

"Ok, how about... Edgar, Turel, and Mar?" Yuki asked, smirking as she cradled a silver goblet full of century-old Sephi brandy between her fingers, her skin aglow in the artificial moonlight.

"Wed Mar, bed Turel, behead Edgar." Alethia draped one arm over the side of her beach chair, reaching for her own drink.

"Harsh. You didn't even hesitate there."

Alethia shrugged, at least as much as she could while reclined. "Turel's cute but I couldn't deal with the angst or the baby, and I can't see Ed and I as a couple."

"Oh? I thought it had something to do with the longing glances during council meetings."

"I assure you, Yuki, you have never seen me give anyone a longing anything."

"Who said anything about you?"

Alethia rolled her eyes. "Whatever, princess. Arcia... Aura, and... me."

"Bringing in the A team?" Suoh made a show of sitting up and looking her companion over. The sapphire blue bikini was a flattering look on Archenksova. Not quite as sexy as her own red and black number, but not bad. She leaned back and took long sip before answering. "You, the Zeltron, Arcia."

"Aw, sweetie, I didn't know you cared."

Abandoning the game for the time being, the pair relaxed in silence, marvelling at the beauty of Voraskel Palace's artificial beach. The moon and stars of Kiasht twinkled serenely above them, refracted through some sort of crystalline glass — real glass, not transparisteel — and the small waves lapping the shore provided a soothing soundtrack.

The Vatali knew how to live.

The pair the pair relaxed in silence, save for the waves, for about twenty minutes before a jubilant shout interrupted. Behind them, Aurora Ta'var waved with one hand, the other clutching the neon purple towel wrapped around her torso.

"I figured I'd have the place to myself, but it's even better to see you two," the Zeltron said, walking up to the water and tossing her towel aside when she got close.

"You picked well," Alethia muttered to Yuki. The Zeltron stood before them in all her glory, with a notable lack of swimwear. "Now wipe the drool off your chin."

"Oh," Aura said as she glanced over her shoulder and noticed the stunned looks of her companions. She turned around, only improving the view. "All of my bikinis were on Judecca, and they do this all the time on Zeltros. I'm not making you uncomfortable, am I?"

"No!" Yuki blurted out immediately. Alethia just smirked. "Not at all, dear."

Aura slipped into the surprisingly warm water and sighed contentedly, wading out until her feet no longer touched the sand beneath them.

Alethia quirked an eyebrow as Yuki stood up and started undoing her top. "What? They do it all the time on Zeltros," the mercenary said indignantly.

"You're just showing off for your new friend."

"If you've got it, flaunt it. Speaking of which..." the mercenary trailed off with a mischievous grin.

"Really?"

"Just saying." Yuki called over her shoulder as she floated out after the Zeltron.

Alethia settled back into her chair and sighed with resignation. *I might as well stay on their good sides.* She took another drag from her drink and let the heat in her throat subside before standing up herself. Archenksova stripped out of her bikini and laid the garment neatly in her chair. She glanced up to see Aura and Yuki gawking.

"I was expecting a wolf whistle, but I'm glad you're impressed." Alethia said, smirking until Aura pointed somewhere behind her. The human spun around. Mar Sûl stood several feet back, near the entrance and holding a datapad. He stood still as stone for a moment before recovering himself and averted his eyes.

"Councilor!" Alethia squeaked, her cheeks flushing as she attempted to cover herself with one arm while the other shot out to grasp for her bikini.

"I bring news from the High Councilor," he stammered, eyes fixed firmly on his feet. "Perhaps it should wait until you're... attired."

"Yes, of course," Alethia answered.

"Or you can join us!" Blade shouted from the pool. Mar started, seemingly just now aware of the other two women.

"It's ok, Mar! We liked it, too," Yuki added. In answer, the man simply turned and slipped out of the room as quickly as he could manage without actually running. Yuki cackled from the water. "See what I mean about the longing stares?"