

Chapter One

Monday, 10:30 a.m. (EST) An archeological dig in southwestern Indiana.

Lily Redfern scraped at the rich, dark earth covering what she suspected was the mound's stockade, a fortifying wall that surrounded the central portion of the ancient site's structures. Moaning, she arched and rubbed at the pain nagging her lower back.

Resting for the first time that morning, her expert gaze swept the dig site. The ancients had chosen well. The ancients in this instance were Terrans, or Mississippians as the humans had named the prehistoric mound builders. From the top of the mound, she could see for miles. The elevation allowed for easy access to the wind and water; subterranean aquifers as old as time were buried deep within the Earth, and the Ohio River was a mere ten miles to the south. In the distance, the mighty, life-giving river gleamed like liquid fire under the bright spring sun. Earth energy, her elemental affinity, was also abundant, and ley lines deep under the ancient site hummed and buzzed with power waiting to be plumbed.

The element of Spirit ran strong here. This was a place of power, of Earth magick. And, under all the wrong circumstances, it was a site of potentially horrific destruction.

A sharp pain traveled her spine, exacerbating an ache in her temples. She gasped. Something was horribly wrong, more than an aching back from bending over too long at the dig, more than the subtle head pain that had grown fiercer as the spring morning had passed.

Taking a drink of water from her ever-present sports bottle, she used her five normal senses and searched for anything out of place. Finding nothing, she tapped into her essence, the spirit at her core that made her a Terran Earth Keeper, and sent it down into the earth.

Sounds of grinding and crashing spoke to her psi and tore through her mind like a tornadic wind. These were the sounds of an Earth in the early stages of tearing itself apart. She cried out as the Earth's pain more fully invaded her body. Bending over, her head touching the ground, she clasped her arms around her middle. She groaned as the intense heat and nausea roiled through her. With deep, calming breaths, she managed not to lose what little was in her stomach. Consciously, urgently, she dissipated the energy she'd absorbed from the cataclysm shaping up many kilometers below the surface. The excess power excited the air around her. The resulting mini-whirlwinds teased her hair loose from the tightly woven French braid she habitually wore on a dig.

Shoving at the escaping strands, she struggled to her feet. Arms extended to each side, she reached with all her Earth Keeper magick and searched the ground beneath her feet once again. And, again, she found the signs of major seismic activity.

"Impossible," she muttered. There had to be a mistake. It was inconceivable. This was *not* a normal quake for the area. Not normal at all. It was too deep and portended to be too strong.

Glancing around, she located the other, mostly human, members of

the dig. They stood by the chieftain's structure at the uppermost part of the mound. She'd purposely chosen to dig away from the rest today. She had problems--she guessed attempted rape would be considered a problem--with the excavation team's leader, Darcy Miller. Miller was a Terran like herself, but of the Protector class with an affinity to Earth.

No matter what he was, he'd always been a Class-A jerk and a thorn in her side. But lately he'd surpassed his asshole status and graduated to a stalker, pressuring her to have sex with him. Last night, he'd taken the decision out of her hands. He'd sneaked into her room at the small motel in town and sought to rape her while she slept. She suspected he'd drugged her soda at the evening meal since she slept so deeply. Luckily, a sixth sense and fear-induced adrenaline roused her enough to fight him off before he fully entered her.

Images of his leering face and large, muscled body as he lay on top of her played behind her eyes in a repeating loop. Over and over--her own personal horror film. The marks from his fingers bruised her arms; his attempt to enter her left even more bruises on her mons. The stench of his sweat lingered on her skin even after two showers and liberal applications of her favorite body lotion and perfume. But what was worse was his odor; it was so strong, fetid, she could taste it. Gagging, she reached for her water bottle and took a long draw from it, washing away the remembered taste, wishing she could vanquish the memories as easily.

No wonder she'd chalked up her early morning headache and impending sense of dread to the violence perpetrated upon her. But she'd been wrong. Maybe fatally wrong. What had caused her physical and mental distress was much worse than being attacked.

Far beneath her, the Earth was self-destructing.

She dissipated the seismic energy automatically, attempting to halt the progress of the quake before it reached the surface.

"Lily!"

The masculine voice filled with rough machismo and overbearing conceit caused her racing heart to speed up even more. She looked up. Darcy waved at her then headed her way, with a self-satisfied smile on his smarmy lips. The bastard acted as if nothing had happened, as if she'd wanted his sexual advances.

Shaking her head, she didn't have time for his unbridled idiocy now. She raised a hand in an attempt to halt his forward progress. He ignored it. Figured. He was nothing if not persistent. It had taken a shot of Earth energy into his balls to get him off her.

Mumbling foul words under her breath, she hurried to meet him. They had very little time to save the humans.

"We're breaking for lunch." He reached for her. "Come on, you'll ride with me."

"No!" She put her hands behind her back to avoid his. Childish? Yes. But Darcy, while not much taller, could match her strength and more.

Bruised balls and her threat to emasculate him while he slept were the only reasons she'd managed to get him out of her room this morning. She hadn't reported the assault, or any of his earlier sexual harassment, to the Keepers of the Environment, the organization that employed them both and had funded the dig, because she needed the job. Plus, Miller's father was a KOTE Council Elder, and when push came to shove, the politically connected Darcy would be believed over her. Life's lessons had taught her that much. "There's a problem," she said. "You need to take the humans and get the hell out of here. Now!"

Darcy frowned. Gripping her upper arms tightly, he pulled her to him and said in a low, savage tone, "Don't think I don't know what you're trying to do. You can't avoid me. You can't avoid us."

Us? Not in a million years.

He shook her and tightened his hold even more, undoubtedly layering more bruises on top of the others he'd left on her. Well, the marks would appear if she lived long enough--the quake would most certainly kill her and tens of thousands of others if she didn't get a handle on it soon.

"Darcy," she hissed, struggling against his grip. "One word--earthquake. Large. Now. Here. Get the humans as far away as possible. Do your fricking job for a change."

His jaw dropped open and he released her arms. "Are you sure?" He shook his head. "Of course you're sure. You don't joke about things like this. Not the serious Lily Redfern."

Something snapped inside him and she could visibly see the Protector essence he managed to sublimate most days come to the fore. "How much time? And how far away is safe?"

"Very little. Far." Like the Arctic Circle, maybe.

He nodded sharply. "Do your job, Lily. I'll be back for you. We aren't through yet. You'll be mine--completely."

"Whatever." She'd already turned her back on him, calling over her shoulder, "I'm not worrying overmuch, Darcy. I don't figure either of us will survive the conflagration."

She angled her head and realized she'd made her comments to dead space. Darcy had already herded the team to the KOTE helicopter. Thank the gods he had the authority to requisition the expensive mode of transportation. All other KOTE projects she'd worked on used four-wheel drives to ferry the scientists to the archeological sites.

A wave of energy sweeping over her skin and into her spine interrupted her wayward thoughts. Her back arching with pain, she fell to the ground, landing on her rear.

Better stay down, Lily, my girl. It's going to be a bumpy ride.

She rolled to lie on her stomach. Placing an ear to the ground, she closed her eyes and sent all in her that was Earth Keeper into the soil.

Down, down, her essence sank, seeking the depth and magnitude of the quake. All around her the earth groaned, crackled and buckled. Slowing her descent, she paused at three kilometers and realized

immediately she'd have to go deeper, maybe as much as ten kilometers, to reach the core of the quake. For it was at that level where the formerly somnolent Wabash Valley Fault line lay.

"This is inconceivable," Lily muttered while she sent out counter energy, fighting fire with fire, in an attempt to prevent the buildup from reaching the surface. In most quakes, it was the rolling motion when the tremendous forces reached ground level that caused the majority of death and destruction.

The Wabash Valley Fault system, she knew, was a normal fault system and usually the most stable of all plate tectonic movements. The last dangerously large earthquakes in this fault had occurred in prehistoric times when the North American tectonic plate had actively moved apart from the Eurasian and created the geographic configurations familiar to anyone with a current world map.

Normally, southern Indiana was as stable and solid as the limestone bedrock it was famous for. The New Madrid fault, hundreds of miles away, along the Mississippi River in Missouri, was the danger zone for Earth Keepers in this part of the United States. In fact, KOTE had established a permanent emergency response team there. For all she knew, she was the only Earth Keeper of any power in the Ohio Valley. She wasn't sure she was strong enough to halt the destruction and loss of lives sure to follow a quake of the magnitude this one promised to be.

"Okay, Lily, stop whining--you're it, girl. Let's put this sucker to sleep."

Or at least into a lower magnitude.

Pep talk notwithstanding, she wished she had at least a hundred other Earth Keepers alongside her.

Closing her eyes to block out all visual distractions, Lily concentrated on the rhythm of the waves of energy emitted by the grinding of plate sliding over plate.

Ice-cold shock skittered down her spine and turned her stomach into a pit as cold as nuclear winter. The energy emissions were too regular--and accelerating way too fast for tectonic plate movement in a naturally occurring quake. Something--or someone--had awakened the old fault--artificially.

Chilled by the knowledge someone had deliberately set into motion an earthquake promising to be magnitude 9.0 or greater, Lily resolved to give all that she was to slow it down. She couldn't stop it. No one Keeper could. If she had a team ... no, maybe not even then.

Resigned to imminent death, she sank her essence even more deeply into the earth. If she could redirect the powerful momentum, divert it into harmless lesser faults and into the ancient liquefaction sites buried deep under Indiana, she might ... might ... be able to lower the magnitude, saving lives on the periphery of the quake. Sadly, she accepted life at the epicenter and anyone living within a minimum of a hundred miles was doomed.

Briefly, she mourned the loss of human life. She hoped Darcy would have the common sense to go to the limits of the helicopter's range before touching down. Surface movement from a quake originating in the Midwest could have the intensity to cause structural damage, and loss of lives, for hundreds of miles. No one deserved to die before his or her time. Not even a scumbag like Darcy Miller.

Shaking off her morbid thoughts, her life energy sank rapidly once more, permeating the ailing Earth. She barreled through the sedimentary layers as quickly as she dared, drawing the tremendous power into herself and directing it into smaller, less volatile faults and any dead space she sensed along the way in order to keep it from reaching the surface.

It was a losing battle. Soon, far too soon, she'd die from the excess processing of energy an Earth Keeper was never meant to assimilate.

As the pressure within her essence built, her corporeal body throbbed with pain so excruciating that she screamed. Biting her lower lip, she stifled the cries of pain. Screaming wasted energy, energy she needed to save lives.

By her calculations, her essence had only traveled four kilometers and the worst waves of energy were yet to come at the focus point or core of the quake.

Suddenly a burning pain from something other than the unrelenting pressure of the quake tore through her, distracting her from the task at hand. Something sharp had cut into her palm.

As she sent even more energy, possibly the last of her reserves, into the ground, she examined her hand through bleary eyes. Within her bloody fingers, she clutched an amulet she had never seen before. It was made of a huge, roughly cut diamond set in hand-worked, shiny--sharp--silver-gray metal. Glittering lights, running the spectrum of the rainbow, flashed and spit from the stone's core, pulling her attention into its heart.

A soothing female voice filled her head. As if by a miracle, the pain wracking her body subsided to a dull throbbing.

Earth Keeper Redfern, you are the chosen one--one of the Talisman from the prophecies of Sorhineth. This day and your coming have been heralded for eons. Use the amulet. Focus on it. Use it to channel your protective power.

Learn your power well ... for worse is yet to come. A dark one--a Destroyer--shall attempt to stop you. A Protector shall join with you as your Consort.

Above all, remember this: The power of three will rule the day.

Protector? Consort? Power of three? What three? Was the voice speaking of mind, body and soul?--the trinity of all Terrans' power?

Elusive memories of the Talisman legends bounced around in her aching head. She couldn't think. All she could do was grasp onto what little sanity and life force she had left. Her job was not anywhere close to completion, yet she wasted time listening to an imaginary voice in her head. Had she gone mad? Had her use of power driven her to the edge of

sanity?

With the fading of the voice, the debilitating pain returned a hundredfold, and with it weakness. The quake seemed to sense her weakening and gained ground.

Pushed beyond the limits of her ability and faced with untold destruction, she took a flying leap of faith and concentrated on the stone. *Why the hell not?* She had nothing to lose at this point. Dead was dead-- and the longer she managed to stay alive, the weaker the quake would be.

Already the quake's L-waves had reached the Earth's surface and tossed her prone body about like a dinghy on a choppy ocean of grass, dirt and rocks.

Refocusing all her remaining energy through the center of the crudely faceted stone into the ground, her essence sank even faster into the earth. The pressure of the rock above her spirit-self, along with the pounding of the underground S-waves, increased. The heat became unbearable and as she slipped into unconsciousness and the last of her energy ebbed away, a masculine voice spoke in her head. His male essence enclosed hers within a bubble of brute male strength.

I've got you, Talisman. Hang on.

* * * *

Monday, 7:35 a.m. (PST), Southern California Coast.

In a secret barracks located on the Southern California coast, Captain Carr Madoc tossed and turned on his cot. He couldn't sleep. A dream--no, more like a nightmare--kept him from the rest his body so desperately needed.

He and his Army Recon team had just completed one week of vigorous training and were shipping out that night for the northern coast of Japan. North Korea was making warlike noises and he and his comrades were being sent in to collect intel. He needed to sleep, because it was very likely he wouldn't get a solid eight again for weeks.

Instead, he kept having the dream. *No, not a dream. A nightmare.*

Sitting up, he swung his legs over the side of his cot and stealthily left his bed. Maybe a glass of milk with a dollop of the communal Scotch would help him nod off.

"Carr? You okay?" His best friend, Ike Smith, spoke softly from the next cot. Like Carr, Ike was also a Terran, a Protector. They'd enlisted in the Army at the same time and went through Recon training together. Their enhanced Terran strength, their psi abilities and their allegiance to Earth as Protectors had made them the best of the best. The humans on their team, while strong, brave and intelligent, had nothing on them in the ability to survive. With Ike and him on the team, the North Korean trip would be child's play.

"A dream." Or was it? It had been too real. Colors, scents, feelings ... her, all had seemed tangible.

Ike shifted on his cot, stood, then slipped in behind Carr, pushing him toward the small kitchen. "Let's get a drink. Tell me about the dream."

Dreams were nothing to scoff at for a Terran Protector. Many times, dream visions had saved both men's lives--and those of the Earth Keepers and humans they protected.

Carr retrieved the milk carton from the fridge and poured himself a glass and one for Ike. His friend had already taken the Chivas out of the cupboard and now added a jigger to each glass of milk. Taking a long drink of the cold liquid, Carr almost choked. He had a lump in his throat the size of a golf ball. Swallowing, he eased the tension in his body by breathing deeply and took another sip. This one went down smoothly. He hadn't realized how much the dream had disturbed his equilibrium.

Ike watched him closely. "Man, you are wound up. What was in this dream?"

"A tall woman with long black hair like living silk, and grass-green eyes. An Earth Keeper. She was lying on the ground, face down--"

"So, how did you know her eyes were green?" Ike's lips turned up in a teasing grin.

Carr frowned and shook his head. "I don't know. I just do."

"Sex dreams never kept you awake before." Ike winked. "So, what's up with this chick? She cut you off before you could get your rocks off?"

"It wasn't like that," Carr snapped, suddenly furiously angry at his friend's casual, joking attitude. "She needs my help. A feminine voice--not hers, although I don't know how I know that--told me to surround her with my protection. Told me I am the Protector of the Earth Talisman..."

"Whoa, hold the phone. Shit, shit, shit!" Ike slammed his glass on the counter and turned Carr round to face him. "This voice in your dream said you were the Protector of the Earth Talisman?"

"Yeah." A chill of fear settled over Carr. The look on Ike's face was one he'd never seen, a mixture of awe and dread. Nothing, but nothing, awed or scared Ike. Not even the strongest Destroyer or the most hellacious battlefield. Carr gripped his friend's forearms, shaking him. "What is it, Ike? What do you know that I don't?"

Ike shrugged off Carr's hands. Rubbing a shaky hand over his shaved head, he said, "Fuck, Carr. Didn't your parents ever read you the prophecies from the Book of Sorhineth when you were little?"

"Sure, but I don't believe in fairy tales." Carr avoided Ike's worried gaze and studied the label on the bottle of Chivas. The intensity flashing from Ike's eyes disturbed him. Niggling memories of the Book's stories surfaced slowly in his conscious mind swirling like a chaotic cloud.

"Since its rediscovery in 1989, the Book of Sorhineth has never been wrong." Ike paced the small kitchen's perimeter.

"Okay, so what in the Book relates to my dream?" There was no way he was a Protector for a Talisman. His dreams were just ... well, dreams.

"Remote viewing, not a dream," Ike said, stopping in front of Carr. "The woman is real and what was happening in your vision is happening

now. Fuck me!” His friend looked around seeking something. He pounced on the remote for the television as if it would save their lives. “If she’s the Earth Talisman, then the catastrophes predicted by the Sorhineth are upon us. It could very well be the end of Earth. There could be breaking news or something.”

Carr leaned against the counter and studied his pal. Ike was seriously freaked. His normally nerves-of-steel fellow soldier believed all the shit coming from his mouth. A sense of dread hit Carr hard.

The television flickered on. A CNN news alert described U.S. Geological Survey reports of quake activity within the last five minutes--in southern Indiana of all places!

It couldn’t be coincidence. Damn, he’d never had remote viewing--or any precognitive abilities before--other than the hypersensitive instinct for survival with which all Protectors were born.

Convinced now, his eyes and ears absorbed the sketchy live news report. “So, what am I supposed to do? I don’t know this woman. Never met her. Wouldn’t know where to find her even if I did know her, though somewhere in southern Indiana looks like a good bet. But, most importantly, I don’t know how to encase a Keeper in my Protection long-distance. You know how it works--if I can’t touch or see her, I can’t protect her.”

“The amulet!” Ike slammed his hand on the counter causing his glass of milk to jump. “There’s supposed to be a fucking amulet. She’ll have one appear when it is time--and you should get one also.” He stared at Carr’s chest; his jaw dropped open. “What the hell? Look!” His friend pointed.

Carr glanced down at his T-shirt-covered chest. There was a lump on his sternum. He pulled out an ornate bejeweled amulet worked in a shiny gray metal, all tangled up in his dog tags. The large, clear, roughly cut stone in the center glowed with flashes of multi-colored light sparking off its surface.

“Touch it,” Ike urged in a hushed voice. “Close your hand around it. Picture the woman--and see where it takes you.”

“Takes me?” He stared at the jewel, its icy heat almost burning his fingers. “Like a transporter?”

Carr had never heard of a transportation device in the form of an amulet. There had been rumors of equipment that could replicate such travel, but as far as he knew the machines filled whole rooms in subterranean, top-secret military facilities. He had never transported anywhere, although he knew some rare Air Terrans and some of the preternaturals who aided his species from time to time could naturally teleport.

He couldn’t. Hadn’t. Wasn’t sure he wanted to.

“Your Protector essence, not your body, jerkweed. Go! Save the Earth Talisman--and the Midwest. I’ll cover your real ass here.”

Carr could tell Ike believed every word he’d said. Trusting his buddy as he trusted him on the battlefield, he grasped the amulet in his right hand,

closed his eyes and brought up the image of the beautiful woman in his vision. Cold heat spread throughout his body and he felt the instant when the essence housed in his astral self left his body and took flight--eastward.

The trip took mere milliseconds. His astral body fell to Earth and hovered on the astral plane above the woman in his vision.

While the sun shone and a wild wind roared over the unnatural mound of earth upon which the Talisman lay, the ground under and around her moved like a storm-tossed sea. Trees and rocks jumped and rolled, and in the center of it all, she lay, hugging the ground and trying her best to stop what looked to be an unstoppable catastrophe.

He'd never observed such giant-sized courage in so frail a package.

Pride, possessiveness, lust, and emotions so varied and intense he couldn't even give them a name, poured through him. His naturally strong instinct for survival expanded geometrically. He vowed to protect her--protect both of them--so he could claim her.

Hell, he'd heard of the instant connection some Terrans felt for their perfect complement, but he'd never known it to happen in real life. His parents' union had been an arranged match; they'd agreed to get along for the sake of perfect genes and pure Protector bloodlines, but he'd never seen any real affection between them. For sure, he'd never expected to find his mate--especially at the beginning of the end of the world.

Carr maneuvered his astral body lower, almost touching her physical one.

His woman was pale, fatigued, and on her last scrap of energy. Yet, she wasn't giving up. Her bravery and fortitude glowed around her, an aura tinged pure golden white. She warmed his soul as well as exciting his libido.

He'd seen plenty of Earth Keepers work a quake, but nothing like this. If she didn't have help soon, she'd die--all her power, her life source had bled into the ground. Then the gods help the humans and Earth, because he knew as well as he knew his own name this quake was only the beginning. Everything he'd recalled about the Book and his own gut feelings told him: Evil was afoot.

He just hoped the Book's prophecies were true--that he was the "one" Protector, the Consort of the Earth Talisman, because if he weren't, this part of the world would be a dead wasteland in a matter of minutes.

Reaching for her astral body with his, he enveloped her within his protection. His essence sought and found her Keeper essence deep within the ground where he supplemented her waning strength with his deep well of power. *I've got you, Talisman. Hang on.*

What? What! Who are you? Her astral body struggled against the web of energy he'd woven around her.

Shh, love, stop fighting me. You're wasting time--and energy. Focus on the amulet and your power. I'm adding my strength to yours. We have to stop this quake before all hell breaks loose.

The woman laughed weakly. *Hell has already arrived. Armageddon is right around the corner ... I don't think I can ... stop it ... that is ... not unless you have some really major Earth powers to add to mine.*

Just trust me--we can do it.

Her head turned, seeking him on the real plane. A frown creased her pale ivory forehead. The expression on her face was filled with doubt--and pain. *I can't see you, but I feel you. I'm going crazy.*

Then we're going nuts together. A slight smile creased her full lips. *Concentrate. I believe in you--in us.*

As exhausted as she had to be, she managed to dig even more deeply into her core and increase the level of quake energy she absorbed from the depths of Earth.

Merged with her, Carr was fascinated at her meticulous work under pressure. All around her fragile physical body, strata of rocks that hadn't seen the light of day since Pre-Cambrian times shot through the surface like a giant set of pick-up sticks. Except in this instance, the sticks looked more like parking garage ramps. The massive amounts of energy released by the quake stirred the air and strong straight-line winds alternated with mini-tornadoes of dust and debris, toppling trees and carrying them away. The landscape was colored in sepia tones from the swirling clouds of dust. Geysers of water shot into the sky from aquifers long buried deep within the limestone substrata.

And through it all, his Earth Talisman, silken ebony hair flying in the wind, torn from a ragged braid, rode the ground like a seasoned bronco rider while her precious life essence sought the depths of Earth in an attempt to quell the storm.

Even without his help, she'd reached the depth of five kilometers and had diffused megatons of power into harmless ripples. She'd decreased what CNN had called a magnitude 9+ quake down to one around 7.5. Yes, there would still be major destruction and a rearranging of the topography of this area of the United States, but she single-handedly had lowered the death toll considerably. Even if she weren't the Talisman, KOTE would deify her for this day's work.

Now all he had to do was help her reduce the damage even more while keeping her alive.

I'm not sure I can go any further.

Her mental touch wavered and barely tickled his senses. She was weakening again.

Yes. Yes, you can, soothed Carr as he projected even more of his seemingly unlimited amount of strength into her through their mental connection. It had to be the amulet providing all this extra power. He couldn't ever remember having this kind of pure force flow through him before.

Sensing her shiver, his astral body snuggled her corporeal one. He swore he could feel her just as if he held her physically. With disembodied hands, instinct had him tugging her body even more closely into his. He

stroked her, warming her. Warming him. She shuddered against him, hesitated, began to move away, then with a sigh that pierced his soul, melted into him. Her acceptance of his “touch” trebled their merged power. Together they plowed through another kilometer of bedrock in less than a second, processing, repelling, and dissipating the destructive energy of the tectonic shift.

What did you do? Her husky voice was a whisper-soft breeze in his mind. His cock, with a mind all its own, hardened.

I'm not sure, but it worked. Just keep going, he murmured, stroking her back with incorporeal fingers. *I feel your strength. You can do this. You are brave.*

Both her astral and physical bodies trembled at his words, at his gentle massage. She nodded and soldiered on.

He hugged her closer. Even in the alternate reality in which they worked, her curvy rear snuggled his cock. Her ass was firm, a prodigious work of feminine art. His single-minded penis hardened to what felt to him like titanium steel. He swore he could feel the intense arousal in his real body, thousands of miles away. Carr chuckled at the image of his cock sticking out of his Army-issue BVDs. Ike probably wondered what the hell was going on.

Shaking his head, he returned to the task at hand--directing his thoughts and energy to supplement his woman's power. There'd be time for sex--later. If they lived.

Yet his resolve was tested.

Crossing from the real plane to the astral, her scent, a combination of lemon grass, vanilla and amber, tickled his senses. His cock grew even harder. She smelled yummy. How would she taste? Could he taste her during an astral plane experience?

He nuzzled silky black locks away from her neck and nibbled at a small spot behind her ear. He groaned. Yes, he could taste as well as smell. She tasted like lemon shortbread cookies. He licked a path from her ear along her jaw to the corner of her lips. She trembled within his grasp, a tremulous feminine moan rustled through their mind connection. A potent surge of energy swept through their joined essences.

Shocked, but pleased at the unexpected result, he experimented to see if he could reproduce it. Carr revisited her earlobe, biting it gently, licking away the pain, and once again their merged energies spiked.

What in the name of Gaia are you doing? she asked, her voice tremulous.

Carr murmured, *Experimenting.* He licked and nibbled a tendon on her neck. She moaned, a low, guttural sound that reverberated through his body to his very soul. Again their power increased.

Stop that! I'm trying to save this part of the world--and you're making sexual moves on me? Are you a pervert? Or just stupid?

Shhh. Something tells me this is the way to save the world.