt his heart stutter in fear. 'No he couldn't be one of those?' He thought in a panic.

Sensing what was going through the tom's mind as he scented a spike of fear, Tanlir quickly set him at ease.

"Easy, I've no desire for a slave only...to assuage my curiosity. I would never dream of forcing you." He breathed hotly now close enough to caress Feral's arm nearest to him.

The dark tom sucked in a breath as that light touch sent a shiver of fire straight to his groin.

"I'm not so certain this is such a good idea. I...I hadn't intended playing since others might seek me out." He said, annoyed his voice sounded breathless and shaky.

"Oh, I think everyone has the same idea right about now. It is late after all," Tanlir whispered, his eyes dark with lust as he leaned closer and surprised the tom by capturing his mouth in a searing kiss.

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Chapter 2: An Erotic Encounter by ulyferal

His head was spinning as Tanlir deepened the kiss. Groaning hotly, he pressed closer, his arms wrapping around the lean body.

Tanlir growled in his throat at the feel of the broader built Kat pressing against his chest. His tongue demanded entry, sliding across the other's barbed tongue when granted it.

The symphony of pleasurable groans increased.

Ulysses' head was swimming when they came up for air.

"You want me to leave?" Tanlir asked as he nuzzled the dark fur on Ulys' neck.

"Hmmm, noooo..." Was all Ulysses could utter as he sought another heated kiss.

Tanlir was giddy. This Kat was turning him inside out with desire. He couldn't remember when he'd been this hard so quickly from just a kiss. He couldn't wait to feel this body under his.

His nimble fingers quickly began unbuttoning Feral's shirt. Feral was to overwhelmed by the taste and feel of the cheetah to notice.

Tanlir swiftly pulled the shirt off the tom's shoulders, tugging it from the pants and tossing it to the floor before reaching for the t-shirt to do the same.

He pulled from the kiss slowly and made his way down the dark furred chest. The breasts were a little more prominent than was normal for a male which was the second sign after scent that this tom was more than he seemed.

Grasping the right nipple, he greedily began to lick and suck it.

Feral gasped and arched his back at the intense feelings Tanlir was drawing from his body. A throbbing had begun between his legs to join his hardening cock.

"Gods!" He panted hotly, "No ones made me this heated so quickly!"

Tanlir let the nipple slip from his mouth as he leered upward into those now darkened gold eyes.

"I am pleased to know that I'm having that affect on you. It will be a distinct pleasure to hear your screams of completion when I take you!" Tanlir growled with anticipation.

Feral could only shiver at that promise as he felt himself grow wet and swollen.

The cheetah grinned wickedly when he felt the dark toms's body quiver under his paws. He intended to wring all the pleasure he could from this magnificent Kat. He turned his attentions to the left breast while using his nimble fingers to roll the now tautly raised nipple on the right.

Ulysses whole body now tingled wildly from Tanlir's focused attention on his breasts. It was almost too much. The throbbing between his legs picked up the tempo and he was surprised his

partner couldn't hear it.

He wanted to this body that was making him feel so good. Shakily, he reached out and began undressing the cheetah.

When Tanlir desisted his attentions to the breasts, he stood up and stole another hot kiss.

Ulysses had succeeded in removing the tom's upper clothing and was undoing the zipper to Tanlir's pants.

Feeling Ulysses' eagerness, the cheetah quickly divested the big tom of his pants, shoving the dark tom to the bed so that he could remove his boots.

Ulysses' was startled to realize they had moved closer to the bed during all the groping when he was suddenly shoved onto it. He stared up at the lustful emerald eyes that leered down at him as the cheetah removed the last of Feral's clothing then his own.

Finished with his task, Tanlir crawled up the bed covering Ulysses' body with his own. Feral shuddered at the feel of the other's hot body and hard cock as it pressed into his belly.

Tanlir gave the big Kat another deeply passionate kiss as they writhed and rolled together on the bed.

Feral was whimpering with intense need when Tanlir began exploring this unique Kat. Licking a path down the dark furred chest, he delved his tongue in the belly button for a moment before moving on to his destination.

He gave the hard, bobbing cock a passing lick before moving on to the tightening ballsack. He lavished attention on them for a moment by grasping them gently in his paws and rolling them between his fingers.

Ulysses shuddered and moaned in reaction.

Grinning in anticipation, Tanlir released the now tight sack and made for his true target. The rich aroma of heated female filled his nose mixed with the musky scent of male. He shot his tongue out and licked the dripping offering from the swollen clitoris.

Feral gave a wild cry at that incredible sensation. No one had done this to him before and it was unraveling his control. His claws dug into the bedding beneath him as his hips bucked upward.

Growling in pleasure, Tanlir licked and purred then plunged his tongue into the hot channel. He was forced to hold down Ulysses' thighs when the tom screeched in reaction and bucked upward.

Uly's eyes flew wide and he shuddered violently when a shockwave roared through him. He screamed and bucked as he came noisily.

Tanlir grinned down at the limp and panting prize beneath him. He reared up to Uly's mouth and allowed him to taste himself. Feral moaned and felt himself heat up again.

He was amazed at what this tom had managed to pull from him and it seemed he was willing for more 'punishment'. This was what he'd been missing. Wanting to reciprocate, Feral wrapped his arms around the cheetah and surprised him by flipping their positions.

"My turn!" He rumbled heatedly.

Tanlir smiled at him and waited to see what this exquisite tom had in mind.

Ulysses didn't make him wait long. He lavished the same attention Tanlir had given him to the cheetah's nipples eliciting groans of pleasure.

After making the pink buds harden into taut peaks, Uly moved down the well built chest, digging his claws lightly into the soft golden fur as he reached the red and glistening cock that was weeping fluid before his nose. He inhaled the wonderful perfume of a male in rut then swallowed it to the root.

Tanlir shouted in surprise at the feel of that hot mouth closing around him.

Uly suck and licked with his rough tongue until he felt the cheetah shudder and howl as he released. He licked and swallowed every drop before moving up to capture Tanlir's mouth, sharing the bounty with him.

They wrapped themselves around each other and rubbed their furred bodies against each other increasing their pleasure and igniting the fires once more.

Panting for breath, Tanlir growled into Ulysses' ear, "May I take you?"

Feral shivered in fear and anticipation.

"I've never been taken before." He murmured softly, blushing a little.

Tanlir blinked in surprised disbelief, "Never?"

"I've been with no one that I was willing to give it to."

"Ahhh...so have I earned that honor?"

"I..." Uly paused a moment staring into those beautiful eyes. This tom made him feel things he had never dreamed were possible and not just the sex. Something about the cheetah drew him in...made him feel whole. They saw eye to eye on many things and he had truly enjoyed his company at dinner. Was he willing to give himself completely now to this amazing tom? Those eyes waited patiently for his answer and it was that patience that won him over.

"Yes!"

Grinning with triumph, Tanlir readied his prize for their first union. He wanted this to be perfect.

For the next hour he tormented and teased Ulysses. When he finally paused and looked down, the dark tom's eyes were dark with lust, he was panting, writhing and moaning, begging him to finish what he'd started.

A feeling of possession came over Tanlir, 'He's mine...!' He growled to himself then stopped and reared mentally in surprise. He had just met this tom, why was his instincts demanding he make him his mate?

He felt his heart freeze in fear. He was supposed to take a female to mate...to breed the next heir. He would be punished and humiliated if he took a male even if that male was an hermaphrodite. The odds for a male herm of getting pregnant was astronomical...and yet he couldn't resist Ulysses' unique scent, the intelligence he'd shown during the conference, his passion and dry wit, the way they clicked together, and most of all those trusting eyes that waited for him to make him his...all these things pushed at his instinct to complete the bond.

Feral felt his need pushing at him, he wanted this tom more than he dreamed possible. Through the haze of his desire he realized Tanlir had halted and a strange look of concern...or was that fear flashed through his emerald eyes.

"Is something wrong, Tanlir," He asked anxiously.

Tanlir saw the beginning of uncertainty and fear in Ulysses' eyes. He couldn't bear to cause his mate distress. He tossed his concerns into the back recesses of his mind and focused on what his instincts clamored for.

"No my handsome one, just taking a moment to gaze on such a treasure." Tanlir soothed his lover.

Feral wasn't so certain that was why the cheetah had stopped but forgot it when Tanlir set to smoothing over the moment with more erotic kisses.

When the dark tom's begging became intense and his cock was so hard it felt like steel, Tanlir raised Uly's hips and slowly pierced the virgin channel.

Feral groaned at the feel of him pushing in slowly. It felt incredible! He wrapped his arms around Tanlir's body and kissed him hard as the tom continued his slow invasion.

Tanlir paused at the barrier he could feel, he nipped Ulysses lip as he plunged quickly past it, sinking deep inside his new mate.

"By the Goddess! You are soo tight and hot!" He moaned in delirious pleasure as Uly gripped him tight and squeezed.

"Ohhhh, I feel complete for the first time. You fill me up!" Ulysses mewed pantingly.

They clung together for several moments, savoring the incredible feeling of their first union. Then, growling hotly, Tanlir began to move, slowly quickening his pace as they got more and more heated. His mate's arms and legs wrapped themselves tightly around his torso as if he could pull his soul into his body.

His head felt like it was flying away, the tension built in his body to a pitch he had never attained before. He felt Tanlir get harder and bigger in some way and he couldn't hold out any longer. He screamed as waves of tingling pleasure flashed through him, from his toes to head.

He trembled and shook as Tanlir continued to pound into him without mercy. Feral whimpered then moaned hotly as the cheetah brought him again and again but still didn't release. Ulysses was stunned by his multiple orgasms, he'd never experienced that before.

As he got closer to release, Tanlir felt the bonding instinct within him reach out to Ulysses' soul. Feral felt a warm presence in his mind that wrapped him a blanket of love and joy for just a moment making his heart soar then it was lost within the sensation of a final, shattering orgasm that broke over both of them and Tanlir's seed filled him.

They collapsed in a limp heap, lungs heaving for breath, hearts pounding a rapid tattoo.

They fell asleep cradled in each others arms for several hours than woke with renewed vigor.

Tanlir took Ulysses many more times before they switched places. The feel of that large cock within his tight channel had been a wild and intense experience. He couldn't remember feeling so possessed before and the orgasm was intense. When they prepared to switch, Tanlir was in for another surprise.

"You haven't allowed a male to have you this way either?" Tanlir had asked in stunned disbelief.

"No, I've been the aggressor in all my sexual contacts." Ulysses said with a shrug.

Tanlir laughed. "That I can believe, but are you sure you want me that way too?"

"You complete me! I don't know why I know that but it's true nonetheless. I want you to have all of me as I have had all of you." Ulysses said solemnly.

The cheetah just shook his head, he knew why Ulysses felt that way but was afraid to break the moment by telling his new mate. The problems this would cause he refused to think about right now.

Taking time and care, he prepared his virgin lover for his invasion. It was even tighter than Uly's female channel.

Despite Tanlir's care, Feral felt some pain but when the cheetah hit that special place within, his head felt it would explode. He went wild under Tanlir and the ride was intense. They roared their completion at the same time.

"Are you alright?" Tanlir asked gently as he slid free and pulled them to their sides.

"Oh yes, fantastic," Ulysses slurred happily, his body quivering with after shocks.

The cheetah shook his head and tenderly nuzzled and licked Uly's face and neck. It had been a crazy ride and he had been taken off guard by Uly's reaction.

"How about a nice hot bath? You're going to be sore and I wouldn't want you to be in too much pain." Tanlir suggested.

"Hmmm, sounds wonderful," His sated mate murmured sleepily.

Chuckling at the response, Tanlir pulled reluctantly away from his mate's hot body and made for the bathroom. The tub took a little while to fill and when he returned to collect the tom, Uly was asleep. Shaking his head, he playfully shook the tom awake.

"Hmm...wha...?" Was the incoherent response.

"Come on love, the bath awaits." He said in amusement.

Feral blinked awake and pushed himself to a seated position. Tanlir leaned down and kissed him hotly.

Ulysses sighed with pleasure and finally slid off the bed to his feet. With Tanlir's arm around his waist they walked to the bathroom.

The hot water felt wonderful as he was just beginning to feel how sore his body was but he didn't regret any of it. Tanlir slid into the tub behind him and made him rest his head against his chest.

They lay enjoying the heat and quiet for some time. Feral nearly fell asleep again as did Tanlir.

"Guess we better get out...the water's getting cold." He sighed regretfully.

The cheetah gave him a kiss in agreement and they both carefully climbed out and dried off under the dryer together.

Feral sighed as he slipped into bed again and accepted the bottle of water Tanlir had fetched from the mini fridge in the room.

They fell asleep with Tanlir spooning Ulysses till morning.

When he woke, Ulysses was a little surprised to see Tanlir had stayed. Pleased, he poked the cheetah in the side. A sleepy, emerald eye opened to stare at him. A smile soon followed and an arm snaked up and pulled the dark tom down for a good morning kiss.

Feral allowed the kiss to go on for a bit then pulled back with a sigh. "We have to get up!" He said playfully shoving Tanlir back. The cheetah sighed as well and followed his mate to the bathroom.

Though they were in a bit of a hurry and he was still a little sore from the night's activities, he couldn't resist Tanlir's hint when he prodded him from behind in the shower with his morning erection.

"Hmm, seems someone is eager." He purred reaching for the soap.

"You keep me hot and bothered just being near you." Tanlir rumbled, trailing a paw down the tom's wet chest to the vee between his legs. He caressed the inner thighs making Ulysses moan and spread his legs. He tugged on the emerging cock a moment before using his other paw to slide down between Uly's rear and to his clitoris.

Feral nearly jumped to his toes at that sensual touch then moaned hotly as Tanlir teased him.

Taking some soap as well, Tanlir used it to make the area between Uly's legs slick increasing the erotic sensation his mate was feeling. Not able to wait any longer, he slipped into the waiting female channel.

They groaned in unison as Tanlir buried himself to the hilt then began a quick thrusting motion. His soaped covered paws continued to caress and tease Feral's other genitals. The fire built quickly and they came in a volley of shouts that echoed around them.

Tanlir leaned against Ulysses who was pressed up against the shower wall to retain his feet. His legs felt like jelly.

'Goddess, he is so hot! I can't keep my paws off him.' He thought blearily.

All things must come to an end and the conference was due to start again within an hour, so reluctantly, he released his mate, giving him a last kiss.

Feral sighed in regret but knew they had to get going so he rinsed and dried quickly. While he was getting dressed, Tanlir left for his room to do the same. They would meet in the dining room for breakfast in a little while.

While he dressed, Feral's soreness, in places he'd never used before, reminded him of last night. He would miss the cheetah once the conference was over and he would never forget him.

As Tanlir hurriedly got dressed, his mind worked furiously. 'How was he going to explain this at home?' He thought in a panic. The bond was unmistakably there. He couldn't deny it. He hadn't told Ulysses about it either. He didn't want the Kat to become upset just yet but he did have to inform him they were bonded for life.

Lifemating was rare and because of that, treasured among his people. Unfortunately, because his lifemate was male, no one was going to be happy. He just didn't know what he was going to do.

Goddess, so many problems that he had pushed to the back of his mind now clamored for his attention to be dealt with. Feral could not and would not leave Megakat City. Tanlir had no legitimate reason to be here unless his father picked him to man the proposed Embassy planned for here. He was still expected to mate a female and breed. Should he just take a mistress to satisfy that? No. The one who bore the heir had the right to be princess. His head ached with all the things the night's work had precipitated but he wouldn't change anything. He knew in his heart this was his lifemate and he would just have to find a way to be with him.

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Chapter 3: The Proposal and the bond by ulyferal

When he reached the dining room some ten minutes later, he didn't see Tanlir so he went to fill his plate and took a table near the windows again.

Tanlir wandered in followed by his guards. He looked around and found Ulysses. Smiling, he went to fill a plate.

"Well good morning, handsome. You look like you had some luck after all last night." Came the sultry voice of Shenar.

He turned his head and saw that she was just behind him and more conference attendees were lining up behind her.

"Good morning Shenar. Yes I did as a matter of fact . . . you?" He asked warmly as he moved down the table.

"I did indeed." She said brightly. "I hope Ulysses is able to win over the last few hold outs today."

"So do I." Tanlir agreed fervently. "Care to join me with Ulysses?" He asked politely as he moved away.

"Sure, be right there." She said as she continued down the table.

He paused to pick up a glass of milk then wended his way through the tables to where Ulysses was sitting. His guards took a table a short distance away.

The Commander looked up and smiled when Tanlir put his tray down, pulled a chair out next to him and plopped down.

"I'm famished." The cheetah said digging in immediately.

Feral chuckled softly and murmured, "Gee, I wonder why?"

Tanlir leered at him briefly before returning his attention to his food.

"Hello all," Shenar sang out as she put her tray down and pulled out a chair across from Tanlir.

"Good morning Shenar." Feral said warmly.

"I was just telling Tanlir that I hope you win over the last of the hold outs today but even if you don't, I think you've got nearly all parts of the planet covered. The hold outs are from very small or remote areas so it might not hurt the coalition that much for them to abstain." She said seriously as she dug into her food.

"I think you're right Shenar. We'll know for certain when the vote is taken this afternoon." Feral said, agreeing with her assessment.

Before long others that had been in their discussion group last night began to join them at their table and at nearby ones. Soon the air was filled with lively conversation.

Very shortly after, everyone drifted to the meeting room. Feral took the small stage again and opened the meeting. After covering yesterdays salient points, he opened it to discussion.

For the next few hours everyone, who needed or wanted to, stated their position. At one point, a hot debate took place between two vociferous opponents. To his surprise, one of them was Shenar and the other was Admiral Tyku. They battled it out for more than forty-five minutes with Shenar winning it.

Grinning in triumph, she joined them for a light lunch. Everyone was pleased with the outcome of

the debate and felt the vote later would be nearly ninety percent for the coalition.

The meeting was to start again by two that afternoon giving attendees time to see a little of the city and shop before the final vote and their departure the next day. All would take away a packet with the proposed contract for each government to review.

With plenty of time before returning to the conference, Tanlir pulled Ulysses aside before he could leave the building. Feral had intended checking out and going to his office for a little before returning but Tanlir had other ideas.

"Go ahead and check out Ulysses then come to my suite. I'd like a little more time with you if you're willing." He said softly pressing close so no one would overhear him.

Feral felt his body heat up in anticipation but was torn on his decision. He really should check in with his office but the enticement of spending more time with Tanlir before he left the next day was almost overwhelming.

"I really should check in at the office, Tanlir." He said hesitantly. "Too many things happen here in the blink of an eye and I have to stay on top of it."

"I heard that about this city. So it's true? The weird tales I've heard?" The cheetah asked in concern.

"I'm afraid so. It keeps me constantly on alert." Feral admitted heavily.

"Then I would like to see your headquarters." Tanlir said then whispered in Uly's ear, "Especially if it allows me to be close to you for a little longer."

Feral blushed at that obvious flirtation. "Well, if you really want to." He agreed reluctantly.

"Perfect! Then let's get you checked out!" Tanlir said grinning as he followed Feral back to the tom's room so he could gather the few things he'd brought, then to the front desk for checkout.

Very quickly they were on their way in Feral's hummer. Tanlir's guards weren't happy about this side trip and were tense the whole time except when they were in Enforcer Headquarters. They felt Tanlir was safe here so spent the time studying the way this military facility was run compared to theirs while keeping an eye on their charge.

Tanlir was fascinated with the large operation and the view from Ulysses office. Before he could comment on it though an alert was sounded.

The Sergeant burst into his office. "Commander, the Metallikats have broken into the Agracite Processing Plant. No one seems to know what they want there but they are holding off the security force." He reported quickly.

"Blast those metallic menaces. Have my chopper prepared!" Feral barked. The Sergeant nodded and left to follow orders. Feral made for the door, stopping to put on his coat. He turned to Tanlir. "Stay here. I'll be back as soon as I can."

"Let me come with you . . ." Tanlir started to demand.

"No! This isn't your city and you're not familiar with what we have to do. Besides, I haven't missed that you are somehow important enough to warrant guards and I don't want whoever set them on you to be angry at me for endangering your life." Feral said flatly then hurried out the door before Tanlir could argue with him.

Tanlir was taut with anger and fear. His mate was not some helpless she-kat and had been fighting the problems of his city for some years but that knowledge didn't help him overcome his

need to protect his mate. Hissing irritably he began to pace and stare out the windows at the choppers that lifted into the air and headed west.

The fight at the Agracite Plant turned into a melee. The Metallikats had trashed half the plant looking for something. They had some pretty potent new weapons attached to their robot arms and were systematically wiping out his enforcers and choppers. His own chopper was shot down just as the SWAT Kats arrived to knock the metal pair on their collective asses.

Feral ached everywhere and discovered he was bleeding from a small scalp wound on his forehead. He was just lucky he hadn't broken anything. His chopper had managed to land pancake style through the roof of the damaged plant and ended up tilted at a crazy angle on top of an ore processing machine. He and the pilot couldn't move or the chopper would crash nastily to the floor below.

The SWAT Kats had seen his predicament. They quickly dispatched the Metallikats using some new tech of their own which managed to short circuit the pair leaving their now mindless bodies to crash to the ground. They then moved the Turbokat to hover over Feral's damaged chopper. Moments later, Razor rappelled down to them.

"Ready to get out of this dead bird, Commander?" Razor asked with a smirk, hanging just above the broken chopper canopy.

"Very funny. Take the pilot first, SWAT Kat." Feral growled unhappily.

"I will but you are both putting a harness on before I start pulling anybody out of there." Razor said firmly then passed harnesses down to each Kat and carefully got them cinched on.

"Okay T-Bone, number one coming up. Slowly buddy!" The cinnamon tom ordered his partner overhead.

"Roger, steady as she goes." His partner responded.

The pilot was slowly winched upward from the cockpit. A few minutes later the winch returned and Razor hooked up Feral.

"Because you're heavier, Commander, I expect the chopper to tip. Pull your legs up to your chest quickly once you clear the canopy." Razor warned. "Alright T-Bone, next one up."

Feral felt himself gradually rise from his seat and at that same moment the chopper shifted once his weight lifted off.

Razor noted the shift. "T-Bone speed up the winch, the chopper is going!" He shouted.

Feral felt himself moving faster into the air and immediately pulled his legs up just in time as the chopper slipped the rest of the way and fell to hit the floor with a loud crash. Smoke and dust plumed into the air but Feral was already nearly inside the Turbokat with Razor right beside him.

Feral swallowed hard and his heart stuttered. That had been really close. He took a deep breath and let it out slowly as he waited to be lowered after his pilot to the ground outside the plant.

'Well, I survived another near miss. Man I'm surprised I haven't had a heart attack by now.' Feral sighed to himself.

The SWAT Kats took off after performing their rescue mission and Feral was left with the mess to clean up. This time he didn't grumble too much since he was alive to be disgruntled in the first place. It took another hour before he could return to headquarters. He checked the time and groaned. He barely had time to clean up before going back to the conference.

Sighing tiredly, he went to his office and was set upon by Tanlir who looked him over worriedly.

"Are you alright?" He demanded searching his mate's body with his paws.

Blinking in surprise, Feral was a bit taken aback and wasn't able to answer right away. When Tanlir stared at him still waiting for an answer, he shook himself.

"I'm beat up and bruised but otherwise fine. Let me get cleaned up. We have to be back at the conference in twenty minutes." He said and made for his bathroom before Tanlir could say anything more.

As he quickly washed up, his mind processed the puzzling behavior of Tanlir. 'Why was he so upset? He doesn't know me that well and though we spent a wonderful night together that doesn't make him anything more than a fling.' He thought in confusion. Tanlir acted as if they were lovers or mates.

Now dressed in a clean uniform and the cut on his forehead cleaned and bandaged, he stepped out of the bathroom and headed for the coatrack and another, more clean, coat.

Tanlir was tight lipped as they made their way out of Headquarters and got into his hummer. As he drove, he glanced out of the corner of his eye at the cheetah. Tanlir was stiff and angry but said nothing. Feral had a feeling he was going to hear it later.

Sighing inwardly, he parked at the hotel. They piled out and headed inside. They were the last to arrive as he made for the stage.

"Your pardon for my lateness. An emergency drew me away. Now, we are gathered to vote on the proposal to create a coalition for the protection of the planet from possible future alien invasions. When I call your name, please say yea or nay to the proposal." Feral said.

More than an hour later the conference was over. Many joined together for a final meal and exchange of information and phone numbers.

"Congratulations, Ulysses on the successful outcome of your proposal." Shenar said with a huge smile at dinner.

"Thank you, Shenar. I think we all won and it's because of you, Tanlir and others firm support that the measure went through at all. Thank you all." Feral said, offering a toast to everyone. They toasted back.

After everyone said their farewells, Tanlir tugged at Feral and insisted, silently, he come to his room.

Feral sighed and didn't resist. The walk to the elevators then to the penthouse room was made in uncomfortable silence.

As soon as the door closed behind them in the bedroom suite, his guards were in the living area, Tanlir turned to his mate. He wanted to shout at the Kat but knew that was wrong. Feral hadn't done anything wrong, only doing his job. What Feral didn't know was Tanlir had made one of his guards tag along and find out what was happening. When Tanlir received his report, he was white faced with shock and fear at how close he nearly lost his new mate. Since that moment, he'd been trying to find a way to explain his consternation and worry without losing his temper.

Finally, he took in a deep breath and let it out slowly.

"Ulysses, I had one of my guards follow you so I know what nearly happened. My heart nearly failed when I heard how close you came to death. Don't get me wrong! I know our jobs are dangerous but yours is infinitely more so. I was terrified for you and nothing I do will change how I

feel about that." Tanlir said tightly.

"But, why do you feel so strongly about me? We've only just met and I can understand being concerned but you're literally beside yourself." Feral said voicing his confusion.

Tanlir sighed. "I'm sorry, love. I really should have told you from the beginning but the strength of our attraction to each other and then our mating was so intense I simply couldn't refuse the desire . . . no the desperate need . . . to bond with you. A lifemate is a precious thing in our land and I never dreamed of finding such a one until I met you. You set off a firestorm in me and my bonding instinct recognized you as the other half of my soul and joined you with me." Tanlir tried to explain.

Feral frowned. 'What was he saying? Bonded? Lifemated?' He thought in utter confusion.

Seeing Feral's face looking bewildered and confused didn't help Tanlir's state of mind. He tried again.

"Ulysses what did you feel when we mated that first time?" He asked.

"Uh . . . besides it feeling wonderful?...Um . . . well, I thought I felt as if a warm blanket had wrapped itself around me with love and a strong feeling of security then it was gone. I wasn't certain if it had really happened." Feral said slowly remembering that incredible moment.

"That was the bond. My soul reached for yours and bound us together. We are lifemated." Tanlir said.

Feral's mouth dropped as he finally began to grasp what the cheetah was saying. "We're mated for life?" He repeated, not really sure he was hearing this right.

"Yes!"

"Shit!"

"My love?" Tanlir asked, his turn to be surprised at his mate's reaction.

"I had never planned to mate or marry! My job is far too dangerous! Besides I can't leave Megakat City. What have you done?" Feral said gradually overcoming shock and getting angry.

"Ulysses! I know this is a shock and there are problems we need to solve but that is no cause to get angry and upset. I have no intention of asking you to leave the city you protect so well. I will have to find a way to come to you." Tanlir insisted.

Feral stood there not knowing whether he should still be angry or let it go and accept it.

Tanlir moved close, slowly caressed his mate's arms and leaned his face against the other's cheek and nuzzled.

Feral closed his eyes and sighed. This close to him, Feral could now feel a comforting warmth and sense of well being. This must be the bond. What a strange feeling to know he wasn't alone anymore.

They stood there close, saying nothing, just breathing in each other's essence.

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Chapter 4: The secret must be kept by ulyferal

"Why don't we get comfortable?" Tanlir suggested, not wanting to get into explanations just yet and the proximity of his mate was driving him insane with lust.

Feral eyed him suspiciously but complied. He stripped off his clothes meticulously, hanging his suit up and tossing his under things on a nearby chair.

Tanlir had taken his clothes more quickly and was already naked and sitting on the bed. He watched his mate take his time undressing. It made him hot and hungry as each piece was taken off.

Feral turned to face Tanlir and felt his heart jump at the look he was giving him. Tanlir looked like Feral was a delicious desert and he was hungry. The dark tom immediately felt himself get wet and hot.

Not taking his eyes off Tanlir's face, Feral walked slowly toward the cheetah, unconsciously swaying his hips. As soon as he was within reach of the seated tom, Tanlir immediately wrapped his arms around Feral's waist and nuzzled the dark tom's belly making him shiver and moan. Tanlir's fingers were kneading the twin globes of the bigger Kat's ass.

Talking was obviously not going to be happening just yet as Tanlir pulled his mate to the bed and made hot and intense love to him. It was rough and fierce, ending in twin roars of completion.

After catching their breaths, Feral rolled to his side, put his head on a raised palm and studied his mate.

"Not that the diversion wasn't fun, but I still want my explanation." He said firmly, brooking no more evasions.

Tanlir sighed, rolling to his side and facing his mate. 'How do you tell your mate he wouldn't be accepted by your father?' He thought bitterly. It wasn't Ulysses' fault. He couldn't set him aside . . . they were lifemates . . . Goddess what a mess.

Feral didn't think Tanlir was being deceitful or was incompetent. He would hope the rank his mate had attained was earned and not just given to him. His senses and the time he'd spent with the cheetah told him this was a very intelligent and forthright Kat. He suspected the problem lay with his country's traditions and the fact he required guards. He decided to nudge the cheetah a little.

"Perhaps you could tell me why you require guards? All the other leaders had some of their officers along and though they were watching for any danger to their superior, they were involved in the conference along side their leaders. Yours were plainly bodyguards and here for that express purpose only." Feral said plainly, raising an eyebrow questioningly.

Tanlir grimaced. 'Of course his mate would spot that immediately.' He thought unhappily. No one else had remarked on it but then he suspected a few of the leaders knew what he was in the first place.

"I'm one of six princes. My father is King Geoffrey Roender." He said heavily.

Feral's eyes widened in mild surprise. "So I'm mated to a Prince?" He said a bit bemused.

"Yes, but there's a major problem." Tanlir said, sitting up and rubbing his neck in distress.

"That I guessed already. So what is it?"

"Uhm . . . Well, you see, my brothers and I are in competition for the throne. My father decreed that the first to breed an heir will be next in line for the throne. Then each one after that in order of who successfully sires a kit. A perfect safety net for our country. But, so far, none has found mates or bred. I'm now the first but . . .", " He halted and swallowed, anguish spreading across his face. "Mating a male is forbidden. I face severe punishment and humiliation once it's known." He finished with his head drooping, staring bleakly at the bedding beneath him.

Feral went very still. 'Gods! What a mess. He takes me without my knowledge and says we're lifemated but he isn't allowed to present me to his father. Isn't this grand?' He thought bitterly.

"Wonderful mess we're in. Did you have a solution of how to solve it?" He finally said in irritation as he sat up too.

Tanlir blanched at his mate's acerbic tone. "No, actually. It's still a shock to me that I'm lifemated to a male." He said

"I sympathize!" Feral said sarcastically.

Wincing, the cheetah spread his paws in helpless supplication. "Please, my love. I cannot be with another. You are the one for me . . . I know this . . . I just . . . I don't know what to do."

Feral sighed and let his anger go. "You know, I've heard you call me 'my love' a few times now. I was taken aback when I heard you say it the first time and couldn't understand why you would call me that endearment when I was, supposedly, a temporary fling. Guess I know now what you think of me." He reached out and pulled Tanlir to him. He wrapped his arms around him and nuzzled his face.

"Okay, I suggest for now we let it sit and say nothing. You go home and give your father the proposal. See what happens with that first. Our personal problem is not as important as that is right now . . . at least to me. Once that is taken care of then we'll see what happens next. Alright?" Feral asked, laying out the only solution available at the moment.

Tanlir sighed and nodded. Ulysses suggestion was the best option right now but he would miss his mate terribly. Since it could be a while before he could come back to Megakat City, he intended to make the most of his last night.

"You're right, my love. That is the best solution for the present situation. The secret must be kept, at least for now. I prefer to indulge in something more pleasant and leave that be. If I'm not going to see you for a while, I want to spend every last moment with you I can." He said huskily.

Smiling warmly, Feral said invitingly, "Now that is a decision I can easily agree to."

The night was filled with times of desperate need, high intensity, some roughness, and moments of tenderness. Every part of each other was explored. Resting periods were spent learning more about each others past, wants, needs, hopes and dreams.

Morning found them entwined and waking to make slow and tender love before reluctantly parting. They couldn't risk any show of affection so Feral had to say farewell now. Their final kiss was long and lingering but finally they had to part. With a last sad glance, Feral slipped from the room and left for his apartment.

Feral walked into Enforcer Headquarters some two hours late. No one dared to comment when they saw the closed and tight expression on his face as he made for his office.

Shoving aside the ache he was only just beginning to feel, he dug into the pile of work waiting for him.

On a flight somewhere over the ocean . . .

Tanlir stared moodily out the plane window. He had had to extract a promise of secrecy from his personal guards on the drive to the airport. They weren't happy about it but pledged their silence.

Jeetter, his long time guard, dared to object before giving their pledge. "Your highness, this is highly irregular. Why would you require us to keep secret your tryst with Commander Feral. Dalliance with a male is allowed. Was there something more about it that could cause you

serious trouble?" He asked in concern.

"I'm afraid there is but I won't say why. I don't want to put you in a compromising situation. What you don't know can't be forced from you by an order from my father. I just prefer the incident with Feral not be spoken of at all." Tanlir explained.

"Very well, your highness. No word of it will be said by us." Jeetter said unhappily.

Now, as they were winging their way home, he needed to push his unhappiness to the back of his mind and smooth his features. His brothers would know immediately that something was up if he arrived with his heart on his sleeve for all to see. His focus must be on the proposal and nothing else if he was to hide his secret pain successfully from his family. The ache in his heart had to remain hidden completely.

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Chapter 5: Missing You by ulyferal

Four hours later, his jet was setting down at the small airport in the Kingdom of Asszeria. Tanlir yawned and deplaned. His guards handed him off to the freshly arrived ones aboard the waiting limosine.

He climbed aboard and was immediately set upon by his two youngest brothers.

"Hi Lir, how was the trip?" Shane asked excitedly.

"Yeah, tell us about Megakat City? Is it as weird as the stories we hear about it?" Genrey asked just as eagerly.

Tanlir smiled indulgently. He spent the trip to the palace answering his brothers myriad of questions. They didn't care about the proposal only the excitement of hearing about another country.

All of them were kept on a tight leash and weren't allowed to travel too far from their country. This trip had been a first for one of them and the others would be hounding him for all the details.

Their father had planned for his sons to take charge of a handful of embassies he planned to install in various major cities around the world. This was to give his sons experience in handling the affairs of their Kingdom while conducting business in another country. He was attempting to move his rather insular country into the bigger world community. This would be the first step.

It was late in the day and he was in time for dinner but not a formal briefing. He would have to make an appointment with his father's Seneschal for the next day. He was pummeled and harassed good naturedly by his other brothers as he walked to the dining room.

They quickly ceased once they walked into the dining room, becoming the proper princes they were, moving with grace and elegant manners to their seats. They stood by their chairs and awaited their father and mother's arrival. Moments later, the King and Queen stepped into the room. The King escorted his mate to her seat, a servant pulling her chair out so that she might sit and doing the same for the King.

Once the royal pair was seated, the rest of the household took theirs. The huge dining room table was surrounded by all the relations that lived in the castle. The princes sat three to each side of their parents then various grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins finished out the grouping.

Noise was sedate as was proper in a royal household. Polite conversation murmured providing a low hum to the air as the meal progressed. When desert was served, the King called to Tanlir.

"My son, welcome home. I trust your trip was an interesting one?" He asked warmly.

"Oh yes, father. Though there wasn't much time to see the city properly, what I did get to see was amazing." Tanlir reported dutifully.

"Tell us a little about this grand city, son," His mother asked with a bright smile.

Tanlir related all that he'd seen of Megakat City and answered all their questions as best he could. Everyone was stunned to learn that some of the stories they had heard were true after all. Conversation was very animated as everyone discussed their favorite story with the added information Tanlir had brought them.

Dinner ended on that interesting note. After his parents departure, Tanlir quickly escaped before his relatives could snag him and raced for his quarters. Thankfully, ones quarters were inviolate. No one was allowed to enter without permission and this was strictly adhered to.

In a place where one's every move was watched by security for their safety and by the curious public, there was a great need for privacy. So it made sense that the right to it was guarded jealously.

Tanlir sighed in relief when he made it to his sanctuary. His luggage was already unpacked and put away except for the trinkets he'd collected which were now on his desk in his study. His briefcase was there as well. Each brother had large quarters that included, a bedroom with sitting area and large bathroom, dressing room, living/entertaining space, and office.

It was nice to be home but his heart now ached for his new mate. Suddenly feeling depressed, he went to the large bay window of his study.

His large wood desk was in a corner away from the window but facing it. Many built-in bookcases lined the walls and an elegant cabinet with many beautiful and fanciful treasures displayed within was on the other side of the window. The huge window boasted a padded seat where he could sprawl and read when the mood struck him. He was an amateur artist and would spend his odd free moments drawing with the sun providing his only light as he sketched.

He sat down, crossed his arm over his chest and leaned against the window as he looked out into the gathering darkness. In the light of day, his home was a beauty to behold. The castle was the centerpiece, more than two centuries old, it stood at the base of a huge mountain that was part of a ring of mountains that protected the kingdom. It's walls and many ramparts were a sandstone color and tended to glitter in the sun. The kingdom itself was hidden by a huge forest canopy except for the many miles of fields at one end for agriculture and the airport.

Even though the community was nearly as modern as Megakat City, it had been kept pristine. Unlike the big city he'd visited with it's skyscrapers, highways, noisy city traffic, large population, factories, etc., his home still used horses with only a small legion of energy efficient vehicles that were used for moving supplies and other heavy things. It's pace was quieter, more sedate. They lived within the forest not outside it and they wouldn't dream of cutting it down. It was part of their defense as well as for its serenity. The most glaring bit of modernization was the airport but that was all. The power needed to run the city was produced by a huge waterfall at the far end of the valley with the power plant hidden in the mountain itself.

Tanlir wished his mate could see this. He knew it would soothe his mate's stress from the hectic life he lived in such a busy and dangerous city. Thinking of Ulysses made the pain in his heart worse. He hadn't realized just how much he would miss him and it had only been hours. What would days, weeks, even months, feel like? He shuddered at the thought of it. Shaking himself, he pulled away from the window and went to his desk to make a call. His father's seneschal told him that the council would be meeting at ten the next morning to discuss the proposal he had brought back. He thanked the Kat and hung up.

Yawning, he headed for his bathroom. A hot shower would be good right now and hopefully he

would be able to sleep. He needed to be fresh for the meeting in the morning.

In a noisy city miles away...

Feral sighed tirededly as he prepared a simple meal for himself in his apartment. Night was falling as he ate it watching a little TV. He tidied up his living space, did the dishes and tossed a batch of laundry in the washer that he'd put in the dryer in the morning, then made his way to bed.

Instead of falling right to sleep, he tossed and turned restlessly. Angry at himself, he climbed back out and walked through his darkened apartment to the balcony door in his living room.

Standing just inside the open door, he inhaled the cool night air and stared with hooded eyes over the brightly lit city scape. He'd be surprised if he'd known Tanlir was doing the same in his far away kingdom. They stared at the same rising moon and wished for each others company.

Feral couldn't believe he was feeling so bereft. Tanlir hadn't been gone that long but it still felt like much longer. He shifted restlessly. Tanlir could be gone months before he was allowed back here, he couldn't moon about it all that time. He had too much on his plate to be feeling miserable. He had to put this new feeling aside or it would distract him at a dangerous moment.

Well that was fine and dandy when he was at work but what about now when everything was quiet and he was supposed to be getting sleep? He snorted at himself but couldn't shake the very real desire to be embraced by those warm arms and feel his caresses. He'd been alone for soo long and now he wasn't, in his heart and mind anyway, his body was another matter. It begged for its mate.

'Well you aren't going to get it,' He admonished himself, firmly, closing the balcony door and going back to bed.

Unfortunately, even though he might order himself to put this problem aside, his sleeping mind had other ideas as it reached for its mate and made love in the world of his dreams.

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Chapter 6: Time passes whether we like or not by ulyferal

Next morning, Tanlir dressed in a dark blue suit and left his quarters for the council chambers. His brother, Cymric came down the hall followed by Torr and Vito. They smiled at their brother then went on in ahead of him while he waited to be announced. His brothers were not allowed to miss any counsel sessions so he knew they should all be in their seats and waiting for his report.

He waited only another ten minutes before Seneschal Camden opened the door and gestured him in. Tanlir nodded politely then strode into the large chamber. His father had chosen to modernize the old council system where they all sat in tiers on the wall and looked down at a speaker in the middle of the floor. It had been an intimidating method and he'd disliked it. So one of his first acts as King was to have the room completely revamped.

Now there was a beautiful skylight in the ceiling letting in natural light that shone down on the massive wood table with heavy chairs, well padded for long periods of sitting. Each seat had a mike so no one would have to shout. Behind the King's seat was a pull down screen. Modern equipment provided excellent audiovisual graphics. The information branch kept the King up to date with all the business of running the kingdom and what was going on around the world.

It looked like nothing more than a very progressive business meeting room found in any modern city and that was what King Roender had wanted. Tanlir walked in and moved to the small lectern set just behind and to one side of the King's chair. He gestured for the clerk to hand out copies he'd made of the proposal. He waited patiently as this was done and while the council read it.

He remained quiet, standing at ease with his paws clasped behind his back. After twenty minutes the King spoke.

"Has everyone finished?" He asked. After receiving nods from around the table, turned to his son. "Alright Tanlir let's hear it!"

Tanlir nodded and gave his take on the proposal, the discussions that went on, his personal view on its merits and what the general consensus had been.

"So you see, your majesty, the proposal is quite sound and is definitely something we should agree to." Tanlir said in conclusion then waited for the questions.

Not everyone felt the same way and the next few hours were spent discussing and arguing about it. Tanlir was relieved when the vote was taken and a nearly unanimous agreement was reached to join the Coalition for the Protection of the Planet from Alien Attack.

His father had a final word for him as Tanlir went to take his seat for the rest of the session.

"Excellent work, Tanlir. Once we've ironed out all the particulars of our part of the agreement, you will return to Megakat City to present it to Commander Feral. That will be in about a months time. This will give the other countries time to complete their agreements so that when you return it will be with the new Coalition guidelines." His father said warmly.

"Thank you, your majesty, for having such confidence in me and I look forward to the return trip to this fascinating city." Tanlir said politely while inwardly he was both sad and elated. Sad because he had to wait a month but elated he **would** see his mate again.

He didn't realize just how wearing on his spirit the month long wait would be.

Megakat City...three weeks later...

Feral was grateful he had been extremely busy over the past few weeks. The longer he was parted from Tanlir the more moody he'd become.

Today, he had been plowing through the pile of recent reports from a blitz of omega attacks. It didn't help that he had been feeling a bit under the weather for the past few days either.

Just as he was about to pick up the first of the reports, his phone rang. He snaked his arm out and grabbed it.

"Feral" He said distractedly.

"Commander Feral...Ms. Briggs. Mayor Manx wishes to see you in his office immediately." Ms Briggs said also sounding distracted.

"Now?" He asked in disbelief as he look at his desk in dismay.

"Yes now! And I know what you're thinking, I've a desk full of work too so let's make this quick so we both can get some work done today." She said actually commiserating with him. Her work had increased with all the damage reports she had to address so she could really understand his tone of irritation.

He was mildly taken aback by the mutual understanding in her voice. It deflated some of his anger.

"I'll be right there." He sighed then hung up. He gave his desk one last look of resignation before going to retrieve his coat and locking his door. Moving briskly, he prevented anyone from stopping him as he rushed through the main lobby and out to his sedan.

Only ten minutes later, he arrived at city hall. Lacking out at finding his parking spot not being usurped by some self important council member like last time, he jumped out of his sedan and dashed up the stairs. He quickly caught an elevator and was striding down the hall to the Mayor's office in minutes.

He would have been really aggravated if he saw the Mayor putting with his golf club in his office but fortunately, the Mayor was actually at his desk going over a file. The rest of his desk was pristine.

Feral mentally shook his head, 'Yeah, all the work will be on Ms. Brigg's desk. Don't have to see it to know it probably looks like mine.' He thought in disgust as he stepped into the office and walked up to the portly Kat's desk.

"What was so important you had to interrupt my desk full of work?" He growled, not feeling particularly civil.

Mayor Manx frowned at him but didn't react to the sour tone of his Chief Enforcer.

"I've just received confirmation from King Roender of Asszeria that he is going to place an embassy here in our fair citae. Callie has already picked some likely places that could meet their exacting criteria for a residence. What I want you to do is to go to each of these and using your expertise, determine which of them meets the stringent security needs they require. Give me at least three choices. I need this done immediately. The King intends on sending his son here to deliver their agreement on your Coalition and to check the possible residence in about a week." He said pompously.

Feral groaned inwardly on the amount of time this was going to take but then realized the Mayor had said one of the sons was coming.

"Which son is coming?" He asked, keeping his voice bland.

"Uhm...which one? How many are there?" The Mayor asked in surprise.

"Six!"

"Really? Oh, well...let me see here..." Manx sifted through the papers and finally stopped at one. "Says here Prince Tanlir."

Feral's heart soared, 'Oh yes!' He wanted to jump for joy but kept himself calm and professional as he answered, "He was the one who was here for the conference. No problem. I'll get this done as soon as I can. That is if the omegas will leave us alone for a bit." He said flatly.

"Yes, I truly hope so too. Wouldn't do to have those pesky criminals around when the Prince visits." The Mayor said in concern.

Feral just nodded, took the folder the Mayor gave him and quickly left city hall.

Only when he was safely in his car and driving back to Enforcer Headquarters did he allow himself to smile broadly. 'Tanlir was coming!' He thought joyfully to himself. Gods! It was ridiculous just how much he looked forward to seeing his mate again. 'Maybe he will be assigned to the embassy!' He thought excitedly. 'I know that's wishful thinking but, Gods! I hope so!'

After spending a few hours getting the worst of his paper backlog done, he went off to check the buildings Ms. Briggs had picked out.

The first he wrote off immediately. The location was terrible and in a dangerous neighborhood. The next was too remote. It was located outside the city limits making conducting business more difficult though security would be less of a problem. The third was far too old and too easy to

break into. It would be too costly to repair and install the required security systems.

He sighed. It was getting late and night was near. He would have to look at the last four on the list tomorrow. He went home and got some much needed rest. Sleep came easier with the knowledge his mate would be coming back soon.

The next day was a repeat of the one before. A desk load of work and meetings all morning long. It wasn't until after lunch that he could go out and see the last four choices on his list.

The first one he checked looked like a good prospect. The real estate agent let him in and showed him around. The place was huge with lots of rooms, a fairly large back yard with a privacy fence. There was a multiple car garage, a pool, and guard house. It was not far from Megakat Park. It seemed perfect but something about it bothered him but he couldn't put a finger on the reason. He decided to temporarily pass on it and they went to the next one.

The moment he drove through the fancy iron gates he was smitten with it. It looked like something from the Victorian age. Thick grey stone made up the building and out buildings. There was a high wall of stone surrounding a large, lush garden/yard space, a pool, tennis court, and a huge garage. Inside, everything was elegant and well maintained but what really sold him was that a security system was already in place. It was out dated but the fact that it was there meant an easy job of updating it. It was perfect! Privately he didn't understand why he felt this was going to be just right for his mate. He hadn't been with Tanlir that long to really know his tastes and yet here he was knowing somehow that this was the right place.

He was reluctant to go and see the other places on his list but knew he couldn't give a proper report if he didn't check them all out.

The next two were okay and would do if his own personal choice was rejected. He thanked the real estate person and said a decision would be made only after the prospective owners had a chance to see it when they arrived in about a week.

He returned to his office, relieved to finally be done. It was getting late but he couldn't leave this much work so he sat, ordered dinner in and worked for several more hours. He wrote up his report for the Mayor and put it in his secretary's basket for typing in the morning. It was well after nine at night when he called it quits and went home.

The next morning, he threw up again upon getting up. This was getting old. Still feeling a little queasy, he took a hot shower and felt marginally better. He dressed and got into work. He really should stop and see Dr. Mewser about this constant feeling of tiredness and nausea but the moment he walked into his office he was slammed with minor emergencies.

It took past lunch to get everything settled. Back at his desk he attacked his work. He settled for some camomile tea and toast for lunch. He still didn't really feel very good.

His secretary had finished the new embassy choice list but he didn't get it to the Mayor until late afternoon.

The Mayor was gone, of course, no surprise there, so Feral went into Ms. Briggs' office and wasn't a bit surprised to see her buried under paper.

"Ms. Briggs, here is that list of embassy choices. The top one is my strongest choice. It's safe, comfortable, has plenty of rooms, and its security system is in place but needs to be updated. That's not a real problem since there is a system there which will make replacing it much quicker." He reported.

She smiled wanly at him as she accepted the report. "Thanks for getting to that so quickly, Commander. Hope you've managed to dig out from under your paper hill." She said with tired humor.

He gave her a small smile in return. "Well the first pile is gone but there's a new one there. I almost suspect they're breeding."

"Yeah, don't it though." She said with a light chuckle then frowned. "Commander, are you alright? You look awfully pale for a dark furred Kat." She asked in concern.

"Uhm, just a temporary bug. I'll be fine. Thanks for being concerned. I'd better be going or my paper pile will be even bigger." He said side stepping the issue of his health.

"Alright. Take care of yourself. We'll really need you next week when the Prince visits." Callie said seriously.

Feral just nodded and made his escape. He hadn't really looked at himself in a mirror. He must look pretty awful for the ridiculously busy Deputy Mayor to notice though nothing much got past her. She was a pretty sharp she-kat. He sighed and decided perhaps it would be wise to leave early from work and get some rest. There was nothing on his desk that would cause a major upheaval for waiting another day to be dealt with.

Having made his decision, he pulled his cell phone out and told his secretary that he would be going home and that Steele needed to be contacted and put in charge but he told her that his second was not to touch anything on his desk or he'd be walking a patrolKats beat for a week.

She couldn't help but chuckle at that and promised to relay the message. She also told him to get plenty of rest and fluids since she too had noticed he didn't look well. He sighed and thanked her then hung up and made for home.

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Chapter 7: Surprise by ulyferal

Another morning, another visit to the porcelain god. This was just getting ridiculous. He felt like crap and was soo tired despite having rested from the time he'd got home till morning.

Forcing himself to dress and go to work took more effort than normal. His secretary eyed him in concern. He didn't make eye contact since he didn't want to be questioned about his undeniably pale countenance.

He actually cleared the important and immediate work from his desk and was leaving to go see Dr. Mewser when his sergeant flagged him down before he could step onto the elevator.

"Commander, there's been an alert at the Megakat Biochemical Labs." He said urgently.

Feral groaned, "Please tell me it isn't Viper again?"

"We don't know sir. Surprisingly there's been no report of any of his creepy plants around." The Sergeant said with a shrug.

"Fine, let's go!" Feral said flatly reaching for his coat and putting it on.

He and the Sergeant went down to the flight line. The Sergeant quickly pulled on a flight suit and hopped into the Commander's chopper. Ten minutes later, they were winging their way to the labs located at the center of the city.

The swaying ride aboard the chopper didn't help Feral's unhappy stomach none. It took all his will power not to heave and disgrace himself. They finally landed in the parking lot beside the building. Enforcers were already evacuating the place.

He grabbed an officer and got a more accurate picture of what was going on. To his surprise it was an unhappy worker that was causing all the trouble. He had barricaded himself in a lab

containing a lot of volatile chemicals and was threatening to blow the place up.

Grumbling under his breath, Feral ordered a negotiator to be sent to the site. When the special negotiator arrived, he sent him up to talk to the distraught Kat. He prepared to wait to see what would happen next. Hopefully, the Kat wouldn't do anything stupid.

The negotiator spent over an hour and half with the culprit while Feral and his enforcers stood tensely around waiting. Suddenly one of his enforcers came running up to him.

"Sir, suspicious activity has been detected near the chemical storage tanks in the rear of the facility." He said hurriedly.

"Oh great...you, you, you and you come with me." He ordered as he moved quickly to the rear of the building. He pulled out his radio and called for chopper cover.

As they came around the corner to their destination, who would they find but Viper's creatures guarding a manhole cover that was now open.

"Oh fine! That's all we need!" He growled furious. His problems had now multiplied. He radioed for more reinforcements as he directed his men to fire on the plants but avoid the chemical tanks nearby.

Some miles away...

"Attention all chopper squadrons and ground force alpha...Viper's plants have been spotted at the scene where the suspect is holed up in a lab. Commander Feral has ordered quick response to his location at the rear of the Biochemical Labs." The enforcer dispatcher was announcing over an enforcer band radio.

"Sounds like we're needed buddy. Let's beat feet." Chance said tossing down his wrench, quickly wiping his paws and heading for the hidden ladder to their hangar.

Jake locked the door to the garage and put up a note they used when they were away then rushed to follow his partner.

Chance had already stripped and was almost completely dressed when Jake joined him and quickly changed his clothes too.

They were jumping into the cockpit of the Turbokat within minutes and were soon winging their way to the hot spot.

When they arrived, the enforcers were having to be extremely careful about firing around the storage tanks of chemicals. All they could do was attack any of Viper's creatures when they poked themselves out into view away from the tanks.

On the ground, Feral and his ground forces had gone around to the front of the building and were doing a systematic check of the place. They had to avoid the one where the negotiator was still trying to get the nutcase from the barricaded lab.

They hadn't spotted Viper yet or his plants. It was getting frustrating.

Into this mess, the SWAT Kats decided a more direct approach was needed. Leaving the Turbokat on another building's roof, they used their glovatrix winches to zip across from their landing spot to the roof of the labs.

Reaching the roof they entered by way of the ventilation shaft. It took a bit but soon they were hovering over the nutcase in the lab. They listened for a bit and watched the Kat.

The supposedly distraught tom was pacing back and forth but had nothing in his paws. The chemicals in the lab were located some distance from him. Outside, they could hear the enforcer negotiator trying to convince the Kat to let them in.

"Hmm, I wonder if this was planned by Viper? This guy isn't trying to cause an explosion. If he was he would have had it nearby." Razor murmured softly to his partner.

"I think you're right. While the enforcers are tied up here, Viper can slip in and get whatever he wants." T-Bone said grimly.

"Then let's give the enforcers a paw, shall we!" Razor said with a wicked smile as he carefully pointed his glovatrix to fire through the slit of the ventilation grille. The tarpedo he fired, flattened the tom to the floor ending the confrontation.

Since the enforcers beyond the door would be primed to charge through the door, T-Bone shouted to them while they stayed in the shaft.

"Hey, enforcers! Your guy is out of commission. Come in and take him!" He shouted loudly.

There was silence for a moment then enforcers forced the door and poured in. The prisoner squirmed helpless on the floor under his tarry trap. Smiling in satisfaction, the SWAT Kats continued on their way through the shaft.

On Razor's cold blood creature scanner, they picked up Viper's trace. It led them to the bowels of the building just below where the enforcers with Feral were at the moment. By the sound of Feral's shouts, the enforcers were heading down to the basement too.

Scurrying as fast as they could, the SWAT Kats pushed on through until they spilled out in the basement at last. Viper was just leaving with some of his plant guards down a drain in the floor.

Razor fired a cement round that sent the lizard kat off his feet. T-Bone took out the plant guards with a mini matchhead missile.

Viper was down but not out. He jumped to his feet and hissed in fury. He seemed to be searching the floor. T-Bone reached him just as he found what he was looking for...a flask with some purple fluid in it.

Grabbing the mutant kat by his waist he yanked him up off his feet while avoiding the whipping tail. Razor closed in and managed to fire a tarpedo into Viper's puss then snatched the flask out of his paw.

Feral and his enforcers charged into the room in time to see Razor holding the flask and T-Bone struggling with a tarry-faced Viper. Sighing in exhausted anger, Feral ordered his enforcers to take Viper into custody and to return the flask to one of the scientists above. As the basement cleared out and left only Feral and the SWAT Kats alone, the Commander growled angrily at them preparing to give them a lecture when the room decided to grow dim then go black on him.

T-Bone had been prepared to shove past the Commander, not in a mood to take one of his lectures, when Feral's eyes suddenly rolled up and he began to fall to the floor. Startled the tiger tom automatically reached out and caught the heavy kat before he hit the hard cement.

"What the heck?" He said in shock.

Razor knelt down and patted Feral's face gently.

"Crud! He fainted!" Razor said in amazement.

"What the heck could have caused that?" T-Bone asked in confusion.

"You got me, buddy but he looks really pale, don't you think?" Razor said looking closer at the Commander's face.

"Yeah, come to think of it he doesn't look really good. Wonder if he's coming down with the flu?" T-Bone speculated as he continued to hold the Commander's upper body in his arms.

The Commander groaned suddenly then tried to get to his feet before he was really conscious of what he was doing.

T-Bone helped him up but felt the big Kat begin to slid down again.

Feral felt sick to his stomach and everything was spinning. Moaning his legs slid out from under him again but T-Bone kept him from falling.

Lowering Feral back to the floor again, he was startled when the Commander began to heave. Supporting him, T-Bone grimaced but didn't let go. When Feral seemed to have stopped, Razor offered the Kat some water to rinse his mouth out.

Feral took a little and spit then drank a bit but the world still was spinning a bit. He moaned and tried to curl up hoping his head would stop spinning.

"Easy there, Commander. You're really rocky. We need to get you out of here and get you some help." T-Bone said in concern. He might not care for the arrogant Kat but he wouldn't leave him sick and helpless.

"Can't stand...too dizzy..." He panted thickly.

"Okay, we'll wait a bit and see if it eases," Razor said kneeling down again and watching the Commander closely.

"Don't understand why I've feel so bad...been nauseated for days...now this..." Feral said blearily.

"Sounds like the flu, Commander!" T-Bone said helpfully. He shifted his grip a bit, accidentally brushing past Feral breasts as he tried to put his arm under the big Kat without pressing too hard on his stomach.

Feral gasped in mild discomfort when T-Bone did that. His breasts had been too sensitive for a while too. He closed his eyes and tried to focus on letting his body rest, hoping when he opened his eyes again things would have calmed down.

"Don't worry Commander, you'll feel better in no time. You just need to rest. If you were a she-kat I would have said you were pregnant since those are the same symptoms a cousin of mine has been having." Razor said trying to lighten the mood while they waited.

Feral blinked in shock. "W-What did you say?"

"Huh? Oh, I said you'll feel better soon..." Razor started to say wondering why Feral was upset by what he'd said.

"No the other thing..." Feral gasped trying to sit up and moaning when he realized that wasn't a good idea yet.

"Oh, you mean about my pregnant cousin?" Razor asked confused.

"Oh God! I don't believe this!" Feral moaned. It just hit him. Sensitive breasts, nausea, fainting and, he just realized, no heat cycle. He'd missed it though sometimes he never noticed because it was so faint.

"What? What's wrong?" Razor asked, concerned by the Commander's odd behavior.

"Kat's Alive! I'm pregnant!" The dark tom hissed in shocked dismay.

"Huh! Uh, if you haven't looked in a mirror lately, Commander, you're male!" T-Bone said in sarcastic surprise.

"Not exactly!" Feral grunted still trying to absorb his predicament.

"Crud! You're a male hermaphrodite?" Razor blurted in shock.

Feral didn't answer but he didn't need to. T-Bone just gaped at his partner then back at Feral who was slowly sitting up and blinking slowly.

The room seemed to be holding still once more. He wanted out of this basement now. He moved to try and stand up but his legs were still shaky. Two paws quickly reached down to carefully heave him to his feet. He swayed dangerously. T-Bone quickly put a steadying arm around the rocky Kats waist.

"Easy there big guy. Guess you'll need a lift to the hospital. You need to be sure about your condition and you're much too weak to make it there by yourself. Come on, we'll help you" T-Bone said as he and Razor helped Feral out of the basement through a door that led to rear of the facility. There was no one around, for which Feral was grateful.

T-Bone moved Feral to a cement wall and made him sit. Razor stayed close while T-Bone went to get the Turbokat.

Very soon they had loaded the ill Kat aboard. Razor had placed a thick pad on the cargo floor and laid Feral down on it when the kat complained of being dizzy again. Razor stayed with him as T-Bone flew them to Megakat Trauma Center.

Having contacted them while in flight, the medical team was waiting for them when they landed. They rolled a gurney into the cargo hold and carefully lifted the Commander onto it.

As he was wheeled in T-Bone and Razor told the doctor what they witnessed and Feral's suspicions. The doctor blinked in surprise since male hermaphrodites got pregnant very rarely.

Once rolled into the room, Feral was quickly stripped. The SWAT Kats hung back against the wall. They wanted to know if Feral's suspicions were correct. If they were, it meant they would be keeping a closer eye on him from now on.

"I want a chem panel done and a pregnancy test!" The doctor ordered. He got a few confused looks but they did as asked quickly and efficiently.

"Alright Commander, I'm going to do a pelvic exam. Just relax." The doctor said as he drew the curtain and pulled out the stirrups on the table.

"Crud! I hate that exam!" Feral grumbled through the oxygen mask he was wearing.

"Yeah! I can imagine. Okay push yourself down here a little...that's it...a little more...okay... now put your feet in the stirrups, please." The doctor ordered.

The SWAT Kats decided to move a little further away. That kind of examination was embarrassing enough without them being that close to it and hearing it. The doctor was quick and soon was ordering Feral to move back up the table.

"You're pregnant alright. The labs will only confirm it for us. When do you think you might have conceived?" He asked as he wrote the information down on Feral's chart.

Feral gave a date. The doctor raised his eyebrows. "Positive about that, heh! Okay that would make you about three weeks along. A female wouldn't have had any real symptoms for another month but males are more sensitive. Also you have more risks. Right now I'm willing to bet your red blood cells have dropped alarmingly. The foetus is drawing on you strongly right now and unlike a female you don't make enough blood supplies to cover the demand at first. You are probably anemic." The doctor said gravely.

He was interrupted by a nurse bringing him the results of the tests.

"I was correct. Nurse bring some blood plasma and infuse at least one unit right now then we'll check him and see if he needs another." The doctor ordered then turned back to Feral and said, "I'm going to have to admit you for overnight observation. I want to make sure your anemia is taken care of and that you get some rest. I'll call a specialist in high risk pregnancies and make you an appointment. Right now just relax!" The doctor warned Feral then left the room while a nurse hung a bag of blood and inserted a needle into Feral's vein to begin the infusion.

Feral sighed in resignation. The SWAT Kats poked their heads around the curtain for a moment.

"Well, congratulations Commander. Do you have a mate?" T-Bone asked curiously.

"Yes." Feral said flatly.

"Okayyy! It's obvious you don't want to talk. We'll leave and let you rest. We'll be keeping an on eye on you though!" He said in parting then he and Razor disappeared before Feral could object.

'Swell! That's all I need is that pair dogging me.' He thought bitterly. Sighing he realized he needed to tell Tanlir. He didn't know how his mate would take the news then he remembered the competition Tanlir had mentioned. He groaned. 'Oh no! Now he's in direct line for the throne. How do I get myself into these things.' He thought in dismay.

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Chapter 8: The Princes arrive by ulyferal

To Feral's disgust and dismay he was confined to the hospital for two days. Ms. Briggs had come to see him yesterday, her face reflecting her concern.

"I hate to have been right. You were much more ill than you let on Commander." She said, her voice having an equal mix of anger and concern.

"I know. Sorry. I truly didn't think I was that ill." Feral demurred. No way was he going to tell the Deputy Mayor that he was pregnant.

"Well, what does the doctor say?" She asked with a sigh.

"I have to stay until tomorrow then I can return to work but have to take it easy for a bit." He hedged.

She frowned at him. There was something he wasn't telling her but since he was a private person and not given to telling anyone his business, she had to be satisfied with that.

"Then do what you're told for once and rest. Next week is too important for you to be out. However, if it happens it happens. Your health is more important than any visit." She said tempering her ire. It wasn't his fault he was ill.

"Thank you, Ms. Briggs. I promise to take it easy." He said quietly.

She nodded then took her leave. So far no one knew his true circumstances except the SWAT Kats and of course the doctor and those responsible for his care. He knew it couldn't stay secret

forever but he hoped to keep it so until he could speak to Tanlir.

Tanlir was just receiving some not so good news of his own while his mate was in the hospital. His father had just informed him that his brothers, Torr and Shane would be accompanying him to Megakat City and that one of them would be staying to take charge of the new embassy. His father had yet to determine which of the three he would choose.

Of course, Tanlir was concerned it wouldn't be him. He didn't know how he could influence his father's choice though.

As the time for his return trip to Megakat City drew closer, he became increasingly anxious. He wasn't certain how he would ditch his brothers to see his mate in private. This was a disaster and there was no way he could warn his mate. He was a mess emotionally by the time they finally boarded their plane.

His brothers had been eyeing him in concern. Though he had hoped he had been able to hide his turmoil, he hadn't been able to hide his scent and in such close quarters, they could smell his tension. Glancing at each other, they traded concern looks. When one went to the washroom in the back the other casually followed. Tanlir never noticed. His gaze was fixed out the window.

Shane stepped into the fairly large space that was their executive style bathroom. He was a handsome cheetah with greenish-yellow eyes and red hair. His older brother, Torr who was closing the door behind him was taller by two inches, had black hair and much darker lines on his face than all of them.

"So?"

"He's not been himself for days now. No one seems to know what's up." Shane said quietly.

"Hmm, how about his guards? Anyone questioned them?" Torr asked thoughtfully.

"Well...no...we trust them to keep certain facts about us private. It would hardly seem right to push his guards to tell on him and expect ours to honor our privacy." Shane objected.

"Yeah, I see your point. Unless it would get him harmed or killed they wouldn't be very forthcoming. I don't see what else we can do but watch him closely." Torr said, shrugging his shoulders unhappily.

"Hope its not something really bad! Father will be furious." Shane sighed.

Torr merely nodded in agreement as they left the bathroom together and took their seats again.

It was midday when their jet set down at Megakat International Airport. As they deplaned and walked into the private waiting room they were met by the Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

"Welcome to Megakat City and, of course, welcome back Prince Tanlir. I am Mayor Manx and this is my Deputy Mayor Calico Briggs. Before we deal with the proposal on the Coalition, we would like to take you to see a few of the choices of residences we have found you for your new Embassy. Is this alright with you all?" The Mayor asked patiently.

"Sounds like an excellent idea, Mayor Manx. I am Torr, the eldest of my brothers, this is Shane, and that's Tanlir." Torr introduced everyone. Normally a protocol officer would have done this but they had decided before hand to keep everything informal.

"A pleasure to meet you all. If you would follow us, we will take you to your limosine." Manx smiled and turned to lead the way. The pathway was lined with enforcers to protect the visiting royalty. Outside where the limousines were lined up, the press were shouting questions and flashing cameras at the three around the wall of enforcers.

Keeping pleasant expressions on their faces, they smiled benignly as they climbed into the limos. A couple of their own guards boarded their car while the rest piled into the other cars.

"So you will be familiar with what we are going to see, here is the information on each residence." Ms. Briggs said as she handed each Prince a copy of the report.

Tanlir barely looked at it. He was tense about where Ulysses was. Because they were a high security risk it would make sense the Chief Enforcer would be on hand to ensure security was at its best but there was no sign of him.

"I like the look of this one, sounds really nice." Shane remarked, studying the place Feral had liked best.

"I admit it does look almost like being home." Torr agreed. "What do you think Tanlir?" He asked turning to his brother who sat nearest the window.

"Huh? Oh, yes..." He startled and quickly looked down at the image of the residence they were commenting on. He paused and sucked in his breath. It was the perfect place. "It's wonderful. It looks like it could be the one." He finally said.

Torr chuckled to smooth over his brother's apparent lack of attention. "Looks like this might be the place and we won't have to see the others." He smiled.

"That would be wonderful. Then you'll be able to take residence very quickly." Manx said pleased. Callie noted the positive response and took a chance to order a buffet to be served when they finished showing the place.

The limo smoothly drove through the iron gates. The brother looked out the windows at the impressive stone work and the stone fence around the property. They waited patiently until their guards had given them the signal it was safe to leave the car.

Given the proper signal, the chauffeur opened the door for them. They stepped out and looked around.

"Wow! Nice digs!" Shane said as the Mayor led them around the back to see the rear of the mansion.

"Yeah, I like the pool and tennis courts." Torr agreed.

"I think I like all the beautiful garden work around here." Tanlir commented, sniffing the air and enjoying the scent of flowers.

"So pleased you love the exterior. Now why don't we go inside?" Mayor Manx said as he led the way back to the front and knocked on the heavy, ornate door. A butler opened it quickly and stepped back.

The foyer was breathtaking and large. All wood floors with a huge chandelier hanging over their heads. A broad carpeted staircase went up to the second floor on the left. Double doors led to the left and right of the main entry way revealing richly decorated hallways, furniture and framed art.

"This is truly magnificent." Shane said in awe.

"Maybe not as ostentatious as our home but very nice indeed." Torr said in pleased appreciation.

Pleased by their response, Mayor Manx nearly had a bounce to his step as he led them on a tour of the mansion. It took a couple of hours to see it all. They ended up in the dining room where a fine late lunch buffet had been set up.

Their guests were pleased and hungry after their early departure, the long flight, then the tour of their new embassy. After getting plates of food they arranged themselves in a group at a beautiful large dining room table. The room boasted many tables, enough to handle parties and visitors to the embassy.

"I think I can safely say this is the place for our embassy, Mayor Manx." Torr said as he enjoyed the excellent food.

"I second that!" Shane said grinning.

"I make that unanimous then." Tanlir said warmly though he was still a little distracted and wasn't eating much because of it.

Finishing his meal first, Tanlir excused himself and went to the bathroom they had been shown located down the hall from the dining room. The guards felt comfortable enough with the present security and added assistance from the enforcers to allow their charges to freely roam the house thus when Tanlir returned from the bathroom and decided to look around some more, no one followed him.

He was investigating the rooms they would most likely turn into business offices for visitors to the embassy. Out of a door near the back of the house on the main floor, which he remembered led to the security surveillance room, stepped his mate. His heart slammed into his throat. He looked around quickly then moved to Ulysses.

Feral quickly placed a finger to his lips and stepped back into the room he'd left. Staying silent, Tanlir followed and closed the door behind him.

Now alone in the near dark room except for the illumination from the surveillance screens, Tanlir pulled his mate into his arms and kissed him hotly. Feral gripped him tightly back.

This was really no place to make love but Tanlir was desperate to have his mate. Ulysses seem to have the same idea and quickly dropped his pants and turned making it easier on Tanlir to enter him. With a groan of heartfelt relief he buried himself in his mate.

Their mating was hot and fierce. The cheetah pounded into the dark tom with near desperation and need. Feral sobbed his desire and relief. They raced toward a loud and hard orgasm. They trembled and panted for some minutes, catching their breaths.

Feral glanced toward the screens and noted that one of the brothers was apparently looking for something.

"I fear one of your brother's is looking for you." He said tightly, quickly returning his clothes to order. Tanlir did the same as he too glanced at the screen in question.

"That's Shane and, yeah, I think he's looking for me." Tanlir said a bit angrily. "Damn it, I want to hold you, be with you...I never dreamed my father would send them with me. I'm sorry love. I'm glad though you found a way for us to be together, even if it was far too short. He's going to get concerned soon." He said in resignation.

"I know, I'm sorry, Tanlir. Perhaps we can find a moment again but you're right you better put in an appearance before there's trouble. I also must make an appearance. The Mayor probably wonders where I am by now." Feral said gruffly. He had wanted to tell Tanlir his important news but there was no time right now.

They quickly parted ways. Feral watched his mate saunter down a hallway and made it look like he had just come out of a room and ran into his brother. Sighing, Feral made his way out of the Surveillance Room and went through the kitchen so that he could come around the dining room and back to the foyer to wait for the group to meet there.

Tanlir spoke with Shane a moment then went off as if to see another area. He didn't note his brother's shocked and angry face as he made for the back of the house. Shane moved swiftly to find his brother. When he did, he apologized to their hosts.

"Forgive me please but I need to speak to my brother in private for a moment." He said politely.

"Oh, of course, we will wait here for you." Manx said, nodding agreeably.

Shane pulled his brother into one of the rooms and closed the door then signaled him to move toward the window away from the hallway. He spoke with his brother excitedly, anger flaring as he told him what he'd learned. Torr hissed in shocked response. Their brother had much to explain. Carefully smoothing their expressions once more they stepped out of the room and returned to their hosts. Another twenty minutes and the group finally returned to the foyer where they had started.

Waiting there was a powerful looking dark tom wearing a high ranking officer's uniform. Narrowing their eyes, both brothers deliberately sniffed the air then bristled.

It was Torr who confronted their brother, "How dare you take a male to be your mate?" He hissed at Tanlir. His brother Shane had stepped up behind Tanlir. "You know the penalty for such a transgression yet still you dared?" He demanded furiously.

Blood drained from Tanlir's face in shocked dismay. How had they known, then he realized... 'You fool, Ulysses' scent is all over you!' He berated himself for being so stupid.

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Chapter 9: Confrontation by ulyferal

Mayor Manx and Callie stepped back in shock at the two prince's fury. Confused looks spread across their faces as they watched and listened.

The guards were angry as well and had moved to stand in a menacing circle around the brothers and the Commander though no one had noted they had done that, until two of the royal guards suddenly grabbed Feral by his arms and held him prisoner between them.

Feral gasped in surprise but stayed still. He needed to know what was going to happen before he caused an international incident by bringing in his enforcers.

Their actions had an unexpected effect though. Seeing his mate being made prisoner made Tanlir see red. In a roar of fury, he flew at the guards with fangs and claws. Shocked the guards let go of Feral and stepped back.

They weren't permitted to harm any of the royal princes. Tanlir turned, putting his back against his mate and hissed furiously. His eyes fairly glowed green fire.

Both of his brothers stared at him in shocked disbelief. His behavior was not of someone who is ashamed of his actions but a mate in full protection mode.

Though they were still disgusted and furious, Tanlir's behavior caused them to pause and wait, trying to understand what was going on.

As they stood in a momentary standoff, Torr spoke carefully to his brother. "Why have you done this Tanlir? You know the law. How could you have done this? Father will be furious with you." He demanded cautiously.

"We are lifemated. I didn't plan it...it just happened. I can't forswear him now!" Tanlir hissed angrily.

His brothers gaped at him. "Lifemated!" Shane blurted in horrified shock.

"Ohhh, Tanlir!" Torr groaned in pain, his anger gone. Fear and sorrow filled his face. His brother would be banished, stripped of his title and cut off from his family forever.

Tears hovered in Shane's eyes as he too realized what his brother faced when he returned home.

"Wait! Before anyone gets anymore upset, I have something important to say." Feral spoke up for the first time since the confrontation began.

Tanlir's brothers shot him angry, hateful looks. It was because of this tom their brother would be banished and disgraced.

"What could you possibly say to salvage what you have done?" Torr hissed in anguished fury.

"From what Tanlir has told me, all of you are in competition to rule after your father and that the first to breed an heir will be next in line for the throne, correct?" Feral asked, trying to ignore the hatred being directed at him.

"Yes, that is true!" Shane spat angrily.

Sighing in relief, Feral said bluntly, "Then I guess you'll have to bow to your brother for he is now the next ruler of your kingdom because I'm pregnant."

Tanlir spun around in shocked surprise. He pulled Ulysses into his arms and sniffed him deeply. He roared with joy when his nose confirmed the truth. He wrapped his arms around the dark tom and kissed him soundly.

"You have made me incredibly happy. I love you even more than that first time we were together." He said joyfully as he nuzzled his mate who blushed furiously in embarrassment.

"Glad you're happy I wasn't so thrilled when I heard the news." Feral said ruefully.

Tanlir's two brothers gaped in disbelief. Needing to verify for themselves they moved closer to the pair and took in Feral scent. Tanlir held Uly tightly but allowed his siblings to sniff his mate.

They backed up and had identical looks of stunned amazement on their faces.

"How the devil did you manage to find a breeding hermaphrodite?" Torr finally managed to say in utter astonishment.

"By attending a conference!" Tanlir smirked. Relief making him giddy.

"Only you could be so lucky." Shane said shaking his head.

"Father must be told immediately and I guess there's no doubt that you'll be assigned here. You've forced the King's paw and I'm not sure he'll be completely happy about it...but who knows...no one could have ever predicted this." Torr said also shaking his head.

"Wait a minute, when you were in the hospital...you weren't ill with the flu were you?" Callie demanded, interrupting suddenly, having pieced together what had happened last week.

"Aw no. Sorry Ms. Briggs but I wasn't ready for anyone to know until I had a chance to tell Tanlir." Feral said quietly.

"Hospital! Why were you in the hospital?" Tanlir asked in concern.

"It's alright, I'm okay. It's something that apparently happens to male herms that get pregnant."

Feral said trying to reassure his mate.

"And that is what exactly?"

Feral sighed and looked around. Everyone was watching him and expecting an answer. This was soo embarrassing.

Taking a deep breath, he said, "In the first few weeks of pregnancy, a male herm cannot produce the amount of blood necessary to sustain the kitten and themselves. To protect itself the uterus will pull all available resources to support the kitten. My physical response to that was severe anemia. I fainted and was further drained by bouts of nausea and exhaustion. The doctors gave me blood and kept me in the hospital until I was stabilized."

"But you're out of danger now and the kitten is alright?" Tanlir asked anxiously.

Feral hesitated, "Well, I have to be monitored for the next couple of months then I'll be out of danger. The kitten is fine though it's really nothing more than cells yet. Male herms react to being pregnant sooner than a female." He said in resignation. "I'm only four weeks along."

"I'm certain that you have also been told you are now removed from combat duty as well." Callie said archly.

Feral grimaced. That was the worst news he had received on top of the one that he was pregnant.

"Yes, unfortunately." He admitted unhappily.

"In your condition that is just as well." Torr said firmly. "Perhaps it might be best that your mate be taken back with us, Tanlir. Before you take up your post, you must introduce your consort to the court. The peaceful quality of our kingdom will also benefit him in ensuring he gets much needed rest."

"You are correct, Torr." Tanlir agreed eyeing his mate in concern.

"Oh now, wait a minute! I have my duties here. I can't just go off for weeks and leave it!" Feral objected in shocked dismay.

"Oh come now, Feral. Your second can handle things. By the sound of it, you don't have any choice anyway. You are mated to royalty and must abide by their customs." Mayor Manx told him firmly.

"But...but..." Feral gasped in bewilderment. It seemed he was being railroaded out of town by someone else's rules and he had no say in them.

"It's alright, my love. You'll be returning here soon enough." Tanlir soothed as he turned to nuzzle his upset mate.

"Oh yeah, that makes me feel soo much better!" Feral said in sarcastic disgust.

Tanlir had the temerity to chuckle at that.

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Chapter 10: Taking care of business by ulyferal

"This has been an exciting morning indeed. Now that the position of the new ambassador and next in line for the throne has been settled, might I suggest we retire to my office to sign the lease for this wonderful mansion so that you may convert it to your new embassy as soon as possible?" the Mayor asked, excited and anxious to seal the deal. He was ecstatic that an embassy was

being placed in his city. That meant the influx of new income for the admittedly lean coffers of the city treasury.

"Thank you, Mayor Manx. That's an excellent idea. When that's been accomplished, we need to submit our agreement for joining the Coalition for the Protection of the Planet from Alien Attack with Commander Feral." Prince Torr said in pleased agreement.

"Of course. So glad your country agrees that such a Coalition is needed. I'm quite proud of my Chief Enforcer for having come up with such a plan. Shall we go?" Mayor Manx asked, gesturing to the door and limos waiting beyond. He was fairly bouncing with pleased excitement over the day's successes.

With the guards leading the way, the group was swiftly loaded about the cars and soon heading for city hall. Mayor Manx broke out the champagne from his mini fridge in the limo.

"To celebrate Prince Tanlir's new status and Commander Feral's pregnancy." The Mayor said beaming as a guard opened the bottle and Callie poured out then handed each dignitary a glass. Feral passed on it. His stomach wouldn't appreciate it.

Tanlir noted that and placed a protective arm around his mate and nuzzled his neck in comfort. He was thrilled and deliriously happy though he could tell Ulysses was not quite as sanguine about it.

Feral accepted his mate's attempts at comforting him but it didn't ease how truly miffed he was at how fast his status changed from Chief Enforcer to consort of a Prince in the space of a few minutes. Though he was very pleased Asszeria was willing to join the Coalition, he was not happy that he now had to leave so much work undone and leave to meet his new in-laws.

He needed to be here to handle any questions concerning the Coalition and greet other dignitaries who would be arriving to see him and submitting their agreements. He wasn't willing to hand that over to anyone. Admittedly, though, except for Asszeria, he didn't expect any answers from the other countries that had been represented at the conference to get back with him for some months. Still, he really didn't feel comfortable leaving right now.

He brooded the whole way to city hall. Nothing his mate said or did could get him to let go of his annoyance and worry. There were a lot of gawkers when the group arrived at city hall and climbed out of the limos. The press had followed them and were pressing against the enforcer corridor that had been thrown up quickly to protect the royal visitors.

Feral realized, bleakly, that he was now included in that protection though the press wasn't aware of it yet. With just a little luck, hopefully that would be kept secret for a while longer.

Everyone was hustled through the huge lobby and onto a pair of elevators the enforcers were holding for them. Feral, Prince Tanlir, Mayor Manx, Ms. Briggs, two royal assistants and four guards were in one. The other two Princes and the rest of the guards and assistants were in the other.

Spilling out of the elevators at the top floor, Mayor Manx lead the way to his spacious office. Except for the top two assistants, only the Princes and Feral joined them in his office. Callie quickly presented the paperwork that Prince Tanlir, as the new ambassador, would sign. Only a few minutes were needed for that then Feral took their agreement for the Coalition and had them sign the membership listing. He countersigned the agreement and had Ms. Briggs notarize it and make a copy for the Princes to take back to their father.

"Now that the important business has been taken care of, would you like to be taken to your hotel to freshen up? The banquet for your visit is for seven tonight in the ballroom of your accommodations. The social elite of Megakat City will be in attendance. One doesn't get a chance to rub shoulders with royalty here and everyone is very excited to meet you all and

welcome our new ambassador." Manx said with unctuous pleasure.

"Just as long as there is no announcement of Tanlir's lifemating to me or my pregnancy, Mayor. I don't think it would be proper to say anything until the King of Asszeria hears it first from his son." Feral said quickly.

"Oh...uh...I suppose you are right, Feral. Very well, no word of it will be spoken of by this office." Manx said in reluctant agreement.

"I will be very lonely not having you at my side, my love. However, in your delicate condition perhaps its best that you rest rather than attend a ball." Tanlir said, unhappy but in total agreement that no word be said about his changed status. His father would be very vexed if he wasn't notified first.

"I see no reason why the Commander could not be presented, Tanlir. We intended to call Father anyway and tell him..." Prince Shane began to object before his younger brother cut him off.

"No! Sorry Shane, but on the drive here I realized we can't just tell Father this over the phone. It's too much of a shocking revelation. If my mate had been female...no problem, but as it is..." Tanlir said spreading his paws, asking for their understanding.

"By the Goddess! You're right little brother. Father and mother will be more than a little shocked. It might go over better if done in person. Alright, I agree with the need to keep this secret for now." Torr sighed, realizing there would be tremendous uproar about this mating.

Shane sighed as well. In his mind's eye he could picture exactly how his parents would react at first. It would not be a pretty picture.

"Thank you both for your discretion." Tanlir said with a slight bow of his head to his brothers then he turned to Mayor Manx. "We accept your gracious offer to have us taken to our hotel. We will see you later this evening." He said politely.

"Excellent! The limos are waiting for you. If there is anything you need or there are problems with your accommodations, please don't hesitate to contact Ms. Briggs to have them solved immediately. Until this evening." Manx said with a smile.

Tanlir and his brothers nodded their thanks and followed Ms. Briggs back out of the office and to the elevators once more. She went down with them and traded small talk. In the lobby, Feral lead the way to the limos as the Princes said their farewells to the Deputy Mayor then loaded into their cars.

Feral was hoping to return to his office to get some work done but Tanlir had other ideas.

"Ulysses, please accompany me. I want to spend some private time with you after our long separation." He said firmly, patting the space beside him.

Feral sighed in resignation and climbed in. Once he was seated next to Tanlir the door was shut and they were soon on their way. Feral wasn't in a mood for talk so Tanlir rubbed his back in soothing circles that, surprisingly, made him relax. Torr and Shane had sat in the seats closer to the driver, giving the couple some privacy.

The drive took about twenty minutes. He had already notified his enforcers to be ready for their arrival and a line of them were waiting as the limos pulled up to the curb. When the door opened, the guards piled out first then Feral and Prince Tanlir and his brothers.

The hotel manager was waiting inside for them.

"Welcome the Megakat Grand Hotel, your highnesses. You have the top floor penthouses to

yourselves. If there is anything you need please don't hesitate to use the courtesy phone in your room to ask for it at any time of day. I hope you enjoy your stay with us." He said beaming in pleasure.

"Thank you, I'm sure we will." Prince Torr said politely.

The group trooped to the elevators lead by the manager. On the trip up, he listed the amenities they might like to try during their stay. As they reached the top floor, he opened each room with a key card that he was asked to give each head guard for each prince.

Tanlir sighed in relief as the door to his bedroom closed behind himself and his mate. His luggage had already been unpacked and put away. His guards were in the main area of the suite but the bedroom was theirs alone. He pulled Ulysses into his arms. They hugged one another for long minutes without saying anything.

Tanlir was the first to break the silence.

"You're not happy, love. I know you're a busy Kat and you have a great deal of work waiting for you on your desk that you're anxious to get to but I felt that we needed to talk to each other after our long parting. Let's strip down a bit and relax on the bed. I want your feet up." He said beginning to undo the buttons of Feral's uniform coat.

Feral let him do it as he stared at his mate. He had missed him...a lot but he was still resentful that he was being asked...no ordered was closer...to go back to Asszeria immediately.

He gently pushed his mate's paws off him and began to partly undress. Tanlir eyed him quietly but didn't say anything. Soon they were in just their pants and t-shirts as they lay facing each other on the huge bed.

"So?...Say what's on your mind. I can see you're upset." Tanlir said encouragingly.

Feral sighed and dropped his eyes as he tried to collect his thoughts. When he looked up, Tanlir was still waiting patiently. It warmed him inside at how considerate his mate was which was just one of the things he truly loved about him.

"As you said, I have a great deal of work but then I always do anyway. That isn't what has me annoyed. I am responsible for the Coalition and it doesn't look right if I'm not here to answer the other countries questions if they have any. I need to be here...it's my program I'm advocating." He said flatly.

"But unlike my country, the others will take many months to come to a decision. I understand how you feel you're shirking your duty by not being here but, my love, they can reach you wherever you are. You do have a cell phone you know. So what is the other reason?" Tanlir asked patiently.

"My condition is high risk for a male. OB-GYNs that deal with hermaphrodites are rare and I'm fortunate to have one here. Can you say the same?" Feral asked. This was an important consideration. The pregnancy made him nervous and the fact that he had fainted once had impressed upon him how fragile his health was right now...which really irked him.

Tanlir frowned in concern. Ulysses had raised a very valid concern. "I really don't know, Uly. I'll have to check. That concern I understand. We will have to look into it seriously. But love, I don't really have a choice here. I must present my mate. There are traditions that must be met as well as my investiture as next in line for the throne. You must be by my side for this as well as your investiture as my mate and consort." Tanlir said seriously.

"Certainly is a lot involved." Feral said in dismay. "Why can't I just meet your parents then return here? What you're describing sounds like it could last a month or more."

"Uhm...well about two months actually then our wedding in about a year." Tanlir said with grim humor.

His mate just stared at him in horror. "Two months...I can't be gone two months..." He said angrily. "The wedding in a year is alright but my job can't be put on hold that long."

The cheetah prince sighed. His mate was really upset and he wasn't making it any better. This was why a female would have been better. Most were not in a career that they would have to be ripped from but he had to take a male for a mate and one with a deep commitment to the position he held. This was going to take some delicate handling but first, he needed to calm his mate.

"I am sorry my love. If there was any way I could hurry it up or change the way it's done, believe me I would but its hundreds of years of tradition I must abide by. Please understand. You will be back here as fast as I can get you through it all. I promise." He said earnestly.

Feral rolled to his back and stared at the ceiling. 'This just couldn't get any worse. I can tell Tanlir isn't going to be able to stop what's already happening. I will just have to accept the fact that I'll have to leave my office to a green second in command. Kats Alive! I hate this...But I love him.' He sighed mentally, coming to an unhappy conclusion that he couldn't do anything about the steamroller coming at him. He was a prince's consort and that was that.

Tanlir's face hovered over him suddenly, and his face was deeply concerned. "Uly?"

"It's alright, Tanlir. We made this bed together and now we have to accept all that that entails. I'm not happy but I know you have no choice and neither do I." Ulysses said sighing, then pulled Tanlir down to him and gave him a warm kiss of acceptance.

Tanlir sighed in relief as he returned the kiss.

After spending a couple hours with his mate and reestablishing their bond, Feral left to try and get some work done. He scowled when he realized a group of four royal guards went with him. He couldn't tell them to leave either, even though no one knew his new status, the royals did and he had to be protected since he carried the next heir. Swallowing his irritation, he let them take him to Enforcer Headquarters in one of the limos.

Meanwhile, Tanlir was making a discrete call to his home. To the operator for the palace he asked for the royal physician Dr. Morticade.

"Prince Tanlir, what can I do for you?" The leopard physician asked.

"I need an important question answered and I require your strictest confidence that no one knows I asked this." Tanlir said gravely.

"Of course, your highness. My oath on it." He answered with the same seriousness.

"Very well. Do you have any experience in dealing with pregnant male hermaphrodites and if not, do you know of any such specialists in our kingdom?" He asked.

There was a stunned pause on the other line before the doctor finally answered, "Uh my apologizes your highness, you did say a pregnant male hermaphrodite?" He asked cautiously.

"I did, yes!"

"You do realize how rare that is, your highness?"

"I do indeed. Please answer my question."

"Uh...I'm sorry I do not have such experience and I know of no one in our kingdom that does. I

believe this is because there are no known male hermaphrodites in the kingdom." The doctor said quietly, puzzled as to why the prince wanted to know this.

"Thank you. I was afraid that would be the answer but I needed to check." Tanlir said with a sigh of resignation.

"Pardon me, Prince Tanlir, but is there some reason as to why you needed to know this?" Dr. Mordecade asked, fairly dying with curiosity.

"Sorry, I can't answer that over such an unsecured line. You'll have an answer when I return home. Thanks again for the answer. Good bye." Tanlir said cutting off the connection. 'Somehow I just knew it wouldn't be that easy. We're just going to have to find an expert here that would be willing to travel for a little while so that Uly can be monitored.' He thought heavily.

Hours later, after the banquet was over and the Prince was once more back in his room, his mate arrived with a bag from his apartment. Feral knew his mate didn't want him elsewhere when he was in town so he'd gone to his home and packed some necessities. He had managed to clear most of his desk, finally, before leaving for the day.

He was hungry though, and he was feeling a little light headed because of it. Setting his bag on the bed, he looked up to see Tanlir returning from the bathroom wearing only a robe.

"Hello, my love. You look tired. A hot bath would do you good. Have you eaten?" Tanlir asked in concern.

"No, I didn't have time and I am hungry." Feral admitted as he sat down rather suddenly, the light headedness was unsettling and he was afraid he might fall.

"Then we will fix that immediately. You mustn't forget things like that in your condition, Uly!" He admonished his mate as he went out to the main room and used the room phone to quickly order a protein rich but not heavy meal for his mate. Returning to the bedroom, he immediately set to helping Uly to remove all his clothes. He went to the bathroom and retrieved a thick bathrobe to wrap around the dark tom. He made Uly lay back against a pile of pillows and covered him with a light blanket. Grabbing the remote, he lay next to his mate and flicked on the TV. He muted the sound for a moment so that he could speak with Uly.

"I called and spoke with our royal physician. He informed me that he wasn't knowledgeable about Kats like you and that he knew of no one with those qualifications in our kingdom. I sincerely hope, my love, that we can find such a specialist that is able and willing to go back with us and monitor you." He told his mate.

"I did say it might be difficult," Feral murmured quietly. "I see my specialist tomorrow afternoon. So you wish to go with me?"

"Of course. Perhaps he will know of someone who meets our needs." Tanlir said hopefully.

"It's possible. We'll wait to see what he says then." Feral said equitably.

At that moment Feral's meal arrived. A tray was placed before him then the servant left quickly and quietly.

"Dig in, my love." Tanlir said smiling as he took the mute off so that they could listen to the news together.

Feral wasted no time digging in. It was nice not to have to make it himself and being catered to was something he might get used to.

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Chapter 11: Visiting the doctor by ulyferal

Feral left his mate to continue getting more work done. Tanlir and his brothers met with architects and security specialists for the redesign of their new embassy. Torr had reported to his father on their new acquisition and the successful completion of the agreement but never spoke of Tanlir's new status. Their father was pleased with his news and wished them a safe trip home the next day.

Leaving his brothers to take care of any final details, Tanlir left with his guards to pick up Ulysses and head to his afternoon appointment.

Feral was waiting for them on the curb with his own set of guards. His enforcers had been staring at the guards wherever he went, puzzled as to why their commander needed them. He wasn't about to tell them.

He'd spent the morning briefing his second in command, Lt. Commander Winsor, a recent transferee from Sandaval Bay Confederation's Security Forces. He'd only been in Megakat City for six months. Not long enough for him to be familiar enough with the threats against the city or the hassle of handling the SWAT Kats but he didn't have any choice. All he could do was give the slim gray tom Kat an over view of what he faced and his cell phone number. Feral prayed the omegas would just lay low for a bit.

Just before he had to leave, he held a special meeting with his department heads and squadron leaders about his absence and their need to help the second as much as possible. He didn't explain why he was leaving which left them confused and concerned. Feral wasn't worried. In a few days the whole world would be aware of his new status.

He still felt conspicuous with these guards hanging around him. He was glad Tanlir was on time so he wasn't feeling like a target standing here. He climbed in hurriedly as did the guards and they were soon speeding on their way. Feral gave the nearest guard the address which he passed to the driver.

He and Tanlir traded the day's news as their limo made its laborious way through heavy mid town traffic. Twenty minutes later they were pulling into an underground parking garage of a ten story medical building. The driver pulled up near the elevator and waited as Tanlir, Feral, and four guards got out. Feral pressed the button for the fifth floor. Tanlir took his paw in his own and kept it as doors opened on their floor. Feral lead the way to an office some two doors down.

Entering the quiet and empty waiting room, Feral signed in and was told he would be summoned in just a few minutes.

Tanlir pushed him gently toward a comfortable chair and took the one beside him. The guards ranged themselves nearby. Feral didn't feel like talking so they sat in comfortable silence until he was called in. She was a bit startled and annoyed by the large group following her.

"Excuse me but only the patient and his mate are allowed back here!" She said politely but firmly to the four guards.

"I'm sorry madam, but Prince Tanlir is not allowed to travel anywhere alone for his safety. We will not go into the exam room except to check it for security reasons but we will remain nearby." The lead guard said firmly, his face stony and implacable.

The nurse gaped at Tanlir in shocked surprise. "A Prince?"

"Yes, I am. Could we move on please?" Tanlir said politely, mildly amused at her reaction.

"Oh, yes, of course." She said, quite flustered as she continued down the hall. She quickly restored her professionalism as she stopped at a scale. "Alright Commander, you know the drill

by now."

Feral sighed and removed his coat and weapon handing them to Tanlir as he stepped onto the scale. The nurse noted his weight then they were on their way again. She opened a door and was quickly but gently moved aside as a guard went in, looked around, then nodded it was safe and stepped back out. Rolling his eyes in annoyance, Feral stepped into the room followed by Tanlir.

"I know how you feel, my love. I've had to pretend I'm alone all my life." Tanlir said in mild amusement.

"I can imagine it feels like being in a fish bowl." Feral said dryly as he began to undress.

"Well put, Uly. That's how it feels exactly." The cheetah grinned then moved quickly to prevent his mate from leaning down.

"Please let me do it, love." He said firmly and Feral sighed and sat up, letting the Prince pull his boots off and place them under a chair and hanging the Commander's clothes on the hooks provided. Feral put on the really too small gown and waited.

Only moments later, his physician, a slim cream-colored tabby male, knocked then stepped into the room.

"Well so this is your mate. I hear he's a real live Prince. Congratulations, Commander on a fine catch." The doctor said smiling warmly.

"Dr. Vander, this is Prince Tanlir from the Kingdom of Asszeria." Feral introduced his mate.

"A pleasure to meet you sir," Dr. Vander said politely as he shook the cheetah's paw.

"And you sir. We have an urgent question to ask you doctor. Ulysses must go to my home to be introduced to the King and Queen and the people of my home. He's explained how fragile his condition is and I've checked and there are no specialists in my land that can monitor his pregnancy. We are hoping you or someone you know can travel with us and monitor him. You will be well compensated." Tanlir explained their problem.

"Oh...well I'm flattered but I'm afraid I have far too many patients to do that. Hmm, there might be someone but I'll have to call him and see if he'll be willing. He's semi-retired and not taking active patients anymore. He would be perfect for what you need. How much time does he have to make a decision?" Dr. Vander asked.

"We leave tomorrow." Tanlir said, shrugging in apology at the short notice.

"Oh my, well, again, all I can do is ask him. Let's finish up here and I'll give him a call." He said.

The exam was quick and thorough. The doctor also checked his blood pressure and had the nurse draw his blood.

"Okay, Commander, you can get dressed now...everything looks good. Let's hope your blood results are the same. Come to my office as soon as you're dressed." The doctor said as he stripped his gloves off, tossed them in the trash and left the room.

Tanlir helped Uly redress then they stepped back out into the hallway. Feral led the way to another door and stepped in. Dr. Vander was writing notes, apparently in Feral's file, when they took their seats before his desk. They waited patiently as the doctor finished.

"I'm pleased to say your blood volumes are in the normal range, thankfully. Your blood count only has to be monitored this carefully for at least another month and a half for you to be safely past

the danger zone." He told Feral. "Now, if you'll wait in the outer room for a little, I'll try and contact my colleague and see if he can take you on for the period you're out of country." Dr. Vander requested.

"Excuse me doctor, is it safe for Ulysses to travel?" Tanlir asked in concern.

"Let me very blunt here, your highness. Commander Feral's health is very precarious at this time. If my colleague cannot go then the Commander definitely can't. He has to be constantly monitored. If his blood volume plunges suddenly, he could suffer heart failure. Male herms are just not built that well to sustain a pregnancy as easily as a female. So, though I understand the very real need for him to go, I can't sanction him doing so without medical support." The doctor said grimly.

Feral shivered at hearing his risks so bluntly stated. He'd been told before but it was really hitting home that he had to take great care of himself. Something he wasn't very good at when it came to the needs of his job.

Tanlir swallowed. This was far more serious than he had imagined. "Then I truly hope your colleague can do this, doctor. We'll go to the waiting room and hope for a positive outcome." He said quietly, standing up.

"I hope so too, your highness." Dr. Vander said with a nod.

Feral got up and followed Tanlir as they collected their guards and went to the waiting room. It was thirty minutes later when the doctor finally appeared. He handed Feral a piece of paper and a thick folder.

"Dr. Taglion may be interested but he'd like to see you first. This is his address and these are your medical records with today's exam enclosed. If he takes you on, then he will continue to monitor your pregnancy from now on. I'll be backup if need be. Good luck, Commander. Hope all goes well with you. It was a pleasure meeting you, your highness." Dr. Vander said in farewell.

"Thank you so much for your help and for your excellent care of my mate." Tanlir said warmly.

"Thank you." Feral added, holding the file tightly in his paw.

The doctor nodded then returned to his office as they made their way out.

"I am truly grateful that his colleague might help us. Let's hurry to his place so that you and he will have time to put your affairs in order and pack." Tanlir said in pleased excitement as he handed the address to the driver.

Feral just sighed in agreement though he really hated to be poked and prodded.

The drive was a good forty minutes from city center. It seemed the doctor lived in the countryside. They were soon driving up a long paved road that lead to a heavily forested area with a very nice home nestled in it. When they knocked on the door, a pleasant looking she-kat opened it and smiled.

"Ah, you must be Commander Feral. Welcome sir. I am Dr. Taglion's housekeeper. Please follow me to his office." She said, stepping back and gesturing them into the spacious entryway.

Once they were all in, Tanlir turned to his guards and gestured for them to remain here. Two of them were already patrolling outside. The housekeeper led them deeper into the house. They reached a comfortable office/den. Filled bookcases covered a wall, a heavy oak desk sat under a wide bay window, and a comfortable couch was across from it.

Just coming from behind the desk and approaching them was an older black and white tuxedo

tom Kat. Some grey was streaking his mane of hair and his facial fur.

"Greeting, Commander Feral and Prince Tanlir. Welcome to my home." He said briskly, his gruff manner tempered by a small smile.

"Thank you for being willing to see us on such short notice, doctor." Tanlir said politely.

"Well, it sounded intriguing. I don't get out much anymore. I do a lot of research since I retired but I do take the occasional patient that interests me. So Commander, you've already had an incident of anemia. Any other problems I should know about?" He asked, taking the medical file from Feral and getting down to business.

For the next hour, the doctor grilled Feral, did another exam then asked Tanlir some pertinent medical questions about himself. When he was through, he had them go with his housekeeper to get a bite of lunch, dismissing Feral's objection with a tart, 'You are feeding two now, sir. Go eat!' Not able to argue with him especially since Tanlir seconded it, he was now enjoying a delicious home made roasted tuna sandwich, with soup and cold glass of milk.

As they were finishing, the doctor walked into the sunny dining room. The housekeeper silently but pointedly placed a plate before him when he sat down. He nodded absently picking up the sandwich and taking a bite as he directed his attention to the pair waiting for him expectantly.

"I'll take the job. I already know it's not going to be a picnic with you, Feral. You are notorious for not listening to medical advice. Let me make myself perfectly clear...you will do as I tell you if you want to get through this pregnancy alive and healthy. I'll brook none of your attitude when it concerns your health. Do you understand me, sir?" The doctor's eyes stared at him implacably.

Feral sighed. He really didn't have a choice and that seemed to be the way his life was going lately.

"I understand. Thank you for doing this." He said heavily.

The doctor gave him a small smile of understanding. "It's hard having all your choices made for you isn't it, Commander? You're used to making all the decisions and this time they are out of your paws. Buck up! I'll get you through this! All I ask is that you do your best to avoid getting into trouble, which, you must admit, you are prone to finding or it finds you." He said knowingly.

Feral grimaced and gave the doctor a wane smile in return. Dr. Taglion understood him better than any of the doctors that had been responsible for his care. Perhaps it wouldn't be so bad after all.

"Our plane departs at eleven o'clock tomorrow, doctor. Would you like to be picked up?" Tanlir asked.

"Thank you. I would appreciate that. How long do I need to pack for?" He asked.

"About a month or two." Tanlir responded.

"Alright. See you two tomorrow. Commander, get plenty of rest and hydrate yourself before flying and don't skip a meal. If your blood pressure is low when I check it in the morning, we will not be taking off until it improves." He warned firmly.

"Understood, sir. I'll make sure of it." Tanlir said firmly as they took their leave. The doctor nodded and the housekeeper saw them out.

As they climbed aboard the limo, Tanlir said, "I feel much better about you going home with me now. I like Dr. Taglion no nonsense attitude and competent manner."

"Yeah. I like him too." Feral agreed with a sigh. He had some major packing to do and preparing his apartment for his long absence as well as inform building security to keep an eye on it.

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Chapter 12: Meeting the in-laws by ulyferal

The next morning, Feral was packed and his apartment closed. He had gone to Enforcer Headquarters to give last minute instructions and to answer any questions his second might have. Dr. Taglion was to meet him here and check his blood pressure. He sent his Sergeant down to the lobby to wait his arrival.

He had just finished signing the last of the urgent reports that required his signature when Dr. Taglion arrived trailing behind the Sergeant. He waited until Feral had handed off the documents to his second, who left, then settled back in his chair.

Dr. Taglion strode up the steps and pulled out his blood pressure cuff. Feral sleeves were rolled up so it was easy to place the cuff on and take a reading.

"Excellent. Everything looks good, Commander. We ready to leave?" He asked politely as he put away his cuff in his medical bag.

The Sergeant looked at his superior with a puzzled frown. Feral still had not told anyone why he was going nor that he was pregnant. Eyeing his loyal sergeant thoughtfully, he came to a decision.

"Yes doctor, we'll leave here momentarily but I need to speak with my sergeant for a moment. If you would wait outside, I'll be right out." Feral said to the doctor.

"Certainly."

As soon as Dr. Taglion closed the door behind him, Feral addressed the patiently waiting Sergeant.

"What I'm about to tell you will be in the news within a few days. No one else knows about this but the Mayor and Deputy Mayor. I have recently life mated to Prince Tanlir. This occurred when he was here for the Coalition conference. I've just found out I'm pregnant which makes Tanlir the next in line to the throne. Because I'm male, his parents might be a bit shocked and upset so they haven't been told. Tanlir intends to present me to the King and Queen in person so everything about this has been kept secret. You are not to speak of this until the announcement is made officially by the representatives of Asszeria. Understood?" Feral asked him.

The Sergeant had been stunned by this unprecedented news but recovered quickly.

"Understood, sir. May I offer my congratulations on your mating and your pregnancy. I hope all goes well for you." He said warmly.

"Thank you! Take care of things for me." Feral said smiling then he got up from his desk and made for the coat rack. Slipping his coat on, he went out of his office and along with the doctor, went down to the lobby to wait for Tanlir's limo to come pick them up.

Very soon they were aboard the Princes Lear Jet winging their way to Asszeria. Feral and Tanlir sat side by side holding paws while the doctor decided to take a nap. Behind them, Tanlir's brothers were playing a game.

Feral was impressed with the spaciousness of the jets passenger area, with its thick carpeting, excellent sound proofing, and thickly cushioned seats. When they were served lunch halfway through the flight, it was a sumptuous meal of cold cuts, salads, finger foods, deserts, and an excellent wine. Feral stomach's however, was too unsettled to enjoy it much.

"Here Commander, have a little chicken without bread, some watermelon, and some camomile tea. That will give you the calories you need but won't make your stomach upset more. Drink the tea first then eat slowly. I also want you to drink plenty of fluids, no wine or caffeine." The doctor instructed him.

Feral sighed and nodded. Tanlir insisted on making him a plate of the suggested food. They sat and talked, with Feral asking many questions about Tanlir's home and what his parents were like.

"Perhaps, you should take a nap, my love then you'll be fresh when we arrive." Tanlir coaxed.

"I'm not tired." Feral said shaking his head in refusal.

Tanlir leaned close and pulled his mate's head gently toward him and kissed him long and lingeringly. Feral sighed, enjoying the attention. Coaxing with his paws, Tanlir made Feral lean against his chest while he caressed his back in soothing strokes. Feral relaxed into the soothing touch and fell asleep without realizing it.

Tanlir smiled lovingly at his mate as he rested against his chest in slumber. Torr got up and walked up to the pair. He paused and smiled at the tender scene, giving his brother a warm smile and moving on to the rest room.

Torr was thrilled that his younger brother had been so blessed, and lucky, to have found a mate that he shared a life bond with. Though it still amazed him that it was a male, he was envious of Tanlir for his good fortune. He hoped when his time came he would be so blessed, although he wanted a female mate.

When the jet landed, it was late in the afternoon. Royal guards and limos were waiting for the Princes as they deplaned. The press in their kingdom was a bit more polite than they were in Megakat City so there wasn't pushing and shoving with shouted questions and demands for pictures. Instead there were cameras clicking and polite gestures requesting attention that the Princes could choose to ignore if they wished.

They had talked about this on the trip and had decided to give the press a snippet that something was up without telling them what it was. So Torr moved forward of the group and addressed the press as the others made for the limos and climbed in.

"Our trip was a great success. There will be a press conference soon. Perhaps by tomorrow. Be alert, there is some special news to be presented as well. I thank you for your patience. Good day." He told them then turned and climbed into the limo.

The press went nuts. The sharp-eyed ones had seen the strangers among the royal entourage and wondered at their presence. One member of the press had recognized Commander Feral from a press release on the Coalition Plan. Newsrooms buzzed as they tried to think what the special announcement could be.

The drive to the palace was breathtaking for Feral and Dr. Taglion. Tanlir pointed out the main highlights as they passed.

"This is truly a fairy tale place come true." Taglion said in awe as he stared at the surrounding forests and the horse drawn carts and wagons.

"Yes, you are certainly right there, doctor." Feral agreed. "It's truly beautiful here, Tanlir." Feral murmured to his mate as he continued to stare out the window.

"I'm glad you find it so. I can't wait to show you around, love." Tanlir said warmly.

When they arrived at the palace and climbed out of the limos, the King's Seneschal was there to

greet them warmly. He looked surprised to see two extra guests.

"Greetings your highnesses. I trust your flight was uneventful?" He asked politely.

"Yes, smooth as always, Camden." Torr responded with a smile. "We have guests. This is Commander Ulysses Feral, the originator of the Coalition plan and Dr. Taglion. Are our parents available to see us?" He asked.

"They specifically asked that you be brought to them as soon as you arrived, your highness." Camden said smiling back. "They are waiting for you in the atrium where a late dinner has been held awaiting your arrival."

"Excellent! You might as well come along Camden. Tanlir has news that you will want to hear. It's going to rock the kingdom." Torr said with a wicked smile.

"Indeed! Well, perhaps we should hurry. I can't wait to hear what this momentous news could be." Camden said giving Prince Tanlir a studied look before turning to lead the way into the side entry of the main hall.

Feral stared entranced by the opulence and beauty of the furnishings, wall hangings and the elaborate woodwork of the walls, trim work, doorways, and bannisters to the broad stairways. Many oil paintings hung here and there as well. The place was incredible.

Camden opened a set of leaded glass doors that led into a stunning indoor garden. The King and Queen sat on a beautifully embroidered divan. A little ways from them was a large table with heavily padded chairs where a feast was being brought in by servants from another entrance. Seated at some of the chairs were the rest of Tanlir's brothers.

Formality was relaxed in this obvious family setting. Feral had been too busy to be nervous about meeting Tanlir's parents but now, as he stood before them, his heart was in his throat and butterflies in his stomach.

Torr, Shane, and Tanlir led the way to their parents. Camden went to stand behind the King's seat. Both the King and Queen stood up and warmly greeted their sons.

"Oh, it is so good to see you all home safely. I trust everything has gone well?" Their father asked as he gestured for everyone to have a seat.

"Yes father, but before we all sit and discuss it, I have some important news to tell you." Tanlir announced. His knees were trembling and butterflies were swarming in his belly though he didn't show it as he quickly pushed ahead before he lost his nerve.

"Oh? I see we have guests, do they have something to do with your news?" His father asked as he cocked his head inquisitively at the strangers.

"Yes, Father." Tanlir answered then extended his paw to Feral who had stayed in the background with Dr. Taglion.

Swallowing hard with nerves, Feral came forward to take his paw, gripping it tight. Tanlir squeezed back showing just how nervous he was as well.

"Father...Mother...this is Ulysses Feral, Chief Enforcer of Megakat City, originator of the Coalition Plan, and my new lifemate." He said in a rush.

His parents, his other brothers and the Seneschal sat frozen in utter shock. Before they could erupt in anger, Tanlir hurried on. "And he's four weeks pregnant with my kitten. He's a hermaphrodite."

His father's face had begun to turn red with fury but as his ears picked up the addition, his mouth gaped open in utter shock. His mother was still trying to grasp what she'd heard and his brothers were equally at a loss for words.

"Only Tanlir could succeed in finding a breeding hermaphrodite at a conference, lifemate with him and get him pregnant. Believe me, father, Shane and I were totally envious. How could one Kat be that lucky?" Torr spoke quickly into the silence trying to use levity to break the strained atmosphere.

"He's pregnant?" The Queen finally managed to ask in a bewildered tone.

"Yes, Mother. He's a bit fragile right now. This is Dr. Taglion..." Tanlir quickly gestured for the doctor to come forward. "He's a specialist in herms and will be monitoring Ulysses' condition while he's here." He informed them.

"Fragile? He's a big, apparently healthy looking tom! How could he be fragile?" Tanlir's brother Vito blurted out in disbelief.

"Pardon me, your highness, your majesties. I will explain. Male herms are not designed very well for pregnancy. The foetus gathers all the blood it needs to sustain itself in the first trimester. A female automatically begins to produce more blood to compensate but male herm bodies don't institute this safety feature until much later in the pregnancy. Because of this, they are subject to severe anemia and even heart failure during these crucial first few months. This is why he must be constantly monitored and not allowed to take many risks his job usually entails or be under any real stress until this period passes." Dr. Taglion explained quietly.

"Oh my! What a risk you take sir." The Queen said in concern and sympathy toward her new son-in-law. "Have you been able to avoid any of these problems?" She asked.

"I wasn't aware I was pregnant, your majesty, until I, unfortunately passed out while on duty. I did suffer a bout of anemia but I assure you I'm fine right now." Feral answered reassuringly.

"Oh dear! How awful. Well, we will certainly make sure you suffer no excessive stress here, only rest and relaxation. Welcome to our family, Ulysses." The Queen said warmly as she stood and gave Feral a hug which he returned rather tentatively.

The King, in the meanwhile, was still trying to grasp the fact that this was his son's new mate and that the kitten this male carried was the next heir to the throne. It boggled his mind.

He stood without realizing it and came to Feral's side. The male was as tall as the King and was well built and strong. He was a handsome Kat but it still was a hard thing to accept that this was his son-in-law (?). It was very weird. He sniffed the air lightly and detected the definite scent of a pregnant female that was strangely laced with the obvious scent of a male. He shook his head and tried to think how he was going to explain this to his council much less the populace.

"Father?" Tanlir asked hesitantly seeing his father studying his mate, a frown of concentration on his face. He was worried that perhaps the King would not accept his bonding.

His father came out of his thoughts and eyed his son in bemusement.

"Forgive me, my son. This is very difficult to accept even though the evidence is indisputable. Your pardon, Ulysses for my poor manners in not greeting you properly as is your due. Welcome to our family." The King said politely giving Feral a brief hug.

"Thank you sir. It's a pleasure to be here. Your kingdom is so very beautiful." Feral said searching for words to appease the King.

The King smiled warmly at that statement. "We like to think so. I'm sure Tanlir will be showing

you around once you've settled in. How long do you intend to stay?" He asked.

"Tanlir told me it would take about two months to have me introduced and for our bond to be formally acknowledged." Feral said questioningly.

"Yes that would be about right though in this strange case, it might be a bit longer." The King said thoughtfully. "But come, let's sit down and have a bite to eat and you can tell me how this came about."

Everyone dutifully took their seats and were served. Excited questions began to fly when the main course had been served. Tanlir and Feral tried to answer them all as honestly as they could. By the time desert was served, the most pressing questions had been answered. The King and Queen bid them a good evening and left them alone with the brothers.

But before any of them could start a new round of questioning, Tanlir had noticed his mate was getting tired and looking a bit pale from the high state of alert he'd been sustaining while the King and Queen were still around. So he put his foot down.

"Now look! Tomorrow will be soon enough to ask more questions but right now, Ulysses needs his rest. He's looking a bit pale so I want Dr. Taglion to check him out before going to bed. So we will now say good night." Tanlir told his brothers firmly.

There were looks of disappointment but no one voiced an objection. Sighing mentally in relief, Tanlir signaled his mate and Dr. Taglion to follow him to his quarters.

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Chapter 13: Convincing the council by ulyferal

They went up the sweeping staircase and down a long ornately decorated hallway until they reached a set of double doors. Tanlir opened one of the doors and gestured his guest to go in. Ulysses and Dr. Taglion walked past him into a spacious living area with heavy expensive furniture. There was a hall on the left and a door at the back of the room to the right.

"That leads to my study," Tanlir said pointing to the right-hand door as he closed the hall door to his quarters. "Let's go down the hall first. There's a guest room and bath for the good doctor." He said leading the way. He opened a door at the end of the hall. It was a fine room with a queen size bed with curtains, heavy pieces of furniture, and a sitting area. "I hope you find your accommodations to your liking doctor." He said. "The bathroom is through that door," Tanlir pointed to a small door in the corner.

"They are beautiful, Prince Tanlir. I'll be quite comfortable, thank you." Dr. Taglion said, looking around in pleased surprise.

"You're welcome. Ulysses and I are just down the hall from you at the first door we past." He said warmly.

"Let me just check your blood pressure Commander then I'll go about unpacking and settling in for the night." Dr. Taglion said briskly going to his medical bag and pulling out his blood pressure cuff. He gestured to a chair for Feral to have a seat.

Feral sighed and sat, extending his arm. The doctor quickly wrapped the cuff around his arm and took his pressure.

"Well it's a little low but not dangerously so. It's a good thing its bed time and you'll be off your feet. Get some fluids on board before you sleep and get some rest. I'll see you both in the morning. Is there a specific time we need to be up, Prince Tanlir?" He asked as he put away his device.

"Breakfast is served at nine in the morning, promptly, doctor. We dress semi-casual usually but tomorrow, Ulysses will be presented to the council so you should go in a suit." Tanlir told him.

"I understand. Then I will see you both in the morning. Good night!" Dr. Taglion said as he walked them to the door.

"Good night, sir." Tanlir said inclining his head politely. Feral just nodded in agreement.

As the doctor's door closed, Tanlir was already tugging Ulysses down the hall to his own room. When he opened the door, it was similar to the doctor's except much larger. The sitting area faced a huge fireplace. Before it was two heavy but comfortable chairs and a chess table sat between them. Thick carpeting was everywhere. The bed against the far wall was a king and heavy crimson draperies surrounded it. A doorway lead to a huge bathroom. A jetted tub, twin shower, dual dryers and sinks were the main features as well as a hidden private toilet. It was incredible. In the main area, Tanlir showed him the huge walk-in closet and the half that was his. His clothes were already unpacked and hanging. A dresser was in one corner for his use as well. He shook his head. 'This would take some getting used to.' He thought in a daze.

The Prince also had a small refrigerator located behind a mini bar in his living space. He had gone back there to retrieve a bottle of water for his mate and handed it to the bemused tom Kat who had followed him.

"This is really some place you have here Tanlir." He said.

"I'm glad you like it. Let's go get stripped and get you to bed, shall we." He said, wrapping an arm around Ulysses' waist and walking him back to the bathroom. After a soothing shower, Tanlir resisted the desire to take his mate, they made for the huge bed. He pulled the big tom into his arms and kissed him warmly.

"Sleep well, my love. Tomorrow will be a very busy and trying day." Tanlir murmured.

Feral sighed unhappily. 'Oh joy! I get to be stared and gawked at!' He thought then shook the unpleasant thought aside and enjoyed the warm arms around him and drifted to sleep.

The next morning, he awoke to bright sunlight streaming through a thin crack in the curtains across the room. He yawned and stretched. Beside him Tanlir rumbled sleepily then blinked his eyes open.

"Good morning, love. How are you feeling?" Tanlir murmured reaching out to caress his mate's face.

Ulysses smiled warmly and leaned toward the cheetah to get a morning kiss. "This is real nice to wake up to."

Their moment was interrupted by a knock on the door. Tanlir sighed, "Come!"

In came a cadre of servants. The head servant bowed. "Your highness, time to get dressed and ready for breakfast." He said politely.

Tanlir looked toward his mate with a lopsided smile. "Welcome to my world, my love."

Feral just rolled his eyes and pushed the bedding off to sit up. Tanlir reached out suddenly and stopped him.

"Slowly, Uly. It's less stressful to the stomach and your blood pressure." He warned gently.

"Humph! What a pain!" Feral growled but did as told. Once he was sitting up, he was surprised by a young maid who presented him a tray with assorted crackers and a mug with some fragrant

tea in it.

"Consort, this was ordered by your doctor. He instructed that you eat a few crackers and drink the tea before rising." She said with a warm smile.

"Uh, well thank you." Feral said, finding this level of service a bit unnerving and being addressed as Consort would take some getting used to. He took some saltines and the tea.

Tanlir got up from the bed and went to the bathroom, soon the sound of a shower was heard. Feral finished his tea and crackers then carefully stood up. He was pleased to note that he felt fine. Out of the corner of his eye, he noted the head servant and another had been watching him closely but once he was safely on his feet they returned their attention to laying out clothes for Tanlir and himself.

Shaking his head mentally, he hurriedly made for the bathroom. The shower was still going even though Tanlir was already under the dryers. Uly stripped and made for the shower himself.

He came out of the bathroom and made for the closet only to be halted and dressed by the servants. This made him feel very uncomfortable but didn't say anything. Tanlir gave him a small knowing smile from where he stood near the door, already dressed and waiting.

Soon he was completely attired and walking with Tanlir out of their room meeting the doctor coming out of his.

"Good morning, your highness . . . Commander. How are we feeling this morning?" Dr. Taglion asked pleasantly as he joined them.

"The tea and crackers worked wonderfully. It's the first morning I've been able to get up without needing to lose my dinner." Feral said gratefully.

"That's good to hear. You need your strength today, or so I'm told." The doctor said.

"You heard correctly, doctor. It will be a trying time as my father addresses the council. They will be understandably skeptical of you and there will be some that will insist on tasting your scent. Once we're past the council then it's the press conference to tell the public. It will be a long day." Tanlir said heavily.

"Sounds like fun . . . not!" Feral said flatly. "I've always hated public appearances and the press."

"Yes, I have no doubt of that and it's never for a happy reason either." Tanlir commiserated with his mate as they made their way to the dining room.

Nearly everyone was there except for a couple of brothers and, of course, the king and queen, when they entered the dining room. Tanlir led his guests to their seats where they stood behind their chairs and waited. Torr and Genrey hurried in and took their places just ahead of the Seneschal's announcing the king and queen. They came in and smiled at everyone and took their seats. Everyone else followed suit and a very nice breakfast was served.

Feral couldn't eat much and wasn't used to much breakfast anyway. Dr. Taglion stealthily passed certain items to him and urged him to eat a little of it. Feral sighed and complied. He would just have to accept the fact that he no longer had any real control over his life anymore.

"I trust you slept well, Ulysses." The Queen said questioningly.

"I did, your majesty." He said politely.

"Please, you're my new son, you are allowed to call me Regina when we are together privately and it will feel more like family that way." She requested

"As you wish,...Regina." Ulysses said reluctantly.

"And my name is Geoffrey." The King said with a smile. "Now, Ulysses, I'm sure Tanlir has already warned you that presenting you is going to cause a stir. Just a piece of advice, keep silent and let the council rant for a bit then answer their questions as completely as you can." He instructed his new son-in-law.

Feral nodded politely. "I'm used to dealing with irate government officials, sir. Hazards of the job."

"Oh of course, I'd forgotten for a moment that you are career military and a leader in your own right. My, this is taking me a bit to get used to. Anyway, I know you'll do fine." The King said.

Mentally he shook his head. He was still adjusting to the fact he had a son-in-law rather than daughter and that his new son was an experienced military Kat with a distinguished career. Instead of supporting his new female member of the family, he was going to have to allow his 'son' to return to his present duties as a Chief Enforcer despite the fact he was pregnant. That thought still caused him to squirm.

'Imagine a male giving birth...oh that's just too strange and if I'm having trouble with it heaven help the council and my people!' He thought with a sigh.

Breakfast conversation was lively, though Feral didn't participate much but did listen avidly. This was a very interesting family and he could feel the genuine love they felt for each other. He counted himself lucky to be included.

As soon as their meal was finished, they rose as a group and followed the King and Queen to the council chambers located in the main part of the castle. It was a good ten minute walk down hallways then down a grand staircase to a grand mezzanine. They crossed that to a heavy set of ornate oak doors with a guard on either side.

The Seneschal stepped from another room and went before the royal couple to announce them. The doors were opened and the Seneschal walked to the head of the huge table. The council was standing beside their chairs.

The King and Queen swept in and took their seats at the head of the table. Tanlir led Ulysses and Dr. Taglion around the table to a wall where a line of heavy, padded chairs were. He gestured for them to take the chairs to his right while his brothers took the ones on his left.

When everyone was settled, the council began its day's business. Feral listened closely to how this country ran its affairs. Though there was some dissension here and there among the members, none was acrimonious. A great deal of business was accomplished in a short amount of time then it was time for new business. He felt himself get tense as the King stood to address his council.

"I know rumors have run rife about some important news my son Tanlir has brought back from Megakat City. I must say that this news shocked and surprised me as well. It's good news but extremely unusual. I must insist that you all pay attention to everything I say before getting angry and upset or interrupting me before I finish. Is that clear?" He asked of all of them.

There were many looks of surprise and consternation but they all nodded, eager to know what the rumors were about.

"Very well then, Tanlir please stand, son and you too Ulysses." The king requested. Tanlir did as asked as did Feral, whose knees shook a little with nervous tension.

"Members of the council, Prince Tanlir has managed to lifemate. His mate is presently four weeks pregnant making my son next in line for the throne. His lifemate is Commander Ulysses Feral, Chief Enforcer of Megakat City. He is an hermaphrodite and our new 'son'." The King finished.

There was profound silence for several seconds then a roar of sound flooded the chamber as multiple voices tried to talk at once. The King and his family merely waited in silence for the fervor to settle down.

It took a while but finally, when they realized the King would not answer any questions until they quieted, silence began to fall once more punctuated by an occasional angry whisper.

"Your pardon, your majesty. You have verified Prince Tanlir's claim that this male is pregnant?" His minister for defense asked tautly glaring a bit at Feral.

"Naturally. However, Ulysses is willing to let any that need to have proof to take his scent." The King said mildly. "Ulysses, if you would come here, please." He ordered his new son. Feral made his way around the table until he stood next to the King. "Now, all that wish to, please come and satisfy yourself of this claim." He told his council.

At least half of his councilors' stood. They took turns coming close. Feral stood stiffly as each male came close and sniffed. It made him uncomfortable doing this. The last of the councilor's lingered a little longer than the rest. He was a middle-aged tom with an amazing red coloring to his fur. The Kat's gold eyes matched Feral's own and he sniffed deeply then leaned a bit close. Feral found himself shivering at the scent of this tom. Something about him made him uneasy.

Everyone was startled when a loud hiss and growl intruded behind the councilor. The red tom turned in surprise to see Prince Tanlir standing there, his eyes glowing with anger, his stance one of fierce protectiveness. He pushed the councilor back and interposed himself between his mate and the councilor.

"Tanlir!" His father barked in shocked surprise.

Tanlir didn't acknowledge his father's sharp censure. His focus was on the councilor. He bared his fangs and growled.

"I meant no disrespect Prince Tanlir. Your protective response tells us all that you are truly lifemated. My apologizes for making you prove that." The red tom said bowing and stepping back to allow the prince to calm down.

Feral heaved a sigh of relief. 'So that's what was wrong. I was feeling threatened and Tanlir, through our bond, reacted to it. Amazing.' He thought, still a little shakened.

He reached out to Tanlir and nuzzled his face to calm his mate. Tanlir huffed and shook himself out then returned the nuzzle, an arm snaked around his mate's waist possessively. The councilor's all retook their seats.

Tanlir turned to his father still holding his mate. "My apologizes for disrupting the proceedings, father. I really couldn't help myself." He told his father softly.

King Roender was amazed. He'd never witnessed a lifemating this strong before. It was obvious his son had indeed found his soul's other half.

"The cause was justified, my son. Go sit down and relax." He told Tanlir gently.

Tanlir walked back to his seat with Ulysses close at his side.

"If all of you are satisfied, we now need to discuss how we are to announce this to the public. Obviously, this is going to be tricky and will take very careful wording to make them understand that this is real and not a joke. That we are all agreed that the lifemating is a true one and that Tanlir is the next in line for the throne." The King said.

For the next hour, the council threw out many ideas about how to approach such a delicate situation. Finally, they came up with a press release that they all could live with. After lunch, they would face the press and tell them news that would shake the kingdom for months to come.

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Chapter 14: Press conference by ulyferal

They were standing in a very large room that was heavily carpeted with banners hanging on the walls. Behind the small group of chairs was a large bay of windows where the sun was streaming in. At the front of the room was a long ornate table sitting on a stage with a long row of chairs behind it. Spaced out against the walls were the palace guards in their livery, standing at attention, each with a sword in a scabbard at their sides.

The chairs on the floor were filled with the press in front and important business people behind. A low mutter of voices filled the air but ceased when the Seneschal announced the royal family. Everyone stood and moments later a line of Kats came in from a side door. Genrey, Shane, Tanlir, a stranger, The King and Queen, Torr, Vito, and Cymric took their seats. Behind them entered the council. They remained standing.

As soon as the royals and council were in, the crowd sat and waited attentively as King Roender stood to address them.

"Welcome to our home my loyal subjects. We are gathered here today to make a most joyful announcement. But first, I will tell you that our country has joined the Coalition for the Protection of the Planet from Alien Attack. The plan is a sound one and well thought out by Chief Enforcer Ulysses Feral of Megakat City. A copy of the plan will be handed out so that you can publish it for my subjects to become familiar with its purpose. In line with being a part of the coalition, I've decided to open an Embassy in Megakat City. One of my sons will be an ambassador there and will monitor our business dealings with that city." The King paused a moment.

The room rumbled with approval of this plan and many were scribbling notes for the evening's paper.

"Now my second announcement is more personal. It seems my son, Tanlir, has found the other half of his soul at the coalition conference a month ago. We were surprised at his choice of mate but the council and I are firmly convinced of the trueness of his lifemating. His new mate is four weeks pregnant which means Tanlir is now the next in line for the throne." The King continued, not surprised when the crowd responded predictably.

There was a spat of surprised sounds and many smiles but also looks of confusion since they didn't see a female anywhere on the stage. They silenced when the King raised his paw.

"When we say we were surprised by his choice it was because he has bonded to a male hermaphrodite. This is unprecedented in the history of our kingdom and was quite a shock but I want you to welcome him, as my Queen and I have, as the newest member of the royal family. I introduce to you, Prince Tanlir's new consort, Commander Ulysses Feral." The King said gesturing for the two to stand.

There was stunned silence for a solid minute then a roar of sound that was a mix of shock, questions and dismay. The group on the stage stayed silent, letting the shock wear off before answering any questions.

The fervor finally tapered off except for a lot of low-level murmuring.

"Your majesty!" Called out a member of the press. The King nodded for him to speak.

"You say you and the council are convinced of the lifemating of Tanlir to this male and of his pregnancy. May we ask how you determined this?" He asked.

The King gestured behind him. The Minister of Defense spoke up and explained what had been done to prove the truth of the matter. The press scribbled this information down frantically. There was still a look of disbelief as everyone stared at the tall, powerful looking tom standing beside the King. No way did that Kat look pregnant and it was going to be hard for the general populace to believe it as well but no one would ever call their King a liar.

Oh yes, this was going to cause a great stir and a lot of talk in the Kingdom for months to come.

After asking questions about how the pair met, the coalition, information on the Commander's job in Megakat City, etc., the questions became more personal.

"Your Consort, will you be giving up your career in Megakat City?" A female asked.

"No, after I've attended the ceremony to officially make me consort and the bonding is recognized, I will be returning to Megakat City." Feral answered politely.

"And before you ask, I will also be going with him. I've been named the Ambassador to Megakat City." Tanlir interrupting quickly.

"What about when the kitten is due? Will you return to have it here?" Another asked.

"Right now that is unknown. It depends on Ulysses' condition at the time." Tanlir said lightly.

"Isn't it difficult for a male to be pregnant, much less give birth?" A female asked, unable to fathom a male doing such a thing.

"In the first couple of months there are some problems not encountered by females, because of the obvious differences between myself and a full female but with careful monitoring by my physician, I should be alright. By my third month most of the danger will have passed and it should progress normally after that. I don't know too much about giving birth yet. Guess I'll know when it happens." Feral said, a bit tongue and cheek, to relieve some of the tension around him.

There was a brief spat of laughter at that. Despite that bit of levity, the same reported asked, "What kind of problems can occur in the first few months for you?" The female persisted, curious.

Feral sighed inwardly, uncomfortable speaking about this in public. Sensing this, Tanlir signaled Seneschal Camden to escort Dr. Taglion in where he had been waiting patiently. He had wanted to set everyone's fears to rest early on in case Ulysses did have another episode of anemia.

"This is Dr. Taglion, a specialist in male herms. He was gracious enough to be willing to be Ulysses' personal physician. I will let him explain what the dangers are for my mate." Tanlir said turning over the briefing to the doctor.

Dr. Taglion was an excellent speaker and was able to answer all questions put to him but had to decline to answer those that broke the rules of patient confidentiality. The press seemed to be satisfied after that and the conference was ended.

Everyone stood as the royals departed the room followed by the council and disappeared through the door. As the public left, many an excited conversation could be heard as they spilled out the main door.

As they royals walked down the hall, King Roender had a pleased look on his face.

"I think that went well, don't you my dear?" He asked his Queen.

"Yes dear, I think so too." She said warmly.

"I'm just glad it's over finally." Tanlir said with a sigh taking his mate's paw in his own. Feral

grinned at him in relief as well.

"Well it seems it's time for a late lunch, shall we retire to the dining room?" The King suggested as he led the way down the long hallway. The council disbanded going off to attend to affairs of their own. The family settled down to a comfortable and relaxed lunch together then Dr. Taglion ordered Feral to rest for an hour or so.

A tour of the city sights was planned for the afternoon and he wanted Feral to be rested. Ulysses sighed, feeling much put upon but found it not so bad when Tanlir whispered he would join him in a little while for a little personal attention. First, though, he had business of his own to attend so left his mate in the capable paws of his youngest brother Cymric.

Cymric told Ulysses and Dr. Taglion about some of the sights they would be seeing and asked numerous questions about Megakat City with ill concealed excitement. Feral smiled inwardly as he answered the youngster's questions. He liked him and was glad the young prince didn't live in his world. That innocence would be destroyed in the 'war zone' that was Megakat City.

Cymric left them at Tanlir's quarters with a bright smile.

"Nice fellow." Taglion said as he headed for his room. "Get some rest, Commander." He admonished the big tom. "I certainly intend too."

"Yes he is." Feral agreed warmly. "I'm not used to napping in the middle of the day but I will rest, promise." Feral said turning into his new quarters and closing the door behind him. He didn't go to the bedroom right away. He went to the library of books Tanlir had in his living space. He looked them over and picked a book that sounded interesting and took it to the bedroom.

He took off his coat, tie, and boots then settled back against the pillows piled against the headboard and began to read. Tanlir came in an hour later to find his mate asleep with a book laying on his chest. Smiling warmly, he removed the book and set it on the table nearby. He took his own coat, tie and shoes off then climbed onto the bed.

Feral woke at the movement of the bed and gazed sleepily at Tanlir's face hovering over his.

"Hmm, I really didn't think I would fall asleep like that. I'm still not used to being this tired." He murmured.

"I can only guess, my love, what it must be like for you and how frustrating. I'm glad that you did get some rest. Perhaps a shower will perk you up before we meet the others for a tour of our Kingdom." He said, with a questioning eyebrow raised.

Feral yawned hugely and stretched before answering his mate. "That's probably a good idea." He agreed.

Tanlir smiled, climbing off the bed again and making for the huge bathroom to start the shower. Ulysses joined him and was surprised when his mate stripped too.

"Thought I'd give you a helping paw." Tanlir said in a low seductive voice.

"Ohh...really?" Ulysses said, giving him a smoky look.

"Hmm...yess...after you my love." The cheetah murmured gesturing for the dark tom to move into the huge shower.

The shower had multiple spray heads, giving them a rain-like cascade of water over them.

Feral sighed and enjoyed the interesting effect against his body. Tanlir reached past him to a ledge that held many types of cleansing products, brushes, and loofas. He chose a loofa and

spread a generous amount of a rain-scented body wash on it.

Moving closer to his mate, he began a slow caressing wash of the broad back. Feral arched his back and sighed deeply. It was so nice to be taken care of.

The cheetah's attention grew more sensuous as he washed his mate's more intimate areas drawing a moan of pleasure from the big dark tom. Paying particular attention to Ulysses' female genitals with his fingers and using the loofah on the tom's front, he made his mate nearly dance on his toes in uncontrollable desire and heat.

"Ooooh...Tanlir..." He groaned hotly.

Grinning wickedly, Tanlir increased his attention until Ulysses was shuddering and making strangled sounds of need.

"I love you so much my consort." Tanlir said in a deeper, darker voice, pausing a moment to nibble on Ulysses' neck and caress the still hard muscled stomach that held the future heir to the throne.

"Tanlir...Gods...take me please...I can't take any more...ooooooo" Ulysses' moaned, his body writhing helplessly.

"As you wish my love," Tanlir cooed, moving into position and swiftly sheathing himself in his mate's female heat. "Ooooh, yes...you are so hot and wet for me." He groaned as he set a fast rhythm.

"Mmmmm..." Was all his dark mate could articulate.

As the hot water cascaded down on them, Tanlir brought them to a roaring climax that left them limp, panting, and leaning against a nearby wall to keep their feet.

Recovered after several long minutes, Tanlir turned his mate around for a long lingering kiss. When they parted, he smiled warmly.

"Guess we should hurry and finish before one of my servants peeks in to see if we are alright and to remind us that others wait for us." Tanlir sighed reluctantly.

"Probably a very good idea." Feral grinned then leaned forward to give his mate a quick kiss.

They finished washing up then stepped under the dryers. As they walked back into the bedroom, Feral found he wasn't surprised anymore that two servants waited to dress them. Within minutes, they were properly attired and leaving their quarters, meeting up with Dr. Taglion as they headed out.

"I'm excited to see more of this beautiful country of yours, Prince Tanlir." Dr. Taglion said, his eyes bright with excitement.

Tanlir smiled at him as they met up with two of his brothers that would be accompanying them.

They went through the main hall doors and down the steps to a formal closed carriage pulled by four beautiful white horses completely outfitted as befitted the royal house. A foot Kat, wearing the King's livery, opened the carriage door and dropped the attached steps down. He stepped back and held the door while Tanlir, Ulysses, Dr. Taglion, Shane and Cymric climbed aboard. He closed the door then climbed up to the rear of the carriage.

Feral heard the driver call out a command to the team and without a jerk, the carriage smoothly began to move down the long drive to the heavy gates that opened as they arrived closer to them. He leaned out a bit and saw an escort of four riders ahead and four behind on horses also

dressed in the livery of the King and wearing swords at their sides. He felt like he'd been transported to medieval times.

"Wow! This is really something." He said, shaking his head.

"Glad you like it, my love. This carriage has been in my family for generations." Tanlir said, smiling. His brothers looked pleased at Feral's response as well.

"What a rich and long history your country has. I almost regret our visit will be so short." Dr. Taglion said in awe. "I'll just have to try and see everything I can."

"Wait til you see the gardens and the marketplace, doctor. I doubt you'll have seen anything like them where you come from." Cymric said with a happy grin.

"And you'd be right. I'm definitely looking forward to seeing them, young Prince." Dr. Taglion said, grinning back.

They settled back and enjoyed the ride down to the village while the Princes told their visitors a bit of their Kingdom's history and some of the things they would be seeing.

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Chapter 15: An enemy see an opportunity by ulyferal

The tour had been enlightening and enjoyable. They returned to the castle tired and hungry. At dinner the King and Queen asked how the visitors found their first real look at their kingdom.

"A truly spectacular place, your majesties!" Dr. Taglion said enthusiastically.

"Yes, I have to agree with the doctor. It's very beautiful and peaceful. I particularly liked the old ruins. It must have been a fascinating place in olden days. I was also impressed with the way you've been able to mix the old ways with the new and keep your kingdom clean and natural." Feral said.

He normally didn't care much for the hoopla of a tour anywhere he'd been but Tanlir's home was breathtaking and so very unlike Megakat City. The ruins were overgrown with plants but still retained enough of what it had been to be awe inspiring. The people were kind and friendly. He could see retiring here without a qualm. It would seem like paradise.

"So pleased you both enjoyed your outing." The King said warmly. "Did my sons have a chance to take you to Dreamer Falls?" He asked.

Feral's brows rose in question, "Dreamer Falls? No sir, they didn't."

"It was getting too late to do so, father, and you know it takes an hour just to get to them then you'll want to spend another few hours just walking around them. We thought that should wait another day." Prince Cymric chimed in.

"You're quite right about that, my son. It isn't something you want to view in a hurry." The Queen agreed.

"Sounds like a fun trip." Feral said politely as he ate his delicious main course of roasted chicken with fluffy mashed potatoes and a strange type of vegetable.

"I'll be sure you see it soon, my love. I wish I could show it to you myself but I'm going to be too involved in learning my duties as an Ambassador and preparing for the ceremony for your investiture as consort as well as the plans for our wedding next year." Tanlir said regretfully.

"That's okay, big brother, we'll make sure he and the doctor get to see it this week sometime

before he's required to get involved with all the business of becoming royalty." Cymric said, cheerfully.

"That would be appreciated, Cymric and thank you." Tanlir said, smiling gratefully.

After dinner, Feral was more than ready for a hot bath and bed. The pregnancy drained far too much of his energy to his disgust. Tanlir washed his mate's body and kissed him senseless but withheld having sex. He refused to stress Ulysses further even if he was willing.

"I'm glad you had an enjoyable day, my love. Mine was really boring." Tanlir said while they soaked.

"Such is the life of a future heir." Feral said with a tired smirk.

"Yes it is but its compensations are well worth it." Tanlir grinned slyly as he stole more kisses.

"Hmmm...you do that soo well." Feral sighed when he could get his breath back.

"You inspire me, my love." His mate murmured, nuzzling Feral's face.

Tanlir help Ulysses get out of the tub and dry off. They cuddled up in bed and were soon asleep.

In a more militant country just over the mountain range, late that night...

"Leader Tormech, we are receiving a message from our spy in King Roender's court." A minion reported.

"Ahh, then let's hear what our little mouse has to say," A large lion-cross male purred, coldly. He walked out of his study and down a modern lit hall to an elevator, stepping in the car he pressed the button for the fourth floor of his fortress where he lived and ruled his country.

The elevator stopped, when the doors opened, his second in command was standing there waiting for him. He nodded as he stepped past the Kat and moved down the short hall to a secured door with two guards. They quickly saluted, one of them opening the secured door with a swipe of a special key card he kept around his neck.

Their leader swept through the door and went to where some highly sophisticated equipment occupied an entire wall. Seated before it was a communications technician.

Their leader came to stand behind the tech. "So, let's hear what our mouse has to report." He said giving a nod to the tech to engage the comm.

"Good evening my Leader," Came a deep voice through the speaker.

"So my mouse, you have news for me?" The imposing leader demanded.

"Yes my Leader. Prince Tanlir's consort is going to be taken to see Dreamer Falls day after tomorrow. His entourage will leave early in the morning and will include Prince Cymric, the foreign doctor, and two royal guards." The spy reported.

"Excellent. Very good work. We'll contact you if we need you." The leader told him and signaled the communication's tech to cut the connection.

"Sounds like a perfect opportunity, sir." His second said cautiously.

The leader stood thinking for some minutes. "Yesss...an opportunity indeed." He murmured then turned and strode out of the communications room briskly, followed closely by his second who smiled in anticipation.

Two days later...

"What a breathtaking sight!" Dr. Taglion said in awe.

"Amazing and soo beautiful!" Feral echoed him as they both stared in wonder at the glory that was Dreamer Falls.

The falls plunged down a steep rock face some fifty miles above where they stood. At its bottom was a large lake where the water rocketed down then hit the rocks at its base causing it to spray outward as high as twenty feet in the air before falling. This had the effect of causing a wall of mist that gave the falls a look of mystery. Surrounding this was a deep forest of tall conifers. At the lake's edge were green lawns mowed short by the animals that grazed there.

From the landing pad that had been built for visitors to more easily reach this natural wonder, they had hiked some five miles to behold this awesome sight. The falls were located at the far end of the kingdom at the foot of the mountain range.

The hike had been fairly easy and allowed them to see the wildlife that were not too shy due to the constant presence of visitors. Deer were prevalent as well as many types of birds and other small creatures. Besides animals, there were a plethora of beautiful and exotic flowers that lined the pathway to the falls. Huge clumps of ferns formed a forest of their own near one side of the falls.

The roar of the falls made it hard to hear anything so one had to lean close to each other and shout to be heard. It was due to this that they didn't hear the large group of camouflaged soldiers slipping up on them.

If it hadn't been for Feral's uncanny sense of knowing when danger was near, they would have been caught by the marauding invaders.

His skin had prickled under his fur and made Feral jerk his head back the way they had come. He caught a glimpse of armed Kats before they vanished into the surrounding forest. Leaning close to the guards just behind him, he quickly gave a warning.

The guards shot a look behind them in concern but saw nothing, however, they didn't doubt the trained soldier's word. Worried, they quickly forced their charges ahead faster. Prince Cymric frowned in concern and looked around quickly as the group moved to the water's edge.

"There's a place I know that will provide us protection and is easy to defend. Follow me!" He said hurriedly as he led them toward the roaring falls at a run. He moved with surety as they ran past the lake and up to the rocky cliffs of the falls themselves. It didn't take them long to get drenched by the heavy mist and spraying water as Prince Cymric began to climb a barely seen rocky path to one side of the falling water. The path was slippery and dangerous. While one guard remained at the bottom watching for the ones following them the other guard aided the less physically capable doctor up the rock face, insuring he didn't lose his footing.

After some ten minutes of climbing they reached a hidden cave behind the falls. Some moments later as the group was catching their breath, the rear guard arrived.

Shouting to the prince he reported what he had seen. "Your highness, there is a group of some thirty soldiers of the Republic of Lionar looking for us."

Prince Cymric's face reflected angry fury. "That bastard!"

"What's going on, Cymric?" Feral asked, moving close enough to be heard.

"Leader Tormech of the Republic of Lionar is always trying to make a bid to take over our country. Theirs is a technologically based society and they covet our unspoiled resources. They

have stripped their country bare and must import much of what they need from other countries." Prince Cymric growled bitterly.

"Ahh...so they think to kidnap us in a bid to blackmail the King into surrendering something they want or need." Feral said in understanding. "I doubt very much he will try to go for a complete takeover of your country based on a kidnaping but something important you have he might make a bid for." He said, speculatively.

Cymric eyed his brother's consort thoughtfully. "You are probably correct. We have just developed a way to increase crop production and built a new prototype chopper. Either of which the Leader might be interested in." He said. "We need to inform my father but our radios don't work in all this rock." He added in concern.

Before they could decide on a plan of action, two soldiers appeared at the cave mouth opening. Immediately, the guards engaged them and managed to shove them back but more began to push their way into their small shelter.

Feral with Cymric at his side joined in the battle. Dr. Taglion wasn't a fighter and wisely kept back out of the way.

The soldiers hadn't expected such a fierce defense so weren't prepared for a lengthy battle. This gave Feral and Cymric a slight advantage. They managed to hold the entryway to the cave against the advancing army but Feral was quickly becoming exhausted and his chest began to hurt.

Back at the castle, Prince Tanlir was listening carefully as the head administrator and his father briefed him on his duties as Ambassador to Megakat City. They were sitting around a worktable in his father's study.

Tanlir suddenly gasped and jumped to his feet causing his chair to fall backward to the floor with a muffled thud. His eyes were wide and he gave a scream of fury and anguish.

His father and the administrator froze in stunned surprise before jumping to their feet and rushing to the prince's side.

"Tanlir! What's wrong?" His father asked anxiously.

Tanlir felt Ulysses' fear and pain. It frightened him that something serious was happening to his mate and he couldn't actually see what was going on. A burning fury built within him. He had to get there now! He was moving before he realized it but was stopped by a strong pair of arms wrapping themselves around him.

Eyes wide with frantic need, he pulled his attention back to the one holding him. "Let me go father. I've got to get to Ulysses! Somethings wrong...he's afraid and in pain." He shouted angrily, trying to push his father away.

"Tanlir...son...if your mate is in trouble then we will go together to rescue him. Calm yourself...give me a moment to gather a rescue team." His father ordered, shaking his son gently to get him to listen.

Tanlir took deep breaths trying to calm himself and nodded at his father. Nodding back in reassurance, the King released his son and went to his intercom. He summoned his general and ordered a rescue team be mustered immediately.

Within fifteen minutes, the King, Tanlir and his brother, Torr, with a squadron of choppers were in the air and heading for Dreamer Falls.

The squadron consisted of six Blackhawk fighter choppers and two Hueys. The King and Tanlir

were in one of the Hueys that were armed with a pair of gatling guns. Prince Torr was aboard the other Huey. They flew in close formation and at top speed for the falls.

As the rescue squad raced to their location, Feral was forced to stagger back from the fight, pressing a paw to his chest. Prince Cymric could only spare the suddenly ailing consort a worried look before returning his attention to the battle before him.

Dr. Taglion quickly rushed forward and helped Feral to the back of the cave and lowered him to the ground. Feral panted hard and moaned in pain. Taglion was extremely worried. It was obvious that the pregnant Commander had been stressed too far and his blood pressure had dropped causing his heart to labor hard trying to keep his blood flowing.

The situation looked grim as Taglion got an IV inserted and started infusing a bag of blood platelets he had brought with him into the Commander. He watched the cave mouth worriedly as the attackers forced the Prince and his guards further back into the cave.

"Give it up Prince Cymric! You cannot win against us!" Growled a deep voice at the rear of the attackers.

"I will not! I will guard the consort with my life!" Prince Cymric shouted as he clawed and shoved aside yet another soldier.

"So be it!" The voice snarled then barked an order. A surge of soldiers pushed in and overwhelmed the prince and guards.

A big red-colored tom with some lion mix in his genes, strode forward into the small space. He studied the struggling prince for a moment.

"You put up a mighty battle, young one, but to no avail." He said mildly, shouting to be heard over the roaring water. He moved away and walked toward the back of the cave to Dr. Taglion's side and stared down at the pair with narrowed eyes.

Feral was still moaning, paw pressed hard against his chest, eyes closed in pain. Dr. Taglion glared up at the invader.

"What ails the consort?" The squadron leader barked.

"He's pregnant and the stress of your attack has endangered his life. He needs a hospital now." Taglion shouted angrily.

The squadron leader's brows rose in shocked surprise. He hadn't been told the consort was a rare male hermaphrodite much less that he was pregnant. Sighing inwardly at being placed in this position by his Leader he quickly ran through his mind how he would evacuate the ill consort out of here and not kill him in the process. He did not want to contemplate what his Leader would do to him if he allowed that to happen.

Before he could make a plan however, a blast shook the cave and the air was filled with shouts, dust and debris. He ran to the entrance and saw attack choppers taking out his small force waiting at the bottom of the falls. Two other choppers were dropping the King's soldiers by grappling lines to the base of the falls.

Scowling, the squad leader pulled his head back and counted the number of soldiers he still had with him. Counting himself, there were ten of them against the King's forces. He signaled two of his soldiers to remain at the entrance and for the rest to form around him at the rear with the consort, doctor and Prince Cymric with their two guards as their prisoners at the center.

They only had to wait five minutes before the King's advance forces rushed the entryway and took out his two guards. They halted in consternation when they saw the squadron leader of the

invaders holding a weapon trained on the consort.

One of them stepped back and contacted the King, explaining the situation. Both antagonists stared balefully at each other as they waited, the roar of the falls the only sound heard.

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Chapter 16: A Prince is taken prisoner by ulyferal

The grim faces of King Roender and his son, Tanlir soon appeared in the cave opening. Flanked by his guards, the King stepped close enough to the enemy squadron leader for them to speak over the roar of the falls.

"Release your prisoners! You can't leave here unless I let you." He warned coldly.

"No! You may block my escape but I have your son's consort!" The squad leader said pointedly.

Tanlir's fists were clenched tightly. Through their bond, he could feel how badly Ulysses was feeling. The pain in his chest was a constant intense agony that wouldn't let him take a decent breath. Tanlir desperately tried to send comfort and strength to his seriously ill mate through their bond..

The King could almost feel his son's barely restrained need to reach his mate. Though his face didn't show it, he was shocked by Feral's nearly blue color under his dark fur despite the dimness of the harsh light from the enemy's torches. He didn't need medical knowledge to know his son-in-law was in danger of dying.

He switched his gaze to the squad leader holding the gun to Ulysses' head. "If you try to take him anywhere, he will die. Can't you see how ill he is? Pregnancy is dangerous for a male and he is in constant risk of dying during the first three months. If you have no physicians that know how to treat him, he will die. I doubt Tormech would be happy with you if that should happen." He said, trying to reason with the squad leader.

The squad leader's face remained stony and his grip on his weapon firm but in his mind he was seething at his untenable position. The King was right! Damn his eyes! He could clearly see that the consort was in a bad way and he also knew they did not have anyone capable of caring for the dark tom. He had only one option left to appease his Leader.

"I agree that taking the consort would be a mistake but your son will do just as well. Allow us through and he will not be harmed. I swear on my honor." The squad leader said solemnly.

The King's jaw tightened. He knew the squad leader would rather die than foreswear a promise but that didn't make letting his son, Cymric, be taken, any easier. However, he had no choice. The longer they argued, the closer to death Ulysses would get.

"Very well! I hold you to your word!" He said bitterly. "Allow them to leave. Send a signal to Lt. Jenor to allow them through on my command." He ordered.

Unhappy about the order, the King's guard did as commanded but couldn't help glaring at the squad leader and his troops as they passed by them.

As soon as the enemy with their prisoner had made it down the rock wall to the ground below, the King's guard quickly prepared to transport the consort out of the cave.

Summoning the Huey he and Tanlir had arrived on, the King had them drop a basket to the ledge outside the cave. It was a very tricky maneuver for the chopper due to the heavy mists and lack of visibility. The pilot had to rely on the flight crew on the ground with the King to get close enough to get the basket to them.

The four flight crew members quickly grabbed the basket and pulled it inside. One of the crew remained near the door to stay in contact with the pilot.

With one packet of blood platelets on board, Feral was looking only marginally better. Dr. Taglion was very worried about moving the ill tom but there really wasn't a choice...Feral needed to reach a hospital asap.

Several guards including the King, Torr and Tanlir helped raise Feral up then lowered him into the basket. He was carried out to the ledge where the flight crew took over. The basket was covered with plastic so that Feral wouldn't get any wetter than he was already. One of the crew clung to the basket while the others held the ropes to steady the basket as it was raised.

It took an agonizing ten minutes to carefully get the basket up past the falls and into the chopper. Once Feral was stowed safely aboard, a crew Kat went down in a seat sling to carry up Dr. Taglion, Prince Tanlir, then the King.

As soon as the crew member swung up into the cabin and closed the door, the pilot raced to the hospital. Tanlir clung to one side of the basket, gently caressing the sweating face of his mate, while Dr. Taglion monitored his patient on the other side.

Feral was angry about failing to keep the enemy at bay. He mentally cursed his condition while at the same time afraid of what the intense pain in his chest meant. He didn't need to see Dr. Taglion's worried face to know he was in trouble.

He watched helplessly as the enemy over ran their position. He tried to stay aware but the need to breathe took all his attention. He felt the sting of a needle and heard the King talking but was unable to make sense of what was said. He felt himself slipping in and out of consciousness.

He was left with only snatches of what was going on; being lifted in the air, something covering him, swinging in the air again, the distinctive sound of a chopper close around him, Tanlir's fingers on his face then it all went away as he sank into darkness.

When he regained consciousness, he found Tanlir sleeping slumped over in a chair with his head on his arms on his bed. The intense pain in his chest was gone, thankfully. He twitched his nose in discomfort at the feel of an oxygen cannula. He tried to reach up and ease it a bit but found his arm weighed down with tubes and lines leading to the machinery sitting behind the head of his bed.

He sighed mentally, 'I really hate being in a hospital!'

"My sons wear that same expression when they are stuck in here." Came a warm female voice to his left.

"Your majesty..." Feral blurted in surprise. His voice hoarse and dry.

"Please, Ulysses...it's Regina...remember?" The Queen chided him then reached for the small pitcher nearby and poured him a glass of water, added a straw and placed it near his mouth. "Here! I know you're very dry mouthed at this moment." She said gently.

Feral took a long sip which did soothe his throat. He pulled back and gave her a grateful smile.

"Thank you. How long have I been here?" He asked.

"Only about four hours. You were dangerously anemic and your heart was failing. You were very lucky." Regina said. Her mouth smiled but her eyes had a shadowed look in them.

"Somethings happened...please tell me." He pressed her.

"You needn't worry yourself. Your only job is to rest and recover." Regina said firmly, taking the sting out of the mild reprimand with a smile.

Feral shook his head mulishly. "I'm sorry Regina, but as most of the Kats that know me will tell you, I don't take no for an answer very well and will continue to insist so you might as well come clean now." He said equally firm back at her.

Regina blinked in mild surprise. Just when she was getting comfortable with her new son-in-law he would do or say something that reminded her strongly that despite being pregnant, he was a military Kat and far too sharp and intelligent to miss her attempt at hiding her upset state.

Sighing mentally, she studied him for a moment longer then made a decision.

"Very well, I'll tell you but you will not be running off to do something about it. You're in this bed for the next twelve hours according to the doctor. When you were critically ill, Roender attempted to rescue you all. Unfortunately, the minion of that fool Tormech was holding a gun at your head. However, he saw reason when the King told him you were too fragile to be whisked off without proper medical help so instead he insisted on taking Cymric as his prisoner and poor Roender had to agree. So Cymric is a prisoner of Tormech." Regina said unhappily.

"No!" Feral said in anguished shock. "If it weren't for me, he'd be here." He growled angrily.

"You will not go there, Ulysses!" Regina said sharply. "It was not your fault that any of this happened. Tormech was determined to cause trouble and you and Cymric were the unfortunate targets. From what I've been told, you and Cymric acquitted yourselves very well but were overwhelmed by sheer numbers."

Feral grunted unhappily. "I hate being helpless!" He muttered.

Regina reached out and gently caressed his cheek. "I know. You are a worthy warrior, Ulysses but right now you are a mother to be and must guard your precious cargo rather than fight battles. It's a hard thing to allow others to defend you when you are used to leading the way during a fight. I think you are very brave to be attempting something no male is meant to do. Rest...concentrate on keeping your kitten and yourself alive...that's your only job right now. Roender will get our Cymric back, never fear." Regina said reassuringly.

"I guess I have to since I obviously don't have a choice. I just hope Cymric is returned soon." Feral said in resignation.

"So do I." Regina sighed worriedly.

Over the mountains in the Republic of Lionar...

Prince Cymric kept a grim demeanor as he was marched away from Dreamer Falls. They walked through the jungle-like forest until they reach a small barren area where three military helicopters waited. The squadron leader divided up his now sadly reduced force among the choppers and they were soon in the air and winging their way back home.

He stared at the floor, refusing to look at his captors.

The squadron leader was nervous and angry. There would be hell to pay when he arrived back at Headquarters without the consort. He spent the flight getting his story straight.

Thirty minutes later, the choppers were descending into a large walled courtyard. When the blades had ceased to move, they deplaned. The squadron leader dismissed his troops except for two who guarded the Prince as they marched toward the main building.

This was a huge, forbidding edifice of grey stone. It was some five stories high and resembled a

strange combination of castle and modern office building. He was taken through a heavy door, down a long hallway to an elevator. They went up to the top floor, stepped out and went down another long corridor then turned to a shorter hall which ended at a rather ornate set of huge doors. A pair of soldiers stood on either side and eyed the approaching group warily.

The squadron leader stepped forward, identified himself, then asked to see Leader Tormech. One of the guards nodded and turned to an intercom and spoke into it for a moment. Receiving an okay from within, the guard reached for the door and opened it.

As they stepped into the room, Prince Cymric studied the interior. The room resembled a throne room. There were sand colored marble tiles on the floor and heavy gold drapes on the walls as well as banners. A huge flag covered one wall and a portrait of Leader Tormech was to one side of it. The room was empty.

Moments later from a door to one side of the throne, a powerful lion-cross strode into the room followed by several of his officers and administrators.

Leader Tormech stopped a few feet from his squadron leader and stared forbiddingly at the prisoner.

"Prince Cymric! I did not expect to see you here." He rumbled in displeasure, turning a gimlet eye on his squadron leader.

The Kat squirmed uncomfortably but quickly explained what had occurred in the cave.

The Leader stood silent for a moment then roared, shaking the room. Everyone but the Prince shrank back a step in fear.

"A simple task I give you and still you manage to botch it." He snarled angrily. His massive paw swung out without warning and struck his subordinate a powerful blow that sent the tom flying across the floor.

Tormech stalked toward his helpless minion who was staring fearfully up at his leader and rubbing his jaw in pain. He hadn't attempted to get up from his inelegant sprawl on the floor.

Tormech began to reach down for the tom when a shout behind him caused him to halt in mid-motion. He raised up and turned to eye the Prince in angry surprise.

"How dare you interfere?" He rumbled deep in his chest.

"Your officer acted in the only manner he could under the circumstances. Though I have no love for him or any of you, I will not stand by and watch someone unjustly punished. Though I wasn't able to summon aid, the pain the consort was in would have been felt by Tanlir and he would have known his mate was in trouble because they are lifemated. That is why my father, the King, happened to be there so quickly." Cymric said firmly, his eyes flashing in anger at the Leader's cruelty to his own soldiers.

Tormech reared back in amazement and rumbled, "Lifemated? That is a rare thing."

"Yes it is, as is a male hermaphrodite getting pregnant." Cymric said flatly.

"Hmm, yes that is certainly true." Tormech said musingly. He turned away from his fallen officer to move back to stand before Cymric. "So, now what do I do with you, eh?" He asked, not really expecting an answer.

Prince Cymric eyed him balefully, not answering.

"Take him to a guest room and guard him. We don't want him harmed in any way." Tormech

ordered then turned away and went back to his strategy room to decide what to do about this new development.

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Chapter 17: Rescuing a Prince and Releasing a Consort by Ulyferal

Much as it hurt his pride to do it, King Roender decided to offer one of the two things he knew Leader Tormech was interested in.

He sent a message by way of a white flag delegation to the border leading to Tormech's lands. His oldest son, Torr, insisted on handling the negotiations and Roender reluctantly agreed.

Torr's argument was that, if he were to be an ambassador to one of the many countries his father intended to set up an embassy, then he needed to be able to handle things like this and he couldn't learn if he wasn't given the chance. It was sound reasoning and the only way he would have allowed another son to be put in danger.

Torr left early in the morning with a detachment of troops twenty strong. His father had already set up the meet with Tormech. By midday they had arrived at the meeting place on horseback. They hadn't wanted to give Tormech a chance to steal one of their high tech choppers.

When they got to the meeting place they were met by an equally large group of well-armed soldiers with Tormech's second in command leading. They were on foot.

To be polite, Prince Torr and two of his guard dismounted and moved closer to the other Kat.

"Greetings Prince Torr. I am Commander Linzt, second in command to Leader Tormech." The lean black-furred tom introduced himself.

"Greetings. Shall we dispense with all the niceties and get to the negotiation. Where is my brother?" Torr asked flatly.

"As you wish." Linzt said gesturing behind him.

A group of soldiers moved aside and there stood Cymric. He looked tired but fine and had a bland expression on his face. This was to prevent their enemies from using emotions against them, a lesson learned very early in life.

Torr nodded. "King Roender is willing to give you the formula for increasing crop size. No weapon's designs will be offered so don't bother to ask." He said firmly.

No expression showed on Linzt's face but his mind was angry and resigned. He could tell by the stubborn set of Torr's body that there would be no negotiation. They had lost their bid when they failed to get the consort and must settle for what they could to save face. Leader Tormech had given him firm instructions to try for the weapons but would settle for the formula. He was going to use his own judgement and agree to the formula. Arguing because he had been instructed to do so, was, to his mind, counterproductive and doomed to failure before it could be tried by the very stiff stance of the eldest Prince.

Nodding gravely, Linzt said, "Agreed! Same time exchange?"

"Agreed!" Torr said gravely signaling his aid to his side.

Linzt gestured to the guards holding the prince, to bring him forward. They marched Cymric forward until they were next to the second in command. Leaving him beside Linzt's aid de camp, they returned to their original positions. Cymric stood quietly beside the aid waiting patiently.

Torr took a disk from his own aid and extended it to Linzt just as the second in command shoved

Cymric lightly forward. Cymric slowly and carefully walked forward until he stood next to his brother.

They stood silently as Linzt put the disk in a portable player and read the contents. Seeing it was what they had been wanting he shut the player off, removed the disk and put it safely inside an inner pocket of his uniform.

"Thank you! The exchange is concluded." He said then gave a hand signal for the troops to turn about and return the way they'd come.

Sighing in relief, the brothers hugged each other tightly. A horse was brought up and they all mounted and began the trip home.

"Tell me! How is Ulysses?" Cymric asked in concern.

"On the mend, thank goodness. He was near death by the time they got him to the hospital." Torr said.

"You know, I really had trouble believing a male that big and powerful would, not only be pregnant, but fragile and it was even harder to believe when I saw him fight off Tormech's soldiers, that is, until he faltered and began to turn really pale and clutched his chest in pain. It gave me a fright, I can tell you." Cymric said, still remembering the last sight he'd had of the dying consort as he was being led away by Tormech's soldiers.

"Yes, I know what you mean. I had some trouble with that image too until I saw them bring him in. Ulysses looked blue under that dark fur. Tanlir looked like a sheet and there was such bleak terror in his eyes." Torr said remembering that terrifying moment when he saw Ulysses being rolled in on a stretcher and looking so bad. But it had been Tanlir's eyes that had held his attention. It had sent shivers down his spine.

"There is absolutely no doubt that their bond is stronger than any I've ever heard of." Cymric said in wonder.

"Oh yes! Most definitely." Torr said solemnly in agreement.

"How long will he be in the hospital?" Cymric asked.

"At least until tomorrow." Torr said. "Tanlir hasn't left his side. Mother visited him yesterday and said Ulysses had awakened and was alert if very tired."

"I can see it's going to be an uphill battle to keep Ulysses from losing his kitten or his life." Cymric said shaking his head worriedly.

"Oh yes! And he still intends to return to Megakat City when the investiture is over. He is a very stubborn Kat." Torr sighed in some annoyance.

Cymric snorted in agreement then changed the subject. "So how did you manage to talk father into letting you handle this rather tricky affair?" He asked, eyeing his brother appraisingly.

Torr smiled broadly. "By reminding him that he was grooming each of us to be ambassador's in different countries. How was I to get practical experience if I wasn't allowed to actually conduct a negotiation? I asked him. He was surprised and had to agree I was correct. But you could see he wasn't happy about two of his sons being in danger." Torr added ruefully.

"I bet he wasn't but I'll be the first to tell him you did a magnificent job. Staying firm was the right tactic to take with Linzt. I got the feeling he's not always happy with Tormech's policies." Cymric observed.

"Hmmm, now that's something that might be worthwhile to explore. I think we should advise our father about this. Enough dissension in Tormech's ranks and we could topple a bothersome tick off our back." Torr said.

"I agree!" Cymric said, nodding his head.

In a hospital room, Feral was just waking from a nap when his mate Tanlir dropped by.

"I've great news, my love! Cymric is free and on his way home as we speak." He said with a wide grin as he leaned over and gave his mate a warm kiss.

"That is good to hear. What did your father have to give for him?" Feral asked as he worked the controls on the bed to let him sit up.

Tanlir frowned. "How do you know he gave up anything?" He asked.

"It was the only thing he could have done since he wasn't about to go to war and since their culture is more militaristic than yours, a stealth mission would have failed." Feral said plainly.

Tanlir shook his head. "You think too much like a warrior rather than the law enforcement officer you are, Ulysses." He said sadly.

"Unfortunately, if I didn't, my city would be burnt, swamped, or taken over long ago." Feral said shrugging indifferently.

"So true! Well in answer to your question, my father gave Tormech the crop formula. It's good for his people so its no hardship to share." Tanlir said with a smirk.

"Hmm, surprised he accepted that and didn't try for military hardware." Feral said skeptically.

"Actually, Tormech's aid de camp made that decision especially since my brother made it very clear that the formula was the only thing on the negotiation table." His mate said. "Tormech is really unreasonable so it's a good thing he wasn't at the exchange."

"Sounds like that country could use a more level head." Feral said archly.

"Everyone's in agreement on that. Commander Lintz would make a much better and more humane leader." Tanlir sighed in agreement.

"Perhaps a casual word of sedition could accomplish it, that is, if his people are tired enough of Tormech." Feral commented lightly.

Tanlir cocked an eyebrow at his mate. "You really are devious, you know that?" He said, shaking his head.

"When I need to be, otherwise I'm always above board in all my dealings. Saves on confusion and ones reputation." Feral snorted, a glint of amusement in his eye.

Tanlir just laughed.

"So good to hear laughter after such a harrowing incident." A familiar voice spoke quietly as a regal female walked into the room.

"Hello, Mother." Tanlir said warmly, turning to give his mother a kiss on the cheek when she came to stand next to him.

"Good Day to you both!" She said pleasantly. "It appears you are doing very well today, Ulysses. Have the doctors said when you can leave?"

"Well the doctor said this morning, that he wanted to see some of the test results done on the kitten and on my blood volumes first before releasing me. I've not heard anything more." Feral sighed, shrugging his shoulders.

"Oh, well surely they will tell you something this afternoon. I know its trying to be confined to a bed on such a fine day but resting now insures fewer problems later." She admonished gently.

"I know!" Feral sighed again.

The Queen just patted his paw in commiseration.

Suddenly the door opened and in walked the doctor that had seen Feral when he'd been admitted with his own personal physician, Dr. Taglion, entering behind him.

"Good day, your majesty, your highness." Dr. Mandor said then turned to his patient.

"Commander, I'm pleased to say everything looks well with your kitten and your blood volume is back to normal. Here are your release papers, you may get dressed and leave. I sincerely hope the rest of your visit to our fair land will not be as stressful. Remember, you must rest frequently and not over tire yourself during this critical time." He admonished his patient as he handed him some papers. He smiled farewell and left the room.

"I second that instruction. You were very lucky this time." Dr. Taglion said gravely.

"I know it. Though no could guess I'd be the victim of kidnapping here." Feral grunted, sitting up.

"That's certainly true. I'll leave now so that you may get dressed. I'll be waiting in the limo to give you a ride home." The Queen said with a smile as she too took her leave.

As soon as the door closed behind her, Feral was up and swinging his legs off the bed. Tanlir smirked at his mate's unseemly haste but hardly blamed him. He went to the closet and got Uly's clothes and helped him dress.

In less than ten minutes, he was properly attired and heading out the door. Tanlir and Dr. Taglion walked on either side of him as they went to the elevator and took a car down to the lobby. The press was outside the door and flashed many pictures of Feral as he and the others climbed into the limo.

He sighed in relief as they sped off for the palace. As he rested back against the seat, he watched the beautiful countryside go by. This little incident had nearly cost him his life and it had been sobering to realize just how weak he was. Being pregnant was not a cause for celebration for him, only severe restrictions on his activity, exhaustion, and constant medical monitoring. He would be eternally grateful when the kitten was born. He didn't plan on having any more anytime soon no matter how much his mate might want them.

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Chapter 18: The investiture ceremony by ulyferal

Over the next few weeks, Feral was shown the many sights of Tanlir's home, introduced to other important people, and begun his lessons on proper comportment of a Consort.

The last was boring in the extreme for Feral. He, of course, had impeccable manners, but all the proper ways of greeting and behaving as a royal were myriad and seemingly unending. Sometimes it was very difficult to take any of, what he deemed pretentious mannerisms he was expected to learn, seriously. But he knew to keep his opinions to himself and learn what he was required to, quickly.

No more incidents occurred as the country geared up for the important investiture ceremony.

Normally, he was told, this ceremony was for giving out special awards to those individuals who had done something to protect King and country. As Kings and Queens began to live longer, a new ceremony had to be invented to recognize princes and princesses new spouses when they were not going to be King or Queen for some time or not at all. It was suggested the investiture ceremony be used for this purpose. This was well received by the people and had been used to designate a consort and give them a rank. It had been used successfully for the last one hundred years.

It wasn't a really long ceremony, fortunately, but there were a lot of preparations to do for it. Huge bouquets of flowers to adorn the throne room, new outfits for the viewers, the feast for afterwards, and the formal wear of the royal party.

And that was what Feral hated the most...being dressed up. He was fitted with heavy ornate clothing from medieval times and a small gold coronet. A heavy chain with a medallion engraved with the symbol of the kingdom made of pure gold and the size of a baseball went around his neck. Around his waist a heavy, beautifully engraved leather belt with sword sheath attached was put on by the royal dressers.

Tanlir approached with a huge grin on his face and a beautiful sword carried lovingly in his paws.

"This belonged to a great uncle who was one of our most revered military leaders. Father wants you to have it. Wear it with honor, Ulysses." He said gravely, placing the sword in Feral's paws.

Feral stared down at the well made and heavily engraved silver blade. The pommel was encrusted with precious stones and was gold. He'd never owned anything like this before. With proper reverence he slid the sword into the sheath at his side.

"You look magnificent, my love." Tanlir said, staring with awe at his mate.

Feral turned to look in the nearby full length mirror and let out a breath of amazement. He didn't look like the same kat in these clothes. An image of some ancient medieval warrior stared back at him. 'Wow!' He thought, stunned. 'I look incredible.'

"What's more important, no alterations are necessary." The head dresser said admiring the soon to be consort. The rest of the dressers murmured their admiration for the handsome dark tom.

Feral blushed a bit from the many comments. "Right, so...can I take this all off now?" He asked gruffly.

"Of course, your highness." The head dresser said with a small smile as he and his helpers divested Feral of his finery.

A little later, wearing a more simple suit and tie, Feral and Tanlir headed for the council chambers. Feral was required to attend sessions to become more familiar with the workings of the kingdom. This was unusual for a consort since they were usually female and were given more feminine duties but because of both being male and a military leader in his own right, the King had insisted he be in attendance.

As with his first council meeting, he found the sessions interesting though sometimes they could be boring.

When he was finished there, he was tutored in his mate's quarters by the royal historian on the background of the kingdom he would soon be a part of.

And so his days went, learning his new duties, meeting endless other royal members, spending time with the King and council members, lessons, taking tea and lessons with the Queen and trying to spend some quality time with his mate.

Of course, amongst all that, he had to submit to examinations by Dr. Taglion morning and evening.

At the end of yet another full day, Feral sighed as he stripped his suit off. His mate had just arrived in the room and was doing the same.

"I never thought I would be just as busy as I am at home." He grunted. "It's a lot to take in over a short time. I feel like I'm back at the Enforcer Academy."

"I know what you mean, Uly. My days are usually fairly busy but I always had time to slip away and take time for myself. Not so now! Father is determined that I be completely ready for taking command of the new embassy in Megakat City so I've not had a moment to myself. Then there's the investiture in less than a week." Tanlir sighed tiredly.

"Glad I'm not alone feeling like I'm on an express train." Feral snorted in tired amusement.

Tanlir snickered. "Good description! Even my brothers haven't been spared. My mother gave each of them a portion of the investiture ceremony to take care of. She feels, even though we have servants to deal with arrangements, they should be familiar with what's involved and knowing all the details required for a successful ceremony." He said.

Feral grimaced, "I almost feel sorry for them. There are certainly a lot of details."

"I think it feels that way only because I'm the first in fifty years to have this ceremony done and everyone is afraid to miss something." Tanlir said with a shrug. "Anyway, enough of that subject my love. How was your day?"

Feral gave him a thumbnail description as they moved to the bathroom. A couple of servants bowed. They had finished preparing the area for the royal pair and were backing out to leave them alone.

Feral groaned in pleasure as the hot water swirled around his tired body. Dinner had been interesting and delicious but now he was tired and wanted nothing more than to wash and get some sleep. As he lay on his back and drowsed for a bit, Tanlir smiled tenderly at his tired mate as he moved closer to him.

He wrapped an arm around Uly's waist and leaned down for a gentle kiss. Feral opened a sleepy eye and gave Tanlir a small smile. He lowered his legs to stand back up and went into Tanlir's embrace. They kissed for a long moment, savoring their closeness and the rare chance of being alone.

Tanlir rubbed his mate's back with a soapy washcloth, then worked it around the dark-furred body. He paused for some moments over each nipple making Feral's eyes widen and darken with pleasure.

"Hmmm...that's nice..." He purred.

"I enjoy pleasing you my love." Tanlir rumbled as he moved the wash cloth down and around to Feral's rear then back to the front again. He leaned forward to kiss the dark tom while he took the wash cloth and passed it between his mate's legs then began pulling it gently back and forth causing it rub against his mate's balls and clitoris.

Feral pulled from the kiss to gasp and moan. The gentle torture was intense and wonderful. To return the favor, he wrapped a large paw around his mate's now hard pole. He stroked it up and down making Tanlir growl with heat.

They teased each other with kisses and touches to all their erogenous zones, finally Tanlir couldn't take anymore and coaxed his mate to turn around. Placing his paws on the rim of the

pool, Feral pushed his rear out and lifted his tail out of the water.

Taking care, Tanlir eased himself into his mate's waiting channel. Feral gasped and moaned as they joined tightly together. Tanlir leaned over his mate and nuzzled him before beginning a slow and deep thrusting. Feral groaned loudly and pressed his body outward to meet each of his mate's thrusts. Smiling darkly, Tanlir reached around and grasped his mate's bobbing cock and began to jack it in time with his movements.

Beginning to tremble, Feral felt flutters of tension spreading throughout his body. They got stronger and stronger until he cried out as his body spasmed.

Tanlir felt his mate's growing tension and was on the verge when his body tightened around his cock. He roared as his climax burst from him as his seed filled his mate's channel.

Feral went limp and was half lying on the edge of the pool with Tanlir draped over his back. When he recovered, the cheetah quickly withdrew and pulled his mate into his arms.

Feral sighed and sagged drowsily in his mate's arms. Tanlir smiled tenderly down at his tired mate.

"It's time we got out of here and dried off, my love." He murmured quietly.

"Hmmm, good idea." Feral said, a yawn catching him as he moved forward to the stairs.

Tanlir guided him up and over to the dryers. After about ten minutes and with the help of the servants they were brushed and dressed in night clothes.

Feral slide into the bed with a deep sigh and murred softly at the feel of Tanlir slipping in and spooning him from behind.

"Good night my love, sweet dreams." Tanlir murmured warmly.

"You too, my love." Feral sighed, already nearly asleep.

Finally, the day of the investiture dawned bright and early. Though the ceremony itself only takes about an hour, the preparations take all morning. The ceremony was set for three that afternoon.

Feral was dragged out of bed at eight o'clock. Breakfast was a formal occasion, attended by all the members of the royal family. Next, he was taken back to his room where he and Tanlir were dressed in semi-formal robes as was all the royal family then he was led to the council chambers for his formal induction to the council. Each member of the council wore their family's robes and stood behind their chairs.

The King and Queen entered followed by Tanlir with Feral by his side then his brothers. They took their seats. Feral discovered a seat had been placed next to Tanlir and bore his name. He stood behind it like the others and waited.

The Lord Constable read a document declaring the addition of one Ulysses Feral to the rolls of the council members. Next the King gave a small welcoming speech then those that desired to gave a speech. The King took over once more.

"Ulysses Feral by the power invested in me by the paw of our loving Goddess Bastet and the people, I make you Duke of the Roaring Fields. You are charged with the care and keeping of the villages, the people, and the lands to the east of the kingdom. Rule them well." He intoned.

Feral had been taught how to respond to this and waited for his turn. The King nodded toward him. Taking a deep breath, he spoke. "I, Ulysses Feral, accept this title and its holdings. I will do all in my power to dispense my duties as written in the accords of the Kingdom." He said by rote.

He sighed inwardly at getting it right and not flubbing it.

The room erupted in a roar of approval. After that they all sat down and a regular council meeting took place. The only difference now was Feral had a say in the proceedings.

Lunch was after the council meeting. The council members were invited and they spent the time getting to know their newest member. After lunch, Tanlir was required to be with his father while Feral was required to take a nap by Dr. Taglion. He was concerned about how much pressure Feral was under as well as his blood pressure being a bit low.

Not willing to take the chance that Feral might faint during the ceremony the Queen added her stricture that the consort seek his bed at once. Bowing in obedience, Feral made for his rooms. He didn't want to admit that he really was tired. It wasn't surprising then for Tanlir to find his mate sound asleep when he returned to his rooms some a little over an hour later.

He didn't disturb Ulysses, deciding to unwind and relax as much as he could on the couch in his den. The investiture was in two hours and it would be exhausting, resting now would be the only chance he'd get for hours to come.

It seemed he had barely shut his eyes when a servant apologetically woke him. He grunted and got to his feet.

"You haven't awakened the consort yet have you?" He asked.

"Not yet, your highness. Tracy was just going to." The servant said.

Tanlir hurried past him and into his bedroom. His mate was still asleep and a servant was just reaching for him. Tanlir hissed at him and the servant halted in surprise, turning to stare questioningly at the prince.

Tanlir waved for him to join him in the dressing room. Nodding Tracy left the bed area and followed.

"Sorry, I didn't want Ulysses awakened just yet. Because he's male, it won't take long to dress him and he needs as much sleep as he can get. Let's get me ready first." Tanlir explained. The servants smiled in understanding and the tedious work of preparing began.

By the time he had been showered, dried, and dressed it was time for Ulysses to be prepared.

Moving ponderously in his formal wear, Tanlir approached the bed and gently awakened his mate.

Feral blinked and yawned. His eyes widened when he beheld his mate dressed and ready for the ceremony. "Wha...why didn't you wake me..." He started to get upset and move off the bed.

"Easy love! There's plenty of time and you desperately needed your rest to handle what's to come. Now take it slow and we'll get you ready in time." The cheetah said soothingly.

A servant moved up quickly and offered the consort a refreshing beverage and some crackers. Sitting still and letting his galloping heart slow down, Feral accepted the cup and crackers and slowly consumed them. When he'd finished he was calm again and ready to go.

He took a shower, was dried thoroughly and brushed, then dressed. As Tanlir had promised, he was done in plenty of time.

"You look so good, love." Tanlir said warmly, leaning close and giving him a kiss. "Now I must be off to take my place with my brothers. See you soon."

Feral nodded. Two of the council members appeared, nodded at the prince then approached the Commander.

"You cut a magnificent figure, Consort. We are here to escort you. Are you ready?" Lord Fanlon asked.

"Yes, thank you." Feral said nervously.

They walked together out of the prince's quarters and down the hall to the staircase. The halls were empty as they headed for the ballroom. The doors were open and from within a subdued hum of voice emanated but as he and his escorts got closer horns sounded and then there was silence.

They reached the door and Feral was stunned. The room was richly decorated with tapestries and flowers. A crowd was seated in rows of chairs facing a platform where the King and Queen sat on their thrones and their sons and the council sat behind them. A thick carpet runner of gold ran from the door to the thrones.

Next to the door were a pair of guards holding twin swords crossed over the entryway where he was to pass. Standing just inside past them was the King's Seneschal Camden. In a loud and melodious voice he announced, "The Consort, Ulysses Feral."

A burst of music filled the air and Feral began to walk nervously down the aisle, the pair of councilors two steps behind him. He counted his steps as he'd been taught so that he wouldn't walk too fast. As he approached the platform, all the royal family stood. The King and Queen stepped forward and waited for him to arrive. On the floor before them was a small padded stool. As soon as he reached this, he knelt on his knees on the stool and bowed his head. The music stopped and all was quiet.

The King came forward and drew his sword. He raised it high then came down on Feral's right shoulder. "In the name of our Goddess Bastet, I grant thee the rank of Duke." He moved the sword to the left shoulder and intoned, "In sight of all, I honor and accept you into my royal family as Consort to Prince Tanlir." He raised the sword again, held it high then sheathed it.

He held his paws out, "Stand with your new family, Consort Ulysses Feral." He commanded.

Feral stood carefully, the stool was quickly whisked away by a servant, then he took the King's paws into his own and was led up the steps of the pedestal and placed beside Tanlir. The King released him and returned to his Queen's side.

The King's Seneschal Camden announced, "All hail Duke Feral, Lord of the Roaring Fields and Consort to Prince Tanlir."

Horns sounded again and the room erupted into roars of approval and clapping.

Feral was trembling with emotion that only Tanlir could feel as he leaned close to him. Surreptitiously, he slipped an arm behind his mate and soothed him with a caress as all around them the noise rose to a crescendo.

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Chapter 19: The Banquet by ulyferal

When the roaring finally eased a bit, music burst out again and the King and Queen began to walk off the platform and head down the aisle once more. Behind them Tanlir and Feral followed, the rest of the brothers then the council directly after. The group headed for another room where they took their places once more on another platform where photographers began a thirty minute photo session. As soon as they were done, a short press conference was held.

Once that was over, the family stepped back out into the hall and made their way up the stairs to a special balcony where the inhabitants of the Kingdom would be allowed to see the new Consort. Accompanying him was Tanlir, his brothers, and the King and Queen. Feral was required to wave to all the people who were cheering below him while standing close to Tanlir who had his arm around his mate and was waving with his other arm.

After twenty minutes, they were allowed to finally come back inside. They dispersed to change their clothes for the banquet.

In their room, Dr. Taglion quickly had Feral sit down after his heavy robes had been removed and before he was dressed for dinner.

Feral felt shaky as he gratefully sat down on a padded chair. He was ashamed to say he wanted very much to lie down.

Dr. Taglion frowned in concern as he took Feral's blood pressure. Shaking his head, he said, "I don't like these readings. They are much too low." Turning to his bag, he instructed over his shoulder, "Take him to the bedroom and have him lie down on the bed, raise his legs.

Concern and worry flashed across the faces of those present. Two servants quickly came to the Consort's side. Tanlir gently pulled his beloved to his feet and was dismayed when Ulysses swayed suddenly. The two servants quickly stood on either side of the dark tom and wrapped an arm around his waist. They slowly walked the unsteady Kat to the bedroom. Other servants ran ahead of them to prepare the bed and get the pillows in position as the doctor had ordered.

Once they entered the bedroom, Feral was held standing in place long enough for the servants to quickly remove more of his clothing, leaving him in his underwear. He was helped to lie down and his feet placed over the piled pillows. By the time they were through settling him, Feral's face was very pale and he was breathing rather hard.

Tanlir sat down next to his mate and caressed his forehead worriedly. Dr. Taglion hurried up to Feral's other side and efficiently began to draw a small amount of blood from the dark tom's arm. Using a special test kit, he checked Feral's blood count.

"This is not good. Your blood production has fallen to an unacceptable and dangerous level. You'll need a transfusion." He said in concern. He took a blood plasma bag from his medical kit and prepared the tom's arm for an IV. Expertly, he had the IV inserted and the plasma going within moments. He directed a servant to hold the bag up to chest height.

Tanlir turned away from Ulysses to search for his head chamber servant. "Jason, go to my father and tell him Ulysses is ill and must rest before joining them for the banquet." He instructed.

"Yes, your highness." Jason said with a bow and quickly left on his errand.

Arriving at the busy royal apartment, he had to wait until he could gain the attention of the King's head servant, Byron. Seeing the Prince's servant here instead of with the Prince getting him ready and having a very worried look on his face made Byron hurry over and pull Jason to a quiet corner to talk.

"Why are you here?" He hissed urgently.

Jason quickly told him. Byron paled, this was bad news. He gestured Jason to follow him. The King was in his dressing area staring off in space, his mind preoccupied while his servants removed his heavy ceremonial clothing. He was wearing only his undershirt and pants at the moment.

"Your majesty!" Byron called, his voice tight with concern.

The King blinked his attention back to the room and eyed his servant in the mirror. He frowned when he saw the look on Byron's face. He turned around and raised an inquiring eyebrow.

"You majesty!" Byron repeated. "Prince Tanlir's servant, Jason has troubling news about his highness Ulysses." He said quickly.

"What is it? What's happened to Ulysses?" The King demanded in concern.

Jason stepped forward and knelt before the King. "The Consort's blood pressure has dropped and Dr. Taglion was beginning a transfusion when I left to bring you Prince Tanlir's message that his highness Ulysses would be late attending the banquet." Jason explained quickly

"Good lord! That's terrible. Give me my robe!" He ordered. A servant quickly fetched it and helped the King put it on. Roender rushed through his apartment and made his way to his son's rooms, Jason hot on his heels.

Bursting in, he made his way to the bedroom and was appalled to see Ulysses on his back, looking pale, his legs raised on pillows, a servant holding a bag of plasma that was nearly empty.

He moved to the foot of the bed and stood in concern. "Tanlir, how is he?" He asked in a soft voice.

"Father! You didn't have to hurry here." Tanlir exclaimed softly.

"He'll be alright, your Majesty." Dr. Taglion interrupted. "It was all the heavy clothing and the tension. He just needs to rest for a couple of hours and since the banquet is sitting, he will be able to attend when he's feeling better." He reassured everyone.

"Oh the banquet be damned! All that matters is he's going to be okay. If he needs to rest longer than he shall. We can go ahead and if he feels up to it then he can attend. I do not want his health risked simply for a fancy dinner." The King said brushing off what was an important dinner as if it were simply a casual affair.

"Thank you, Father but I think Ulysses will want to attend..." Tanlir began to say when he was interrupted.

"I'm sorry for causing a disruption in the proceedings, your Majesty." Feral said thickly, feeling soo embarrassed.

"Nonsense. It's not your fault my son. Rest. Your kitten and your health are all that's important to us. You did very well during the most important part of this day. Don't fret so about the rest. We'll see you when we see you." The King said, gently patting the foot near him in reassurance.

"Thank you for your understanding, sir." Feral said softly.

The King merely smiled then took his leave so that he could continue to get ready. He needed to tell his Queen before she found out and got upset.

"Crud! I feel soo embarrassed." Feral murmured in annoyance.

"My love, you simply must accept that sometimes this is going to happen and that it is only for a few months more." Tanlir chided him gently.

"Prince Tanlir is correct, Commander. It's not as bad as it could have been and really that was a lot you had to manage. I'm surprised you didn't collapse sooner. Just rest, you'll be fine, I'm very pleased to say." Dr. Taglion said in relief.

"If you say so. I still feel a bit shaky." Feral sighed and settled into the pillows.

"Rest love." Tanlir ordered, leaning forward and giving him a kiss on the forehead. Everyone left him to rest except for a servant who stayed at his side to keep watch.

The King was visibly shaken when he hurried back to his apartments. He swept into his dressing room and his servants hurriedly put his dining wear on. When he was properly attired he made for his wife's dressing room but found her coming his way already and not quite finished preparing as the trail of anxious maids attested.

"Geoffrey, I heard a terrible rumor..." She began, her face upset.

"It's alright, my love, I've just come from Tanlir's room. Ulysses had a drop in blood pressure and received a transfusion. He is resting now. He's a bit pale but Dr. Taglion assures me he will be fine. Ulysses wants to attend but I told him not to push it. We'll offer his apologies and hope that he might be well enough to sit with us later." He said taking her paws in his to soothe her.

"Oh, thank goodness. Poor Ulysses, this is so hard on him." Regina said, shaking her head and heading back to her dressing room, much to her maids relief. Roender followed so that they might continue to talk.

"I know, my dear. I can't begin to imagine how he must feel having his strength sapped that way." He said.

She clucked her tongue. "Well, dear, males were never meant to bear kittens. He's doing something truly extraordinary." She said as her clothes were settled on her frame and the last touches were being applied.

"You can say that again!" Roender said, still amazed by it all.

Soon the royal pair was ready and made their way down the staircase and to the banquet room. The guests stood as soon as the royal Seneschal announced them. They swept into the room and took their seats. Three seats were conspicuously empty when everyone reseated themselves. The King called for everyone's attention by gently tapping his wine glass with a knife, causing the room to fall silent.

"Greetings to all our honored guests. I'm glad you all could attend our feast in honor of my son's lifemating and the investiture of the new Consort. I'm sorry to tell you that my new son-in-law, Duke Ulysses has taken ill. His pregnancy takes a heavy toll on him and he has been ordered to rest. We hope that he will recover enough to join us later. For now, please don't let this momentary setback ruin the celebration of this happy occasion. My staff has prepared a wonderful repast for us so let's enjoy it and the evening of dancing that will come later." He said with a smile.

Excited conversation burst out everywhere, especially in one section. The King and Queen had invited and flown here for the ceremony, Ulysses' family, friends and associates. They were concerned about Feral's well being. Before one of them got up to see if they could find out more, Prince Tanlir entered the room and headed for them.

Standing over the group, he smiled warmly. "I'm sorry Ulysses is missing the surprise but I promise he will be feeling better soon and will be here in a few hours." He promised them.

"What happened exactly, your highness?" One of the guests asked.

"Ulysses' blood pressure took a dive from a combination of the heavy robes and the tension of the ceremony. Dr. Taglion gave him some plasma and he's resting quietly." Tanlir answered politely.

"That's a relief." Another sighed.

"Yes it is, now please, enjoy the meal. I'll be sure to save some of the best stuff for my love for later." He said with a grin. Then he took his seat and began to eat and talk with his new relatives.

In his room, Feral had succumbed to exhaustion and slept. He woke some hours later and tried to get up. The servant watching him, quietly urged him to stay put while he got the doctor. Sighing in resignation, Feral agreed.

Some ten minutes later, Dr. Taglion arrived. "Well, you look better. How do you feel?" He asked while taking Feral's blood pressure and checking his pulse.

"Definitely better." Feral said truthfully.

"Excellent and your blood pressure says you're right. I'll let the servants get you dressed. You are in time for the end of the main course so you haven't missed too much. I'll wait for you to get ready." He said warmly.

Feral got up slowly and the servants helped him shower and dress. In about twenty minutes, he was ready to go. When he went out to the living room, he found Dr. Taglion and Tanlir waiting for him.

"Ahh, the color is back in your face, my love. I'm so relieved. Shall we go?" He asked taking his mate's arm in his and escorting him out the door. Dr. Taglion followed behind.

As they entered the banquet hall, the Seneschal called for silence and announced their arrival. Everyone cheered as the new Duke stepped into the room. Feral felt his face heat in embarrassment as Tanlir escorted him to their seats. He was taken by surprise by the sight of familiar faces. His family, friends and associates quickly stood and hugged or shook his paw. After a flurry of greetings, they urged him to sit and they returned to their own seats.

The King called from the head table, causing everyone to go silent again.

"Ulysses, it pleases me to see you looking so much better. Welcome! As you can see we had a surprise for you. The Queen and I had your family and friends brought for this very important occasion. Tanlir has saved a plate for you so please relax and enjoy. Don't overdo!" He said with mock severity, smiling warmly at him.

"I will your majesty and thank you both for this." Feral said, smiling, amazed and pleased they had done such a wonderful thing for him.

The King waved off his thanks with a grin and turned his attention back to his Queen.

His family hadn't seen much of him when he was home so this was an extra treat for them to be able to visit. Of his family, there were his brother, sister-in-law, Felina, his grandmother and five cousins. His associates represented were Ms. Briggs, Mayor Manx, and few old friends he knew on the force. Ms. Briggs brought him up to date on the doings of the city while Felina told him of the happenings at Enforcer Headquarters.

Keeping his promise, Feral remained seated for much of the night. Even when dinner was over and the whole group moved to the ballroom, he was placed near the King and Queen in a comfortable chair where he could be greeted by those that wanted to meet him and to watch the dancing that began shortly after they entered the room.

It was getting late when Feral chafed at sitting so long. Tanlir smiled in understanding and took him for a short walk in the gardens under the moonlight. They kissed and held each other for a little while near the fountain at the center of the gardens. Returning to the ballroom they noted a waltz had begun and dancers were taking their partners to the floor.

"Do you feel up to dancing, my love?" Tanlir asked, his arm wrapped around his mate, his face

close and intimate.

Feral nuzzled him warmly. "Yes, I'd love to dance." He said with a smile.

Grinning, Tanlir led his mate onto the floor and they began to dance. Before very long, people began to pull away from the couple, leaving them in a private circle of their own. Many eyes watched with envy and joy at the happy couple. Tanlir and Ulysses only had eyes for each other as they moved as one with the music. Photographers surreptitiously took pictures of the happy couple for use in the royal album and newspapers.

The long evening finally drew to a close. Everyone said goodnight and the royal family retreated up the stairs to their quarters, chattering happily about the evenings events.

Tanlir and Ulysses followed from the rear, wrapped in each other's arms and talking intimately as they made for their apartment.

The servants helped them undress then finally left the couple alone. Tanlir kissed his mate deeply then helped him into bed.

"I love you my wonderful Consort." He murmured lovingly as he spooned his mate from behind.

"I love you my Prince." Feral rumbled, rubbing his face against Tanlir's cheek. It had been an incredible day and despite his brief moment of illness, it didn't ruin the joy and amazement he felt about what had transpired. He was a duke and the consort of a prince. It would take a while before he could get used to his change in status.

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Chapter 20: Returning to Megakat City by ulyferal

Two days after the investiture, Feral was happy to find himself aboard a luxury jet with his friends, family, associates, and Tanlir with his embassy staff heading back to Megakat City.

"I can feel your excitement, love. Happy to be going home?" Tanlir asked, smiling warmly from his seat beside his mate.

"Your home is beautiful, Tanlir but I do miss my own so, yes, I'm overjoyed to be going back to my city." Feral said, sighing with pleasure.

Tanlir gave a soft chuckle and leaned close to kiss his mate's cheek. Feral nuzzled him back then turned to watch the world rush by under them.

A few hours later they were landing at Megakat International Airport. The royal bodyguards deplaned first then Feral and the Prince, followed by the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, Feral's family and associates then Tanlir's entourage.

Enforcers dressed in their best uniforms lined the walkway leading from the plane to the limos. An amazing amount of katizens had come out to welcome the new Duke (ridiculously proud of their Chief Enforcer) and his mate, Prince Tanlir, Megakat City's first Ambassador from another country.

Feral sighed inwardly as flash bulbs and shouting voices vied for his attention. He was used to being harangued by the press so took it with ease and, of course, Tanlir had grown up being under the scrutiny of the public. They walked arm and arm down the kat-made aisle toward their transport ignoring all the calls from the press to answer questions.

Mayor Manx and Calico Briggs felt it would be prudent for the pair to have a press conference at the new Embassy Building later that afternoon. Security would be tighter.

"How do you feel about being home again, brother." Tyrone asked. He, his wife, and their daughter Felina were sitting with the royal couple as well as the Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

"Really great. Can't wait to get back to work." Feral said with a sigh of relief.

"And how do you feel being so far from home, your highness?" Tyrone asked the Prince.

"I'm excited to start my new duties as Ambassador and home is wherever my mate is." Tanlir said with a wide grin and a gleam of excitement in his eyes. "I can't wait to begin sharing a home with the love of my life." He said, his eyes now glowing with love and joy as he cast a tender look on his mate.

Feral blushed a bit at that look. He caught a look of warmth and happiness from his brother and he blushed even more. He knew his family had always worried about him being alone so much and were very pleased at his good fortune in finding such a prestigious mate.

The limo made its way through the busy city traffic while its occupants chatted and its newest katizens studied the passing scenery with great interest.

Finally, the driver turned into the gates guarding the new Embassy. The long drive went around to the back of the mansion allowing them to climb out without being mobbed by the press or others at the front entrance, who wanted to catch a glimpse of the new Duke and Prince.

The major domo that managed the household greeted them at the door and welcome them in. Tanlir was pleased and excited to be in his new home. Feral smiled at him indulgently as he was almost dragged through a quick tour to show the Mayor and Ms. Briggs all the changes that had been made. Feral was impressed at all the work that had been done to make this a home and office. The security was up to par as per his instructions before he had left. He felt relief at that knowing his mate would be safe here.

After congratulating the new couple again, welcoming the Prince and reminding him of the ball to be held later that month to introduce them to high society, Mayor Manx and Ms. Briggs departed leaving the couple alone finally or as alone as royalty ever was.

The pair escaped to their new quarters for some privacy. They were interrupted briefly by Dr. Taglion as he wanted to check Feral before going to see his own home. He would be on call if they needed him. He too was pleased to be returning home after so long.

Pleased with Feral's blood pressure, he wished them a good evening and left them alone.

Sighing, Tanlir wrapped his arms around his mate who lay on the bed and finally relaxed after the hectic day of travel. Nuzzling Ulysses, he purred in contentment.

Feral purred back, happy to be back and anxious to get to work the next day. His stomach growled, spoiling the moment. He scowled down at it in annoyance.

Tanlir chuckled. "Seems our mama to be is hungry. Shall we call down for food or go to the dining room?" He asked with a warm smile.

"Order in! I'm too tired to go anywhere and I'm far too comfortable to move." Feral said with a snort.

"Sounds perfect to me." Tanlir smirked then reached for the house phone and ordered a meal from the kitchen. "There, the chef says we should have something delectable in about fifteen minutes. They anticipated us." He said with a pleased smile then leaned close to give his mate a kiss which turned into a mini-make out session.

A light knock on their door, a little later, broke their intimate moment.

"Come in!" Tanlir called out.

His room servant opened the door to a waiter who rolled in a serving cart where delicious smells emanated.

"Where would you like it your highnesses?" The servant asked politely.

"Right there is fine, thank you." Tanlir said warmly.

"Very good sir. Have a pleasant meal." The servant said, bowed and left quickly.

"Hmm, something smells wonderful. Want me to make you a plate, my love?" Tanlir asked as he got off the bed and headed to the cart.

"Sure, thanks." Feral sighed and yawned then pushed himself to a seated position. He felt like a nap but his stomach was still growling.

Tanlir made up a plate and pulled a tray out from under the cart, placed the plate and drink on it and carried it to his mate.

"Here you are, love." He said as he set the tray before Ulysses.

"You're right it looks fantastic." Feral said appreciatively at the food choices on his plate, wasting no time digging in.

Chuckling, Tanlir filled a plate for himself and sat at a small table not far from his mate. He hummed in pleasure as he took his first bite.

"Hmm, we have gotten a first rate chef, obviously." He said with a pleased smile.

"I'll say. I've never had anything quite so delicious." Feral mumbled, enjoying his meal.

After such a filling meal and the long flight, Feral felt sleepy. It didn't take much for Tanlir to convince him to take a nap. When he was gently awakened sometime later, he wanted nothing more than to stay in bed but the press wouldn't wait and duty called so he climbed off.

"I know just how you feel my love but you need to hurry up." Tanlir said from the bedroom door where he had just entered to see if his mate was up.

Feral grunted in annoyance and headed for the bathroom. In very short order, he was dressed quickly for the press conference and escorted on Tanlir's arm to the press room. He grimaced, hardily wishing they could skip this part but he was too famous now to duck this responsibility.

Multiple flashbulbs went off in their faces when they entered the room and continued as they stoically answered everyone's multiple questions. They glossed over Feral's difficulties with his pregnancy and could not be pestered to answer anymore about it. Soon it was over and they were escaping to their upper rooms.

"Crud, that was awful. Felt like being chomped on by vultures, nothing like our press at home." Tanlir remarked, shaking his head.

Feral just gave a tired chuckle heading to their living area and flicking on the TV. Tanlir joined him to watch a little screen before dinner.

Dinner time was a semi-formal affair. This was an opportunity for the household to meet and greet their new employer and his mate. The meal was delicious and the conversation excellent.

Feral was pleased with the staff and felt his mate would be quite comfortable here. Returning to

work would be much easier now that his mind was free of concern for Tanlir.

They went to bed in good spirits.

"I can tell you are very pleased with our staff." Tanlir said as he cuddled against his mate.

"Hmmm, yes I was very impressed. It eases my mind about leaving you every day when I go to my office." Ulysses said, smothering a yawn.

"I know your enforcers will look out for you my love, but I will still be worried for you." The cheetah said unhappily.

Feral blinked at the worried sound in his mate's voice. He turned around so he could face Tanlir.

"My love, I will do everything I can to stay safe...you know this." He said soothingly, licking the cheetah's face.

"Mmmm...I know Uly, but your job is dangerous regardless if you remain at headquarters or simply go visit the Mayor at city hall. This is a dangerous city." Tanlir sighed.

"Well I can't argue with you there." Feral sighed in agreement. He needed to distract his mate from this gloomy topic and he knew just what would work.

He continued to lick and groom his mate's face while his paws began an erotic exploration of the naked body pressed against his own.

Tanlir guessed what Uly was up to but didn't stop him as he began an exploration of his own down his mate's back and buttocks.

Feral turned his head a little and took Tanlir's mouth in a passionate kiss. The cheetah moaned and darted his tongue out to duel with his mate's.

A warm and welcome heat spiraled up his body at Uly's attention. Tanlir stroked the dark tom's thick fur, digging his claws in every now and then causing Uly to mew and writhe in pleasure.

There was something to be said for slow and gentle sex, Tanlir had to admit compared to a more violent and wild bout of play. Every slow touch inflamed the senses gradually, building the fire to a wonderful intensity.

Wanting more, Ulysses released Tanlir's mouth to move to his neck where he nibbled and licked then gradually down to the right nipple. He licked, nipped and nuzzled the nipple till it was hard and erect.

Tanlir groaned as Uly tormented and teased his nipple sending zings of lightning to his cock that was growing harder by the minute. Uly wasn't letting him do anything himself, he seemed determined to give his mate pleasure first. The cheetah cried out and shuddered as Uly teased his other nipple with the same concentrated thoroughness.

Before his mate could move further down his body and thwart any effort of his own, Tanlir, reached down and grasped Uly's gradually hardening cock in his paw and began stroking it.

Ulysses gasped and bucked his hips a moment at that first warm grasp of his pole. He moaned and allowed Tanlir to handle him for a few minutes and continued his own attention on the cheetah's nipples.

Tanlir grinned as he stroked the hot pole for several more minutes then released it for the large globes hanging below which were gradually pulling upward against the body. He rolled the sack gently in his fingers, pleased to hear his mate's groans of pleasure above him.

Feral was growing hot and wet but he wasn't finished with his mate just yet. Warning Tanlir to let him go by pushing on the cheetah's chest gently, he moved backward so that his mouth now hovered over the weeping cock. Grinning wickedly, he leaned over and inhaled the cock to its root.

Tanlir howled and bucked upward at the feel of that hot mouth surrounding him. A rough tongue swirled around the head, tormenting him further and driving him crazy.

"Oh god! Ulysses!" He panted heatedly.

Feral merely grinned around a mouthful of cock, sucking lightly then adding a purr to drive his mate nuts. His mate's hips came off the bed in wild abandon, nearly choking the dark tom.

When he felt the cheetah's cock get bigger, he released it with a loud pop from his mouth, heaved his form upward then settled down onto the glistening head. He groaned hotly as Tanlir's cock filled him completely within his female sheath.

Tanlir growled hotly, placing his paws on either hip to stabilize his mate as the huge tom began a slow and torturous rocking motion. They both moaned and panted as the pace picked up.

Ulysses tried to keep a steady slow pace but it felt too good and he began to go faster and faster. Tanlir met each of his movements with one of his own until they reached the cliff and tumbled down the other side together, their roars shaking the room.

Feral trembled with aftershocks before finally slumping over his mate's chest. They panted and tenderly licked each other's face for long moments before Feral groaned and carefully removed himself from his mate's body to lay beside him.

"That was fantastic, love." Tanlir sighed, eyes closed, his paw caressing the dark chest beside him.

"You're welcome." Ulysses murmured, thoroughly enjoying the afterglow.

After regaining his strength, Tanlir got up and disappeared into the bathroom. He returned shortly with a washcloth and a bottle of water. He gave the water to Ulysses then cleaned his mate up.

Feral sighed happily at the attention then drank his water down. Tanlir tossed the washcloth on the table beside him and crawled back in the bed, pulling the covers over them. Snuggling close to his mate, he murmured a soft good night.

Feral turned his head and gave his mate a kiss. "Good night love." He whispered softly.

The next morning, they rose bright and early. Tanlir showered and ate breakfast with his mate before heading for his new offices. Feral went out the front doors where a limo waited for him. He sighed and climbed in reluctantly, he would have to learn to get used to this as well as the four guards that haunted his steps. But this little annoyance didn't dampen his first day back to work in months. He could hardly wait to dig in.

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Chapter 21: The ball of the decade by ulyferal

Feral's first week at work was spent exclusively in his office, clearing the backlog created by his second in command's poor management. This would normally make him furious and ill-tempered but he was far too happy to be back to care.

Tanlir was also extremely busy taking care of the details necessary for getting the embassy up and running to perfection. He spent a lot of time meeting his new staff, learning what all their duties were, and what was expected for this fledgling embassy. It was tiring, but exhilarating,

learning his new job. By Friday, he had sent his first progress report to his father.

The rest of the month flew by without trouble from the omegas, much to Feral's relief. His pregnancy was going more smoothly, finally, except for one brief episode which embarrassed Feral to no end only because the SWAT Kats had been involved and had nearly given his mate a heart attack.

It had happened two weeks before the end of the month. Omegas might not have been around but the scientists at Pumadyne more than made up for their absence. A newly designed robot for space exploration had been built to replace the ones the Metallikats had destroyed. It was built along the same lines as those first two except for being a bit shorter in stature and having a living crew aboard.

A small crew of four were supposed to furnish the 'mind' of the robot but, for the purpose of testing and for safety reasons, it was presently being remotely control using its onboard computer brain.

The pre-testing of the brain was a success but for reasons they couldn't determine, during the actual test the computer developed a virus and caused the robot to run amok.

It flailed around, totally trashing the testing facility before finally breaking through a wall and, like a charging bull, headed in one direction. None of the security force could stop its forward motion as it plowed through the fencing of Pumadyne and continued on its straight course.

It's path led it past the salvage yard and over the freeway to the heart of Megakat City. Since it was charging down the center of the road, it caused panic among the commuters, leaving a wake of damaged cars and frightened Katizens.

"What the heck was that?" Chance bellowed when he heard the sounds of crashes, screams and breaking metal.

"Crud...don't know..." Jake shouted as he ran through their gates for the street.

Chance had followed him and together they saw the departing form of the one-story robot racing down the street and the destruction it had left behind. Looking at each other for only a moment, the pair turned and ran back into the yard, closed their garage, and went down to their secret hangar.

Meanwhile, Feral and his sergeant were at city hall dealing with some minor problem that the Mayor seemed to think was a major one when the call came over the Commander's enforcer radio.

"Enforcer One!"

"Feral here!"

"Sir, a robot being tested at Pumadyne has gone amok and is on a collision course for city hall." Dispatch reported.

"Wonderful!" Feral growled under his breath. "Have a squad get to city hall on the double and have choppers in the air to try and halt its progress." He ordered.

"Squad already on the way, choppers leaving the pad as we speak, sir."

"Excellent, keep this channel open and give me regular updates." Feral growled as he moved to the windows to see what was going on.

"Roger, sir!"

Everyone else followed Feral's example and stared out the windows. Just a few miles away, the imposing robot was seen coming into view. It was moving at a fair clip much to Feral's dismay. Looking down, he saw his squad arrive, pile out of their armored vehicles and form a defensive line at the bottom of the stairs leading into city hall.

A familiar roar sent Feral's head upward to see the SWAT Kats arriving on scene. Though he growled in annoyance, he watched as the pair began their assault on the lumbering thing.

His chopper squadron arrived on scene just then and were trying to harry the robot and make it change direction. Apparently nothing either the SWAT Kats or his pilots did could make it alter its path. That's when Feral realized it had no mind of its own, it was just following a single path it had started on and wouldn't stop until they destroyed it.

Huffing in annoyance, Feral wheeled around and hurried for the elevators. Ms. Briggs rushed after him on the heels of the Commander's royal guards.

Feral paid them no attention, his mind focused on the battle outside as he listened to the reports coming over his radio.

Ms. Briggs eyed Feral in concern. "You really shouldn't go any closer to this Commander." She said worriedly.

"I can't just stand by while my enforcers try to cope with that thing and it doesn't make it easier to have those two hooligans on hand either." Feral snapped, distractedly.

Callie sighed in frustration. The Kat was just too bull-headed for his own good. The elevator doors snapped open and the group surged forward toward the lobby doors. People visiting city hall and its employees had already escaped through the rear exits so the lobby was eerily quiet except for the noise of battle coming through the entry doors.

Outside the robot loomed even closer, in an attempt to halt its progress the SWAT Kats had blown a hole in the road before it. This was somewhat successful as it caused the robot to fall in but apparently that had jogged its circuits and now its protection mode had activated.

The robot heaved itself from the hole and grabbed a car to hurl but its arm was ruined by a slicer missile from Razor. Unfortunately, that move had allowed the hand holding the car to be sent through the doors of city hall.

Feral and his group had barely begun to cross the lobby floor when, suddenly, something came hurling through the glass doors. Callie caught only a glimpse of, what looked like a car, before she was shoved out of the way and slammed to the floor with a heavy body over her.

The car slammed into the elevators with a loud boom, glass and metal flying everywhere. When her ears stopped ringing from the sound, the body covering her moved off and helped her to her feet.

It was Commander Feral who had saved her and was now looking through the broken doors to see what was going on. His royal guards were caught on the other side of the thrown car and were even now trying to hurry to his side.

What he saw made him furious. The robot had apparently been mindless but now its movements were more purposeful and it was actively attacking. At the moment, it was facing its attackers, its back to the building.

Growling angrily, his face set with purpose, Feral stomped forward and stepped through the broken door, much to his guards dismay. They tried to intervene when Feral grabbed a bazooka from one of his troopers but were too late.

The Commander put it to his shoulder and fired a rocket toward the robot's head just as Razor fired a scrambler missile at the same target. One of his guards pulled the bazooka away from him but Feral didn't pay any attention as he watched what would happen.

Both missiles managed to strike at the same time with devastating results. The scrambler missile caused a surge in the electrical system and computer of the robot allowing Feral's rocket to finish it off, completely destroying its head.

The robot wasn't finished doing damage though, as its falling body crashed down, its one arm, which were still raised, hit the front of city hall, a floor above the lobby, tearing chunks of masonry and brick away from the face of the building before its body violently hit the ground.

Seeing the robot's body hurtling for them, Feral's guards desperately snatched him by his coat and arms and pulled him back toward a side entrance. He was able to snatch Ms. Briggs despite the guards tugging on him. The enforcers outside, frantically scattered out of the way. The force of the robot's body hitting the steps of city hall caused a shockwave that sent huge sections of the lobby ceiling to rain down, burying everyone.

"T-Bone!" Razor shouted. "That damn robot has collapsed the front of city hall's lobby ceiling. I thought I saw Ms. Briggs there with Feral!"

"Damn, why couldn't that thing have fallen backwards!" T-Bone growled angrily as he found a cleared area and landed the jet.

The pair leaped from the cockpit of their jet and raced back to city hall's ruined entryway. Enforcers were already hard at work trying to get to those they knew were buried under the debris.

At the moment the ceiling collapsed on the trapped Kats, across town at the Asszeria Embassy, Tanlir had been going over a report with his First Secretary Harshad when he jerked upright with a cry of pain and fear. "Ulysses!"

"Your highness! What is it?" Harshad asked anxiously.

"My mate is hurt! I can feel his pain!" Tanlir said sharply, heading out of his office at a run.

Harshad pulled his phone from his pocket as he ran after the Prince and hurriedly summoned a car and guards to take Tanlir where he needed to go.

In very little time, Tanlir was anxiously directing his driver toward where he felt Ulysses was located. His claws sunk into his seat as he tried to keep control of himself.

At city hall, T-Bone had found where the trapped Kats were and was using his cutting torch to carefully cut a hole to their location. Fortunately, the ceiling had fallen at an angle and allowed a safe pocket to be created under it.

When T-Bone and Razor made an opening, enforcers moved to either side and held up the sagging panels so that the SWAT Kats along with other officers could help pull out the Commander, his enforcer sergeant, Ms. Briggs and Feral's royal guards.

The poor Kats were covered in plaster and insulation dust which caused them to cough and have red teary eyes.

Razor had to risk going into the safe pocket to help two of Feral's royal guards, who were badly injured, to get out. Medics swarmed the victims as they were pulled free and took them outside where they could be treated.

The SWAT Kats stayed to be sure Callie was okay. Nearby, Feral fumed angrily, pushed away

the medics then stormed over to the pair to give them a dressing down.

"You two hotshots caused more damage than the robot then you let it fall toward city hall rather than rope it and pull it away first." He growled furiously.

T-Bone bristled, "Oh right, it's easy to see that after the fact. Hindsight's a bitch, Commander. You just can't plan for everything." The brawny tabby growled. "Besides, you're the one who blew its head off, remember?"

His fists clenched, Feral was about to give a scathing retort when his vision blurred then everything went black on him. His last thought was, 'Crud, not again!'

Razor who had been trying to pull T-Bone away so they wouldn't get into a row with Feral, noted the Commander's eyes rolling up and his body suddenly falling. He lunged forward to catch the suddenly fainting tom before he kissed the sidewalk with his face.

"Aw Crud!" T-Bone gasped, as he helped his partner lower Feral to the ground. His anger forgotten and shame taking its place as he chastised himself for failing to remember the Commander's fragile condition.

Two medics hurried up with a gurney and with the help of the SWAT Kats picked up the inert Commander and placed him on it, immediately examining him.

A shout caused everyone to look toward the street. A limo with flags on it was parked haphazardly near the medical vehicles and a familiar figure was racing up toward them, fear and upset on his handsome cheetah face.

"Ulysses!" Tanlir cried as he reached Feral and quickly touched the dark tom's face to reassure himself his mate was alright, even though the bond told him he was.

Feral groaned and blinked up at the face of his mate leaning over him anxiously.

"Tanlir?...ohhhh...Crud, I hate fainting!" He growled in annoyance then tried to sit up causing his head to spin.

Tanlir and a medic put paws on his shoulders and pushed him back down.

"Oh no you don't, sir. Stay right there until we check your blood pressure." The medic said firmly.

Feral huffed but did as he was told. "How is Ms. Briggs" He asked instead.

"She's alright Commander." Razor told him. "The medics are giving her a look over but except for a few bruises, she's okay."

"Two of your royal guards are injured and are being taken to the hospital, sir. " His sergeant reported. He had been cleared by the medics though he looked odd covered in plaster dust.

"Well that's good news. Have CSI do their thing then have this mess cleaned up." Feral ordered with a sigh.

"Yes sir!" The Sergeant said briskly before turning away to bark orders.

The SWAT Kats had wisely slipped away during all this. Feral heard the jet roar as it raised from the ground. He watched it disappear as he was rolled toward an ambulance.

Tanlir hovered at his side and went aboard the ambulance, brooking no argument from the medics, who shrugged and allowed him to sit near the Commander's head as they traveled to the hospital.

Feral had to endure a transfusion before he was allowed to go home with his mate. He wanted to go back to work, he had a desk load of reports to take care of as well as writing up this incident. Unfortunately, what he wanted and what he was allowed were two different things.

He didn't win the battle and was sulking as he was driven home aboard his mate's limo.

"Come on, my love. It's not like you can't fill out your report at home. You scared me to death and interrupted my own work." Tanlir chided him gently.

Feral sighed and glanced at his mate. "I'm sorry, I do sometimes forget about our bond. Things just happen that I have no control over." He said, shrugging helplessly.

"That I well know, my love." Tanlir sighed. "Even when you're not looking for it, danger just seems to find you. At this rate, I'll have a silvered head of hair before very long." He snorted in good humor.

Feral gave him a wane smile and a kiss for being so understanding.

That had been the only incident concerning his pregnancy and now, two weeks later, he had finally passed his third month. Dr. Taglion told him he shouldn't suffer any further problems concerning low blood pressure but that he should still be monitored for a bit longer.

He was barely starting to show when he had to endure being fitted for formal wear in preparation for the ball the city was holding to formally welcome the Prince to their city.

"Is this really necessary?" He asked his mate rather plaintively.

Tanlir swallowed a smile and said in a firm voice, "I know you would rather wear your dress uniform but you are not going as Chief Enforcer but as Duke Ulysses, so, yes, you have to wear the appropriate clothes for it."

Feral sighed and stared at the ceiling. Tanlir found that endearing and made a promise to himself to give his mate a little personal time when he was done with his fitting.

The night of the ball was warm and clear as the Asszeria Embassy car pulled up in front of the Mayor's mansion. Royal guards that were in armored cars ahead and behind the royal limo, now jumped from their vehicles to form a line of protection for the royal pair before they were allowed to leave their vehicle.

Feral sighed inwardly at all the fuss but plastered a mild look on his face as he stepped out of the limo just behind his mate, Tanlir. The Prince took his mate's arm and they walked down the red carpet leading into the mansion while news crews flashed their cameras and shouted questions. Other important guests looked on in envy as the royals disappeared into the foyer.

Mayor Manx greeted his important guests with a huge smile and a welcoming paw shake.

"So glad to see you, Prince Tanlir. I hope you enjoy the evening we've planned for you." He said in that thick Irish brogue of his.

"I'm sure we will, Mayor Manx. Thank you for putting this on for us so that we can meet the important people of Megakat City." Tanlir said politely.

"You're very welcome." Manx said, puffing up with pride. "Shall we enter?" He asked, gesturing toward the ballroom.

Tanlir nodded and followed the portly Kat. The room had been decorated with care and glittered in gold and silver trappings throughout, giving it a fairy tale appearance.

By mid-evening, Feral was mindlessly bored. He hated these things and some of the shallow people that hung around Tanlir just because he was royalty and it would raise their positions in the social structure to be seen in his company.

"Social climbers." He grumbled to himself as he moved away from his mate to go to the restroom.

When he returned, he decided to find a more secluded spot away from the crowd. Grabbing a ginger ale, which was all he was allowed, he headed for the french doors leading to the rather elaborate gardens the Mayor had around his place.

He sighed in relief as he took a deep breath of the night air. He took a watch position near a pillar so he could keep an eye on the activity inside while safe outside. And that was where Ms. Briggs finally found him.

"I should have known I'd find you 'hiding out' here Commander." She said in amusement coming up behind him from the gardens where she too had gone for a break.

He glanced at her over his shoulder. "You know me well, Ms. Briggs." He said with a small smile.

"I don't blame you, actually. These things do get rather dull, I'm forced to admit. How are you holding up?" She asked mildly, as she drank her glass of champagne.

"Except for being a bit tired, I'm fine." He grunted.

"Then your pregnancy has smoothed out a bit?"

"Yes, finally! Being that weak and fragile was really getting on my nerves." He said with a grimace.

"I have no doubt of that." She said sympathetically. "Hmm, it looks like your Prince is looking for you." She said as she noted Tanlir moving through the crowd with a purposeful stride.

"Hmm, Yes, it appears so. Our bond allows him to find me rather easily." Feral murmured, a look of warmth in his golden eyes.

Callie felt a pang of jealousy at Feral's good fortune at finding such a loving mate. She didn't, however, envy all the new duties he'd acquired along with it though.

Tanlir walked through the french doors and stepped close to his mate. He sighed, "I should have known this is where you'd be. You owe me a dance, my love."

"Do I? Have the vultures finally let go of you?" Feral asked archly.

"Now...now we mustn't call them that...even if that's a perfect description." Tanlir snorted in amusement. "I see you too had chosen to 'escape' your duties for a bit as well Ms. Briggs." He said turning to look at the Deputy Mayor with a warm smile.

"Guilty!" She said with a small laugh.

"I certainly can't blame you. Mayor Manx must be a demanding person to work for." He said diplomatically.

"That's an understatement!" Callie said with a mild snort. She really liked the Prince. Unlike some royals she'd met, he wasn't pretentious or snooty. He was a caring and likable individual and Callie felt a special kinship with him. "Might I steal you away for a single dance. It would give those pains in the tail social climbers something to gibber about?" She asked smiling wickedly.

"Why, I'd be happy to, Ms. Briggs." Tanlir said with a smile of his own. "But first, my mate and I

will dance. Come Ulysses." He said holding his arm out for his mate.

Sighing, Feral set his glass down on a nearby table and took Tanlir's arm. They walked back into the ballroom and headed for the center of the floor. Seeing them there, the band leader immediately began a waltz.

Taking the lead, Tanlir swept Ulysses into his arms and stepped out smoothly in time with the music. A circle of cleared space was made by the other dancers so that the Prince and his consort were dancing alone.

Tanlir was an excellent dancer and Feral was no slouch either though he was the one who usually lead. The cheetah held his mate close as they swung through the moves of the waltz. They had eyes for only each other as they moved across the floor gracefully. Many eyes watched them with envy or appreciation.

When the dance ended, Tanlir gave his beloved a warm kiss. Feral sighed when it ended and nuzzled his mate for several moments before they moved off the floor to allow Feral to sit and rest.

Tanlir gestured for Ms. Briggs to join him. Taking her paw and bowing to her, he took her out onto the floor and they danced together. Callie smiled and enjoyed herself. Tanlir was an excellent partner. She would remember this part of the ball for some time to come. The song came to an end and Tanlir politely guided her to the Mayor's side.

Thanking him for a wonderful dance, Callie watched the Prince return to his beloved mate. She sighed, 'Feral was indeed a very lucky Kat' she thought.

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Chapter 22: Trials and Tribulations of Pregnancy by ulyferal

Two months later...

"Commander ...get down!" Sgt Fallon bellowed as he pushed his superior to the ground and covered him with his own body.

Feral gasped in surprise at being shoved to the ground and pressed there. The next moment he and the Sergeant were inundated with debris being whipped up by a vortex from the Pastmaster. Lightning crackled and boomed around them. His royal guards were in a car behind them. When the attack occurred the four were spread out in a defensive pattern around the Commander.

When Feral had left his office, it had been a calm, serene day that is until he was laboriously climbing out of his car with the help of Sgt Fallon when all hell broke out. There had been no way for him to know that a vortex had appeared near the end of the city and had traveled rapidly toward city hall where it halted since it had moved too quickly to have been reported.

The SWAT Kats had seen the vortex while working at their garage. They could hardly miss it since it had decided to pass over the salvage yard. Changing quickly, they chased the phenomenon to city hall.

Razor readied his weapons when he spotted the Pastmaster flying one of his favorite things...a dragon. He was accompanied by some truly strange things that looked like a cross between a bird of prey and a lion. They were huge and had wicked claws that were strong enough to tear through metal which they were finding out the hard way as one of the things was presently ripping through one of the Turbokat's wings.

T-Bone flipped the jet in a barrel roll to dislodge the ugly thing. The enforcers arrived on scene and soon a violent dogfight ensued. Meanwhile, the Pastmaster slipped into the clock tower while everyone was busy. He wasn't completely unnoticed, though.

Feral had to push against his sergeant enough to get the Kat to let him up enough to see what was going on which is how he saw the Pastmaster go into the clock tower. What the creep intended there, Feral had a pretty good idea.

Meanwhile the Pastmaster's dragon swung away from the tower and left to engage the SWAT Kats. Gritting his teeth, Feral reached for his radio on the seat and called for an immediate patch to city hall.

The first voice he heard was a frantic Ms. Briggs and the scared brogue of the Mayor in the background. She'd answered the phone but hadn't said anything yet.

Not waiting, Feral shouted a warning at her, "Ms. Briggs! Get out of there. The Pastmaster is headed your way."

"Commander! Wha...no...let me go you creep..." Briggs started to answer when a cackle and a familiar voice came through the radio before being cut off.

"Damn!" Feral swore. He changed the frequency and made a different call. "SWAT Kats!"

It took several precious minutes before a gruff and distracted voice responded, "What? We're busy right now Commander?"

"Ms. Briggs has been taken by the Pastmaster." He answered swiftly and was greeted by a curse.

"Crud! We're hung up here with these damn things the creep brought with him. Razor where is the Pastmaster's dragon?" T-Bone shouted to his partner forgetting his radio was still on.

"I don't see it! Wait there he goes...he's got someone with him." Razor voice came through to Feral's listening ear.

"It's Callie! You've got to get these things off us." T-Bone snarled as he once more he did an evasive maneuver away from the things trying to rip their jet apart.

Watching and listening below, Feral cursed at his helplessness then he had an idea. He changed the frequency yet again and made a call.

The SWAT Kats were going after the Pastmaster with the weird things still harrying them when suddenly a squadron of enforcer jets appeared and began spraying the creatures with blue energy rays. The creatures screamed in pain then froze solid, a result of the rays effects, sending them falling from the sky.

Feral smiled grimly in triumph. The funds he'd shifted to Pumadyne for weapons production had finally paid off. The new cold energy ray was a recent invention that hadn't had a chance to be tested yet. He was pleased that it worked as advertised. Now the SWAT Kats were free to take out the Pastmaster and they did so some minutes later, rescuing Ms. Briggs handily.

With the battle over, Sgt Fallon helped Feral gain his feet. He groaned in discomfort, his legs had cramped from having been in that position for too long. Gently making Feral lean against the car, Fallon quickly knelt down and began a hard, firm massage to ease the pregnant tom's tightened leg muscles. A sigh of relief told him he had succeeded. He continued until he didn't feel anymore knots in the muscles.

Feral gave him a grateful nod before closing the door to his car and walking around it to the city hall steps. He still had that meeting to attend even though he knew the ones holding it might be a bit distracted which would delay its start but at least he'd be able to sit down. His royal guards continued to keep a tense perimeter around him. The attack had made them upset and nervous.

More than a couple of hours later, as Sgt Fallon drove the Commander back to Enforcer Headquarters, he dared to make a suggestion.

"Sir, I think you should take a short nap. I can keep everyone away for about an hour. What just happened with the Pastmaster then the meeting has exhausted you. I can see how pale you are despite your dark fur."

Feral gave him a tired and annoyed look but didn't take the sergeant to task for his comment. He did feel tired, he just didn't like it pointed out to him. "I'll see when I get back to the office." Was all he was willing to promise.

Sergeant Fallon wisely didn't comment and got them back to headquarters in quick order. He aided Feral out of the car once more and kept close behind the very gravid tom. They waited until Feral's guards were around them again, then went into the lobby.

As Feral caught an elevator and pushed the button for the top floor, his cell phone went off. Sighing he pulled it from his coat and answered it.

"My love, are you alright?" His mate's anxious voice asked.

"Sorry Tanlir, yes I'm fine, just tired. We had an incident with the Pastmaster. I wasn't in any danger but it was dicey for a bit there." Feral answered, knowing his mate had sensed his fear and anxiety a little while ago.

"You'll have to tell me about it tonight meanwhile, take a nap, my stubborn mate." Tanlir warned.

"My sergeant has already suggested it."

"Good. Then do it! I love you. See you later." Tanlir said rather distractedly, obviously, Feral had, yet again, interrupted Tanlir when he was busy.

"Fine. I love you too." He murmured, closing his phone and putting it away. He hated it when he disrupted his mate's day. The doors of the elevator snapped open and he walked down the hall to his office. 'It was going to be yet another long day.' He thought mentally.

Another month passed and another crisis had Tanlir in a panic and Feral being rushed to the hospital.

It had started as a normal day with the two of them getting up for breakfast together before they separated for work. Feral's belly was sticking out like a beach ball which annoyed him to no end. Despite the tailors making him new uniforms to cover his pregnancy, he hated how he looked. His great coat didn't even button at all and it made him feel sloppy. It didn't help that his feet and back pained him a great deal of the time. He was glad he was due in another four weeks, he didn't know how much longer he could handle this.

"Such a sour look you have on your face this morning, my love." Tanlir murmured gently as he hugged his mate in preparation for their parting.

"Just so very tired of being pregnant, love." Feral sighed, hugging back.

"I do wish you would listen to reason and stay home to do your work. It would allow you to rest as you need to." Tanlir broached the subject yet again but knew he wasn't going to win it.

Moments later, he was right when Feral grunted at him and shook his head. "You already know my answer to that and the reasons."

"I know but I can't help but try." Tanlir said without apology.

Feral just shrugged, they parted for the day. He had worked for most of the morning at his desk before going to a demonstration of some new tech for his enforcers at Pumadyne.

The group, consisting of himself, a few of his enforcer squadron commanders, four of his royal guards and the Director of Research were walking down a cement corridor heading for the firing range.

He had felt a twinge of pain near the top of his belly at first as they walked but then a much sharper more intense one streaked across it. It had taken his breath away and forced him to stop in midstep. He heard the others asking if he was alright as if from a distance.

"Sir, what is it?" Sgt Fallon asked worriedly, putting an arm around his Commander to steady the dark tom.

"Commander?" The Director of Research asked uncertainly.

Feral's officers stood back in a group because the royal guards had immediately encircled the tom but their eyes were wide with concern. Feral stood hunched in Fallon's arms, one paw over his belly. With eyes closed, he tried to breathe through the discomfort. He waited for the pain to ease but it didn't. Instead, it intensified and his legs couldn't hold him anymore.

Sgt Fallon exclaimed in fear as Feral's legs began to crumble beneath him. The Director quickly summoned emergency aid as Feral's royal guards helped Sgt Fallon lower Feral more slowly to the floor. Everyone was worried as Feral writhed in obvious pain. There was no doubt something was amiss with the Commander's pregnancy.

At the embassy, Tanlir was in a meeting with the head of a shipping company that wished to begin a business arrangement with Asszeria when the cheetah prince suddenly lurched from his seat and screamed, "Ulysses!" His clawed paws reaching forward as if to catch something that was only in his mind.

Immediately, Tanlir's aids surrounded him to support the now distracted prince who's only focus was on his distant mate's distress. One of them summoned a car, while another contacted the Commander's guards to find out what was happening.

At Pumadyne, an on-site emergency team responded to the Director's call and were assessing Feral's condition. Not equipped to deal with this kind of emergency, they made the decision to immediately transport the Commander to the hospital.

In very little time, Feral was on his way in an ambulance to Megakat Trauma Center. His royal guards and enforcer officers followed in their own vehicles. One of the royal guards was riding with the Commander and answered the urgent call from the Prince's advisor.

So, at very nearly the same time, Tanlir was being guided to his mate's location just as Feral was reaching the hospital. Tanlir could barely function as his mind reached out to his very sick mate. It was up to his support system to insure the Prince was taken where he needed to be and that he was guarded the whole way. Meanwhile back at the embassy, the badly shaken business Kat that had been left behind was being told what was going on and asked to return when things were back to normal.

At the hospital, Feral was rushed into a trauma bay and immediately surrounded. An ob/gyn was summoned while the on call physician did his best to try and assess Feral's condition.

Outside the Prince's limo roared up the emergency ramp and screeched to a halt, his guards in cars behind doing the same. Tanlir leaped out of the limo, his guards surrounding him immediately as he hurried into the emergency room intake area.

Things were happening so quickly that the Hospital Administrator was only just getting the word

that Commander Feral was in the ER and that Prince Tanler was just arriving as well. He quickly ordered that security be increased in the area and that the top physician's be called quickly to the scene. He didn't want anything to go wrong with such important people in his hospital. Once he'd gotten the orders out, he hurried downstairs to assess what was going on for himself.

Patients sitting around the intake waiting area blinked in amazement at all the commotion, many only just realizing who had walked in as the Prince and his guards were quickly escorted to the back.

Feral panted in pain as his clothes were taken off and he was bombarded with questions as they took care of him.

"How many months along are you, Commander." The chief of trauma asked as he put a stethoscope over the tom's chest.

"Six...ohhhh!" Feral groaned.

"We need an ultrasound done stat!" The doctor barked out, one of the nurses responded by going to a wall phone and calling x-ray. "I'm sorry we can't give you any pain meds until we're sure what's going on first Commander. Just pant, that will ease some of your pain."

"Doctor, the patient's mate is here!" A nurse quickly informed him.

"He's going to have to wait a bit." The doctor said distractedly.

"No he's won't. They are bonded and he has to be here by his side." The Hospital Administrator interrupted, having finally managed to get into the room a few moments before.

The ER doctor blinked in surprise at that but didn't stop his work, just accepted he had been over ruled. Moments later, a tall, powerful looking cheetah entered the room and immediately went to the Commander's head. He did stay out of the medicals ways as best he could. His fingers caressed his mate's forehead and he frowned as he closed his eyes and concentrated.

He sent healing energy into his mate along their bond trying to ease Ulysses' pain. Feral felt a warmth in his mind then an easing of some of the pain, it had kept him from realizing Tanlir was near. He opened his eyes and stared up at his mate whose eyes were still closed.

"Tanlir." He murmured heavily.

The Prince's eyes snapped open and he looked down worriedly. "My love, is the pain a little better?" He asked in concern.

"Yes...thanks." Feral said, talking tired him more than he thought it should. He frowned and eyed all the people surrounding him.

A machine was being wheeled up to him and his belly was being covered with a familiar goo. They were going to do an ultrasound, he realized. The lights in the room were turned out and the doctor ran the wand over his belly.

The kitten moved and made Feral meow suddenly in renewed pain.

"I'm sorry, Commander but you must hold still if you can." The doctor said tensely. He'd seen something he didn't like.

Tanlir sent more healing energy through their bond but it only eased his mate a little.

The doctor's face was unhappy. Before he could decide anything, another doctor hurried in and moved to his side.

"May I, John?" He asked as a professional courtesy.

The ER doctor turned his head in relief. This one was an expert in OB/GYN and he was glad to hand over this case to him.

"No, I'm glad you're here." He said then reeled off Feral's vital signs as he stepped away from the patient, handing the wand over to the specialist.

Dr. Freeborn nodded and accepted the wand and began his own examination. He stared at the screen in intense concentration. His face went grim at what he found.

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Chapter 23: Royalty is born on a Wing and Prayer by ulyferal

"We have a Grade 2 placental abruption. Get the Commander ready for surgery stat." Dr. Freeborn said, grimly. The medical personnel in the room immediately began hurrying around preparing Feral.

Tanlir and Feral looked around in rising consternation and the edge of fear. Dr. Freeborn didn't keep them in suspense.

"Commander, in placental abruption, the placental lining has separated from the uterine wall. The premature labor pains you're feeling is blood beginning to pool behind the placenta. An extremely serious condition. The kitten is also experiencing distress. I won't sugar coat this, there is a thirty percent chance of mortality of the kitten and an eighty percent chance of mortality for the mother." He explained, gravely.

Tanlir went white and Feral felt like fainting.

"You're taking him to surgery. Why?" Tanlir asked, desperately getting a handle on his fear.

"To deliver the kitten and repair the damage before Commander Feral exsanguinates. We must hurry. What's in our favor is the quick response of getting him here and his excellent health. Both things should insure a good outcome." Dr. Freeborn told him, trying to give him hope that everything will work out alright.

"But it's too early!" Feral suddenly blurted. The thought of losing the kitten after trying so hard to keep it was nearly more than he could bear.

"It's only four weeks early, Commander." Dr. Freeborn soothed him. "We've had kittens that young survive. Some have a little difficulty breathing because their lungs are not completely developed but that clears up with age."

Feral was still not appeased but he really didn't have a choice as he was packaged up and quickly rushed to the surgery floor. Tanlir stuck close to his side, his face drawn and worried. He gripped his mate's paw all the way until he was prevented from entering the surgery suite.

Under normal circumstances, he would be allowed in but this was not normal, however, royal protocol required the birth be witnessed. Tanlir made that plain to Dr. Freeborn.

"Must you be in the room?" The doctor asked.

"It can't be on camera, I actually have to witness it as do two of my advisors." Tanlir said firmly.

"Oh it wouldn't be on camera. The room we have him in happens to be a student observatory. New doctors are required to observe procedures they are learning. There is a balcony above the surgical area where you can see everything that's going on and I'll have one of my assistants sit with you and answer all your questions." Dr. Freeborn assured him.

"I'll stay with you as well." The Hospital Administrator said. "Please follow me and I'll take you there now. Are your advisors here?" He asked as he began to lead Tanlir away.

But Tanlir hung back. "Please may I speak with Ulysses a moment before you start." He begged softly.

Dr. Freeborn nodded his understanding and walked him into the suite. The room was quickly being prepared as was Ulysses, who was very nervous and trying to hide his fear.

Tanlir came close and leaned over to kiss his mate and whispered words of comfort before squeezing his paw and reluctantly leaving. His heart felt tight with fear, but he shook himself mentally and reminded himself that he would help Ulysses as much as he could through their bond.

He followed the administrator down the hall and to a door not far from the surgical suite. They went inside and up some stairs. They entered a room that resembled a mini theater because of the way the seats were set in tiers, though there were only three levels. Before the seats was a huge slanted window that did indeed look directly over the bed Ulysses was on.

Tanlir took a seat on the front row and told the administrator that two royal guards and two advisors were required from the group standing outside the surgical ward doors. The administrator nodded and excused himself to retrieve the personnel indicated as well as insure Dr. Freeborn's assistant Dr. Chase had arrived.

While Tanlir waited, he watched tensely as Ulysses was put under anesthesia. He was draped with blue sheets in such a way as to leave his belly open to the air and his feet were placed in stirrups with his legs open wide. IVs had been started with blood plasma and fluids. Other things were attached to his mate that he wasn't very clear on what they were for. Some he knew monitored Uly's breathing, pulse and heart rate. Another, he thought registered the kittens vitals.

The door opened below him and he heard a group coming up the stairs. Both of his advisors came toward him with grave looks and took up seats on either side of him. To his surprise, Felina Feral had also arrived and sat just behind him. Somehow she'd found out about her uncle.

He reached back and grasped her paw in his in mutual comfort. She gave him a wane but worried smile in return, her eyes straying toward her uncle.

"I came as soon as I heard, Tanlir. What do they say is wrong?" Felina asked worriedly.

Tanlir explained what he'd been told and she gripped him even tighter a moment longer before releasing him.

"He's survived so many things. I'm certain he'll make it through this as well." She said, trying to give hope to them both by reminding them how tenacious the Commander was.

"I'm sure he will, Felina." Tanlir said softly returning his gaze below as the doctors prepared to begin surgery.

"Your highness." One of his advisors murmured. "The King and Queen have been notified."

Tanlir just nodded, glad someone had remembered to do that.

Elsewhere in the city, word was just reaching the public about Commander Feral.

Chance and Razor had been eating dinner when a news bulletin interrupted the show they'd been watching.

At city hall, Callie had heard a rumor race through the building and had returned to her office then

passed through to the Mayor's to turn on his TV. The Mayor had been preparing to leave for the day.

"What's going on Callie?" He asked, a frown on his face.

"I don't know Mayor, I just heard a rumor concerning the royal couple...shhh...listen!" She said suddenly when Ann Gora of Katseye News appeared on screen.

"This is Ann Gora and I'm standing before the ER entrance of Megakat Trauma Center where Commander Ulysses Feral was rushed here just hours ago. He had been at Pumadyne earlier today to observe the testing of a new weapon when he began experiencing severe abdominal pain.

He was rushed here and quickly examined then taken to surgery. What we've been able to find out is something serious has occurred with Commander Feral's pregnancy. Whatever the problem is, it's serious enough to warrant the termination of his pregnancy and the early delivery of his kitten which wasn't due for another four weeks. We've been told the danger to the Commander and his kitten if this is not done, is very high...nearly eighty percent mortality.

Prince Tanlir is at his mate's side as is Lt. Felina Feral, the Commander's niece. We will be standing by here waiting for more information and we'll pass it on to you as soon as we do. This is Ann Gora of Katseye News at Megakat Trauma Center."

"Ahhh...this is terrible. Callie, you must go to the hospital and offer our support and let me know immediately about the outcome." Mayor Manx said, worried about the financial loss of the embassy should Feral die.

"Yes Mayor." She said annoyed at the Mayor knowing exactly what the pompous, greedy Kat was thinking but fortunately, she also wanted to be on hand. She sincerely prayed everything would go alright for Feral and his kitten.

"Crud! After all the effort he's gone through to keep his kitten now this has to happen!" Chance said unhappily.

"Yeah, it just doesn't seem fair." Jake added, an upset look on his face. "Let's pray he and his kitten pulls through."

"I will!" Chance said grimly. Whatever he might think of the Commander in this one area he was just as worried as those close to the prickly tom.

Back at the hospital, Tanlir was sitting on the edge of his seat. He barely asked what was going on, so focused was he on maintaining a steady stream of healing energy to his mate.

Below, the doctors worked quickly and efficiently. They hadn't wanted to do a caesarean section because it carried the greatest risk but the kitten was in distress as was the mother so no other choice was left. The very real chance the mother would bleed to death and his kitten suffocate from lack of oxygen was high.

To ensure a greater chance of survival, Dr. Freeborn had two assistants at paw to be ready to stop any bleeding as quickly as they could and Feral's blood had been tested for clotting and it was a relief to find his clotting factors were present and working.

Dr. Freeborn quickly cut a midline incision for a larger than normal abdominal opening to be able to get at the hidden bleeding behind the placenta. As soon as the cavity was opened, blood poured out. No one panicked as the bleeding was suctioned and the tear was revealed. While his assistants dealt with the bleeding, Dr. Freeborn quickly cut the uterus and removed the kitten, handing it off quickly to the waiting pediatricians.

Tanlir was horrified by the amount of blood but the doctor's calm behavior made him relax just a little. He tensed again when an incredibly tiny creature was lifted from his mate's belly and carefully handed off.

He couldn't see what sex it was and soon his kitten was surrounded by doctors of its own. His nerves were raw as the kitten hadn't cried yet. He flicked his eyes back to his mate. The monitors showed he was holding his own despite the fact the bleeding hadn't been brought under control yet. Dr. Freeborn was removing the evidence of pregnancy to make it easier to seal off the bleeding.

It took nearly ten minutes, but finally the bleeding was stopped. Silence still held as there was still no sound from the table where his kitten was still being worked on.

Dr. Freeborn had glanced over at the pediatricians himself. One could see his brow furrow in concern over his surgical mask.

Finally, to everyone's relief a weak cry was heard. The Hospital Administrator leaned over to depress the mic that allowed them to speak to the doctors.

"Dr. Renson, the kitten must be seen to be witnessed by royal edict. Please show the kitten and tells us its sex." He asked formally.

Dr. Renson looked up and nodded. Gently, he raised the tiny body up and with a nurse staying close with an oxygen hose, he moved closer to the windows and held the kitten up.

"It's a male and in generally good condition for having arrived too early. He must go immediately to the NICU because he still requires a little assistance for breathing and he needs to gain weight before he can go home." Dr. Renson said. "Are you through, because he really needs to go."

The administrator looked toward the advisors and was given the green light. "Yes, he can go and thank you Dr. Renson. The advisors will be coming to the NICU with Prince Tanlir in a little while."

Dr. Renson nodded and returned to the warming table to finish his exam and to place the kitten in an incubator. The little one was soon being rolled out and taken away to the Newborn Intensive Care Unit.

Tanlir stayed in the surgical suite until his mate was taken to the recovery room. Limp with relief, he and Felina went together to the NICU followed by his advisors.

His son was still being hooked up with all kinds of monitoring devices as well as oxygen when he arrived. He and his advisors were allowed close but not to hold or get close until the nurses were finished.

Tanlir stared in amazement at his son. The kitten was no bigger than his two palms together.

"Oh, Goddess! He is so tiny. Its so unfair that he had to come so soon." He moaned in sorrow.

"He looks strong though, Tanlir. Don't sell him short. He'll make it." Felina said gently, wrapping a comforting arm around the cheetah.

Tanlir couldn't answer, his throat was too tight. After about thirty minutes, the nurse in charge of his son's care indicated he could come close but no one else.

Tanlir approached the incubator with some trepidation. His son looked lost in the huge incubator and almost completely hidden by all the equipment that was monitoring him. He carefully reached in as the nurse coaxed him to do and gently caressed the tiny cheek and arm. The kitten shivered a bit in response but otherwise made no other sound.

"He knows you're there, he's just too tired from all he's been through." The nurse said kindly. "Do you have any questions about your son's care?"

"Uhh...no not right now. You're doing a great job of caring for him. Thank you." Tanlir said, not able to take his eyes or fingers off his new son.

"You're welcome. You can visit any time you want. When Commander Feral is able, he will be wheeled down to see him as well." The nurse told him then went about her duties.

The Prince stayed for some twenty minutes more before leaving to see Ulysses. His advisors said their farewells. Felina gave him a hug and left to return to duty.

"Do you wish me to call the King and Queen, your highness?" One advisor asked politely.

Tanlir blinked, looking back at the NICU distractedly. "Ah no, I'll...I'll call them after I've seen Ulysses. Thank you anyway."

"Of course, your highness. See you later and please, do get some rest. Your new family will need you alert." The advisor chided him gently before he and his fellow advisor took their leave of the prince.

His advisor was right, he did need to get some rest before he fell over. Giving so much energy to his mate, had left Tanlir limp and exhausted, he needed to recoup it soon. He walked into the recovery room but learned Ulysses had already been taken up to his private room. Trailed by his guards, Tanlir went to the sixth floor and down to the room the nurses had told him Ulysses would be.

Stepping into the quiet room, he found his mate sleeping, IVs were still in his arms and monitors were making soft beeping and clicking noises. He went to Ulysses' side and leaned down to kiss the tired and very pale brow.

Uly's bloodshot gold eyes fluttered open and stared up at him blearily. He tried to speak but only a croak came out. Tanlir quickly filled a glass that was nearby, and a straw, placing it in his mate's mouth so that he could suck some water down while the cheetah kept hold of the glass.

Feral sighed. His mouth had tasted like sand and he ached everywhere. His body felt like lead. His mind felt like molasses as well because it took him several minutes to even ask about his kitten.

"Our kitten..."

"He's fine, love. He's very tiny but he's doing alright so far." Tanlir said softly.

Feral let his fear run out of him at that news. 'A son...Wow!' He thought deliriously.

"I'm so proud of you my love. It was a great risk for you and you succeeded. Now we need a name for him." Tanlir said, a frown of concentration on his face as he tried to think of a perfect name for their little one.

Ulysses' mind was like mush but a stray thought swam up and he blurted, " Jory."

Tanlir blinked. It was a rather odd name but it sounded nice and was easy on the ears. He smiled and accepted. "Jory it is, my love."

Calico Briggs was waiting patiently outside the surgery area when Felina came out with the advisors. She stopped to talk with the Deputy Mayor.

"How's your uncle?" Callie asked.

"He made it through the surgery alright despite some really heavy bleeding and the kitten, though small, is doing okay as well in the NICU." Felina said, sighing in relief.

"That's good to hear." Callie said, equally relieved. "Beware the press is lurking just outside." Callie said in mild amusement.

Felina grimaced. "Oh joy! Maybe I should ask for a chopper pickup?" She mused a moment.

"If you do, can I hitch a ride. I'm not interested in a press conference when I'm not ready for it. You could fill me in for the Mayor's report." Callie suggested with grin.

"Good idea. Let me contact the tower and see if we can catch a patrol and get out of here." Felina decided. She pulled out her cell and contacted the comm center at Enforcer Headquarters. She got lucky and in about fifteen minutes, she and the Deputy Mayor were being collected from the hospital chopper pad atop the roof.

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Chapter 24: Recovery Time by ulyferal

The call to his parents was long and filled with comfort and joy. The King and Queen were glad Ulysses made it through alive and that their new grandson was holding his own so far. He was warned to keep them updated on Jory's progress, to send pictures, and they couldn't wait for them to be able to travel and be welcomed into the family formally. The call made Tanlir feel better as he returned to his mate's room.

In the end, Tanlir couldn't bring himself to leave the hospital. The administrator accommodated him by having a bed brought into his mate's room. His guards set a rotating schedule outside the room. The nurses grumbled a little about having to be checked each time they went in and out but otherwise the night passed quietly.

Feeding Jory was handled by the NICU as he couldn't eat by mouth and was on a feeding tube. Feral was taught how to pump his milk so that his breasts wouldn't become tight and sore or dry out. His milk was stored for Jory's use when he could take nourishment by mouth.

Feral wasn't able to visit his kitten for twenty-four hours after the birth due to the threat of him possibly bleeding again. He was required to rest with no distractions or visitors except for his niece and mate.

On the morning of the third day, he was finally allowed to go see Jory. He was helped into a special reclining wheelchair and taken down to the NICU. Tanlir had been persuaded to go home yesterday but was back to be with his mate to see their son together.

Still looking very pale, Feral stared in awe at his tiny son. The kitten was a tawny color with cheetah spots and a black tail tip like his father. A tiny thatch of black hair and black lines around his eyes were from him. He wondered what color eyes Jory would have when he opened them. He would have to wait about ten days to know.

The day nurse that was responsible for their son's care, came close and coaxed Feral to reach in and touch his son.

Feral was enthralled as his son wrapped his tiny paw around his mother's pinky finger. When Jory released his mother's finger, Feral tenderly caressed his son's face and arm, speaking soft nonsense to him. Jory waved his arms and legs in response showing that he did indeed hear his mother's voice and recognized it.

Tanlir was leaning close to his mate's face as they watched their son. All their focus was centered on their tiny son and everything else simply vanished in this perfect moment.

"He's so tiny! Gods I wish he could have stayed inside a little longer." Feral murmured in regret.

"It wasn't your fault, my love. Stop blaming yourself. You weren't really meant to carry a kitten and yet you managed it. Be proud of that." Tanlir said softly, nuzzling Ulysses tenderly.

"He's right. You did something truly remarkable and I was afraid you weren't going to make it." A familiar voice spoke softly behind them.

They looked up and saw Dr. Taglion smiling warmly at them.

"Glad to see you." Tanlir said, smiling.

"Wouldn't miss it for the world. Sorry I wasn't available at the finale but Dr. Freeborn is top in his field. You were very lucky to have him at such a dangerous time." Dr. Taglion said. He looked into the incubator and eyed the tiny kitten. "He's a strong one. He's suffered a couple of small setbacks according to the nurses but he's pulled through each time. Not surprising considering who his mother is." He murmured in gentle levity.

"Yes, he's strong and a fighter but he has such a long way to go..." Feral trailed off worriedly.

"Just keep touching him when you can and let him know you're there. They've found kittens that have been handled frequently do grow faster and respond to treatment more successfully." Taglion reassured Feral.

"I'll try." Feral said humbly.

"You should go back to bed now, Commander. You're getting a bit too pale and wane looking for my comfort." Taglion said in concern.

"Okay..." He muttered reluctantly. As much as he wanted to stay, he was feeling really tired and weak. He gave his son a last touch then closed the incubator.

An attendant, waiting nearby, jumped forward and carefully wheeled Feral back to the elevator. On his floor, his nurses noted his return and followed the chair to the tom's room. They helped Feral get resettled on his bed and hooked back up to IVs.

"Go back to work, Tanlir. I'll just be sleeping. I'll see you tonight." Feral murmured sleepily.

"Alright, love. Rest well and I'll see you later." Tanlir said reluctantly, leaning down and kissing his mate tenderly before leaving the room.

The day after the royal kitten was born, the news had raced around the city like wildfire. Jake was eating his breakfast and catching up on the news when Chance stumbled in, still groggy with sleep, holding his own bowl of cereal. He dropped onto the couch, sitting next to Jake, when the piece about the royal couple came on.

"This is Ann Gora from Katseye News with an update on Commander Feral. As we reported earlier, the Commander had been rushed to Megakat Trauma Center with complications involving his pregnancy. The latest report taken from Lt. Felina Feral stated, the Commander had come through surgery successfully and, though very small, their son is doing well."

Jake flicked the channel to another station and sighed. "Well, that's a relief."

"Way to go Feral. A son, man I bet Tanlir is flying to the moon." Chance said, chuckling.

"I don't doubt that. I bet Feral's really sore today though. It's still hard to believe he was pregnant and managed to give birth. That's an incredible feat, buddy." Jake said admiringly.

"You'll get no argument from, Jake. That took a lot of guts and he nearly lost his life accomplishing it." Chance agreed.

"Yeah. Well, he'll be out of commission for a while and we'll have to deal with Steele again." Jake said, snorting in disgust.

"Aw, Jake. I could have gone all day without hearing that." Chance grumbled, getting to his feet and taking his dish to the kitchen. "Come on, let's get to work."

"Yeah, I'm coming." Jake said, turning off the TV and following his partner.

A little after lunch, Feral got a visitor. Ms. Briggs wanted to see how Feral was doing and give the Mayor an update.

"Hello, Commander. How are you doing?" She asked, smiling warmly.

"Tired, sore and glad its over." He murmured, still a bit sleepy.

"I'm certain of that. How's your son doing?"

Feral gave a tired grin and a soft look came over his features. "He's so tiny but so perfect. I look at him and can't believe he's mine."

Callie felt a small pang of jealousy at the look of wonder on the Commander's face. It was obvious he was smitten with his son as any mother would be. He'd paid a heavy price for the privilege to call himself that too.

"That's wonderful to hear. Congratulations. I bet Tanlir is overjoyed." She said grinning.

"Oh yes. He couldn't bring himself to leave so stayed overnight but I made him go while I was getting some rest. We're supposed to visit Jory again this evening." Feral said shifting a bit uncomfortably.

"I can tell you're still pretty sore so I just have something to ask before I let you get some more rest to hasten your healing. I'm assuming, that you'll be on maternity leave for however long the doctor decrees then as soon as your son can travel you'll be going to Asszeria for Jory's formal welcome into the royal family. Is this correct?" Callie asked.

"Uh...you're ahead of me on this, Ms. Briggs. I have no idea though I'm sure Tanlir does and will inform me later. I'm not happy about leaving again but since getting rid of Steele, my new second in command is more competent. At least I won't return to the mess I did the first time." Feral sighed, half closing his eyes.

"Guess I need to have a word with your mate then. Glad you have a second in command you trust to do the job finally. And, again, congratulations from the Mayor and I." Callie said, patting Feral gently on his arm then turned and left.

Feral yawned and tried to get comfortable. He needed his strength to be able to see his son this afternoon.

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Chapter 25: Crisis and going hom by ulyferal

Feral had to remain in the hospital for seven days while he healed. His son would stay in had hospital for at least another three weeks or until he could breathe without a respirator and could maintain his body heat.

When the Commander was released, he found himself too tired and oddly depressed. Though he

was ordered to rest and regain his strength, he found he couldn't just lay around. He did take naps often throughout the day but when he wasn't sleeping, he was restless, wandering the embassy endlessly, causing the embassy personal to be concerned.

His mate was concerned as well. Ulysses should be happy even if he was tired from giving birth but he was sour and irritable, quick to anger, restless, and too often miserable. The only high point for him was visiting their son in the hospital at least twice a day.

Tanlir called Dr. Freeborn to ask his advice shortly after Uly's most recent postpartum visit. As usual, his mate failed to tell the doctor about the emotional problems that were plaguing him.

"I'm very concerned about Ulysses, doctor. This behavior isn't like him."

"Hmm, it sounds like he's suffering a case of postpartum depression. It strikes some new mothers for reasons unknown. A temporary course of anti-depressants usually help alleviate it. Some of his difficulty, I'm sure, is because his kitten is still in the hospital and not in his arms where his instincts insist Jory should be. It just exasperates the depression. Let me write a prescription and it will be up to you to make him take them. I've been told he's a very difficult patient to treat but does listen to you." Dr. Freeborn said in mild amusement.

Tanlir couldn't help but chuckle lightly at that comment. "Well, it's true he does listen to me, most times. Thank you for your help. I'll send a runner to pick up the prescription and have it filled."

"You're entirely welcome and I'll make sure to ask him about how he's feeling emotionally on his next visit. Unfortunately, that question is as bad as his reaction to a pelvic exam...hostile or uncooperative." The doctor snorted before saying goodbye and cutting the connection.

Tanlir sighed and closed his cell. Yes, Ulysses could be very difficult as a patient but it distressed the cheetah to see his mate so unhappy. He reached for his intercom and requested a runner.

As the doctor predicted, Feral was annoyed and unwilling to admit he had a problem and nearly refused to take the medication.

"My love, I know you think there's no real problem, but believe me...I can feel your distress through our bond. Please, for the sake of our son and your happiness take the medication. It will help you." Tanlir quietly urged him.

Feral sighed and capitulated. He could never win against Tanlir's sincere need to see him happy.

Two weeks after he began to take the medication, he did begin to feel much lighter and less down in the dumps. This was a good thing because their son took a turn for the worse and the medication helped him weather the crisis.

They'd been summoned to the hospital by the NICU sometime after seven in the evening, a week before he was to be released. Hearts pounding in fear, Tanlir and Ulysses were rushed to the hospital in the royal limo.

They rushed into the entrance of the hospital with several guards. The two caught an arriving elevator and two of the guards were able to jump aboard with them. When it reached the floor of the NICU, the pair hurried to the appropriate room on the nursery floor.

They had to pause long enough to put on paper gowns before entering the room. Going to their son's bed, they could see he was back on the respirator he'd just been weaned from, days ago.

Feral swallowed in anguish at this loss of ground by his son. IVs were running into his tiny arm and he seemed to be moving rather weakly from when his mother had seen him that morning.

Dr. Renson was there checking Jory over, a look of concern on his face.

"What is it? What's wrong?" Feral blurted anxiously.

"Jory has contracted a bacterial infection and has a fever with some chest congestion. I've begun a strong antibiotic to kill it and supportive care to help him get through it while the medicine works." He said seriously.

Tears threatened to fall as Feral stared down at his very sick son. Tanlir wrapped an arm around his mate, just as worried and upset.

"He's a strong one. He should fight this off but we won't know for a few hours. You may stay and sit with him. It helps." Dr. Freeborn said kindly. He moved off to see other patients.

A nurse brought some chairs for the parents so they could sit down near the incubator then left them to their vigil. Over the next few hours, the nurses came and went as did Dr. Freeborn, changing Jory's diaper, meds, or checking his vitals.

For a torturous long time, it didn't seem as if Jory was getting better, but sometime near midnight, he began to rally. By dawn he was over the worst of it.

Before Jory had gotten sick, Feral had begun to bottle feed him. Jory wasn't able to suckle yet and only took some three ounces of breast milk every three or four hours. Now he was back on a feeding tube and all the progress he'd made was gone.

As the sun rose further in the sky, an exhausted Tanlir coaxed his mate to go home with him to rest now that Jory was out of danger. Feral was reluctant but finally bent to his mate's will, much too tired to argue. He stayed silent and tense the whole way home. When they were finally back in their quarters and alone, he released his frustration, fear, and anguish in a torrent of tears.

Tanlir pulled him to their living room couch and sat them down. He hugged and comforted his distraught mate, joining his tears of relief with his son's mother.

When the tears had all been spent, he gently tugged his mate to follow him to their bedroom. He helped strip Ulysses' clothes off as well as his own and pulled the tom to the warm pool that was their bathtub. They lay in the soothing water for more than an hour before climbing out and making for bed.

Tanlir spooned his mate from behind and nuzzled him tenderly. Slow, gentle caresses down his mate's chest and belly soothed his Ulysses into much needed sleep.

Jory was required to stay in the hospital another seven days but finally he was ready to go home. He was still extremely tiny, so Feral decided to take his son out discretely by chopper rather than face the press that had a rumor the royal's newborn was being released today.

Felina volunteered to be their pilot. On a regular patrol, she casually went by the hospital early in the morning and picked up a happy mother and father and ferried them to the embassy where she quickly deposited them on their own chopper pad behind the mansion.

Wishing them a good day and giving her new cousin a gentle caress, Felina said farewell and soared back into the sky and continued her patrol.

The embassy was abuzz with the arrival of the new prince. A corridor of people met the royal couple as they entered through the back way into the mansion. Smiling faces and soft voices gave welcome to the newest member of the royal family.

Feral was grinning from ear to ear as he hugged his tiny son to his chest. Tanlir's face held the glow of a proud father. Everyone oohed and aahed at how tiny and how beautiful the kitten was as the couple passed by them on their way to their quarters.

Formal pictures were needed and a photographer was set up in the living area of the royals apartment waiting for their arrival.

As soon as they entered, the photographer had them dress in their more formal wear for the session. Feral sighed mentally at all the hoopla but knew this was necessary.

Loathe to let go of his son after being separated from him so long, his personal body servant, Marls, stood next to him and held Jory in his mother's view at all times while Feral got dressed.

Marls gently handed the tiny kitten to its mother then went to retrieve the clothing the tiny prince was to wear. He didn't dare offer to dress the princeling, just stood by while its mother undressed and dressed him. Soon ready for his first pictures, Jory was alert and staring at his mother as Feral took his place on a super plush love seat of gold velvet that would allow them to sit close to each other.

Holding Jory in a rich velvet blanket of deep royal blue, Feral had the blanket open so that the kitten's clothes and colors would be seen easily. Jory's bright golden eyes, the spiting image of his mother's, blinked in the bright light, looking a little owl eyed at all the commotion around him.

"Best hurry! He won't be awake much longer." Feral warned the photographer.

"Yes consort. I'm pleased that he is so alert and what a beautiful kitten he is." The photographer gushed as he positioned his camera and quickly took many pictures as fast as he could before the kitten started drooping and falling asleep.

Luckily, Jory stayed awake just long enough for a sufficient number of shots were made much to the photographer's relief. He quickly gathered his equipment with the help of his assistant and the Prince's servants and cleared out of their living quarters and left the new parents alone.

"Ahh, alone at last, my two loves." Tanlir cooed softly, looking adoringly at his son in his mate's arms.

"Yes, he did so well for his first time under so much scrutiny." Feral murmured proudly, holding Jory closer to his face so he could nuzzle him. It felt soo good to have his little one home finally.

Of course, several hours later, he was going to regret that just a little, as Jory wailed at several hours intervals to be fed or changed.

A very sleep deprived but happy father, gamely plowed through his work the next morning. His personal assistant secretly rearranged his highness' schedule a bit to allow the exhausted new father to sneak a nap after lunch.

The embassy was smiling and gossiping about the tiny prince. Everyone was amazed at just how small Prince Jory was and how beautiful. Everyone made a point of telling the parents so whenever they crossed paths with the royal couple.

Feral wasn't seen much, though, because he was still recovering and spending time bonding with his son. He finally felt at peace with Jory in his arms. For the first time in his adult life, he didn't look forward to going back to work.

He'd already decided, Jory was going to work with him. A nanny would be there if Feral had to leave to take care of business. He and Tanlir had gone round and round about it but he finally prevailed, saying that neither place was any safer than the other from Feral's enemies.

Feral did understand that part of Tanlir's objections was being separated from his son. He promised to come home at lunch time everyday so Jory could spend a little time with his father. That had appeased the Prince somewhat, though he wasn't completely sanguine to the idea of his son being at Enforcer Headquarters.

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Chapter 26: The Royal Family of Asszeria by ulyferal

By the time Prince Jory was two months old, Feral and Tanlir had fallen into a regular schedule that suited them both. So far no omegas had shown up to disturb the peace of their time learning to be parents.

Feral would take his son to the office each day and take him home at lunch time and Felina would drop in at least a few times in the day to see her cousin. Jory had gained a lot of weight and was now a healthy eight pounds. He was still tiny but was gaining in size as if to make up for his too early start in life.

Just a week before they were to go to Asszeria to have their son formally accepted into the royal family, The Coalition for the Protection of the Planet from Possible Future Alien Invasions Agreement had finally finished being ratified with all the nation's willing to be involved signing it. It was a crowning achievement of Feral's career.

With great relief that the agreement was finally taken care of, he was in a more peaceful frame of mind when they boarded the royal jet for the flight to Tanlir's home.

The flight was smooth and quiet. Feral took this time to work on some reports he'd brought with him while Tanlir enjoyed some father time with their son.

When the jet set down and they deplaned, they were greeted by a huge crowd. A line of royal guardsman made an aisle for the royal couple to traverse to their open carriage that would carry them to the palace.

People cheered and threw flowers as they passed. The Asszerian people were thrilled that the succession had been assured with the birth of Prince Tanlir's son. When they arrived at the palace, the King and Queen as well as his brothers greeted them. They were surrounded by family and herded in and up to the more private wing for a family get together.

The family sitting room had been rearranged to have the comfortable furniture gathered closer and a table of finger food and drinks sat nearby.

Feral and Tanlir were pushed gently toward a huge settee with the King and Queen sitting on either side of them. The Queen, of course, had chosen to sit beside Feral so she could see the kitten more closely. The brothers hung about the back of the settee so that they could ogle Jory too.

"Gosh! Look how tiny he is!"

"Isn't he precious!"

"He's the spitting image of you, brother!"

The brothers exclaimed almost at the same time. Deeply enamored of the tiny new prince and ridiculously proud of their brother and amazed at Feral for producing such a treasure.

"Oh, my son, he's so beautiful!" King Roender gushed admiringly.

"Ulysses, he's adorable. What a fine job you did." The Queen said warmly, giving her son-in-law a kiss on the cheek and cooing at her new grandkitten.

Feral blushed and smiled with pride as did Tanlir.

For the next hour or so, everyone asked lots of questions, had a turn holding Jory, and slapped Tanlir on the back in congratulations. Then they discussed the ceremonies that were going to be

occurring in the next few days as they ate and drank.

The first one was to christen Jory in the church with all his relatives beside him then be formally accepted into the Asszeria royal house. Next, the investiture to raise Tanlir officially as the Heir Apparent, the next in line for the throne.

Just as before, they would be walked through the ceremonies, have appropriate clothing made, and all the preparations done.

Feral sighed privately. This, of course, was the worst part of the whole affair. At least, he would be spared most of it since his only part was to hold his son and to be by his mate's side when the time came. The fittings were the only thing he disliked the most.

With his son and mate, they took in the sights and enjoyed being here once more. The fittings weren't as bad as the first time, or he was just more amendable to it this time around. Jory did fuss about his though, much to his mother's amusement and sympathy.

"Like mother, like son." Tanlir chuckled as his son complained bitterly about being measured and having clothing put on and off.

Feral just smirked and soothed his son when it was all over.

It was a beautiful day as they entered the old church and took their places. The ceremony was wondrous and made Ulysses heart sing with joy. He watched, smiling proudly, as Tanlir raised his son to all at the end of the ceremony and the room roared with approval.

Of course, that set Jory to crying with fright. Feral had to hug him closely and coo to calm him once more. Though, they were supposed to walk down the church aisle and head out into the open carriage to ride through the crowds, Jory needed changing then fed. The wise one who'd done the ceremony smiled benevolently at them and offered his office for the consort to take care of the little one.

Feral smiled warmly and thanked him then quickly hurried after a church assistant who lead him to the room. Tanlir had come with him and watched as his mate fed their son then changed him. This was something Tanlir never tired of seeing, his mate looking content and totally relaxed as he nursed Jory.

Soon enough they were off again, walking together side by side out to the carriage. Again the citizens of Asszeria came out in huge crowds to see the new prince and Heir Apparent with his mate.

Next they had to endure an hour of picture taking by the royal photographer. Jory was asleep for these this time.

Later, with Jory safe asleep in his basinet in his parents room, the royal couple enjoyed a feast in their son's honor.

For the first time since his difficult pregnancy and recovery, Tanlir made a non-vocal gesture requesting intimacy. Feral had not wanted it for many reasons but now was healthy and happy to oblige this time.

He met Tanlir's casual caress with a kiss.

Smiling warmly and with a sigh of relief laced with desire, Tanlir kissed back with growing heat.

Feral sighed and moaned. He truly had missed this as he moved his body closer and wrapped himself around his mate.

The cheetah moaned and stroked the dark tom's body in long caressing movements from shoulder to tail. His mate sighed with pleasure at the touch and returned the favor by taking his mate in paw and tugging on it gently.

Tanlir growled appreciatively as he increased his touches to ready his mate for him. They kissed, nipped and rolled in each other's arms enjoying the return to intimacy they'd missed for so long.

Feral was wet and swollen in no time and was urgent for Tanlir to enter him after soo long. Tanlir felt his mate's spike in desire and interpreted correctly as he moved over his mate and raised the tom's hips for a more direct access to his female sheathe.

Eyes glowing brightly with excitement, Feral encouraged his mate by pulling him close again for an intensely passionate kiss just as Tanlir thrust forward joining them tightly.

They groaned with joy and pleasure, holding still for a long torturous moment before Tanlir set a quick rhythm that brought them roaring moments later. They collapsed in each other's arms and enjoyed the afterglow. The moment was ruined just a few minutes later by a familiar yowl.

"Heheh! Someone is either hungry or we woke him my love." Tanlir said warmly as he gave Ulysses a quick kiss and withdrew so that his mate could get their son.

"Most likely a little of each." Feral sighed ruefully, getting up. Despite the interruption, it had been a glorious ride. He brought their son to their bed so he could feed him.

Tanlir moved close to spoon his mate's back and watch his son eat. He nibbled on his mate's neck making Feral ripple with pleasure to add to the sensuous sensations his son was causing him as he nursed. It was a wonderful moment he would treasure for a long time.

Two days later was the investiture ceremony. It was just as grand as his own investiture had been with all the pomp and circumstance, gold and glitter all around. Everyone looked rather stiff in their form finery as they watched Tanlir receive the small crown that signified his place as Heir Apparent. The crown was placed on his head by his father, King Roender.

Feral was then bade to step forward and take his place next to Tanlir and was given a large medallion that was placed around his neck by the king.

The room shook with the roar of approval. Just like for Jory ceremony, Tanlir and he went down the aisle and rode in the open carriage through the people.

Another feast was given honoring the new Heir Apparent and his mate. The citizens were glut on the number of feasts and parties that went on over these two weeks of ceremonies.

Feral was just glad it was finally over. They stayed for another week enjoying the peace and beauty of Asszeria before finally packing up once more and returning to Megakat City.

There were many a tearful goodbyes and hugs before they finally were able to board the jet for home.

Back home once more, their lives picked up where they left off. Feral running after one omega after another, nursing their son in between and Tanlir running the Asszerian Embassy and worrying about his mate. It was a wonderful life.

End.

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