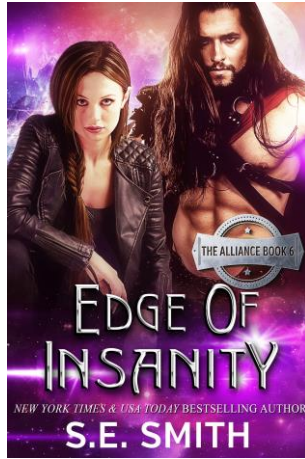


**Edge of Insanity:
The Alliance Book 6**



By S.E. Smith

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my husband Steve for believing in me and being proud enough of me to give me the courage to follow my dream. I would also like to give a special thank you to my sister and best friend, Linda, who not only encouraged me to write, but who also read the manuscript. Also to my other friends who believe in me: Julie, Jackie, Christel, Sally, Jolanda, Lisa, Laurelle, Debbie, and Narelle. The girls that keep me going!

And a special thanks to Paul Heitsch, David Brenin, Samantha Cook, Suzanne Elise Freeman, and PJ Ochlan—the awesome voices behind my audiobooks!
—S.E. Smith

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Summary: A human woman caught on an alien world will do anything to get back to Earth, even if it means freeing an alien warrior belonging to the species that caused the Earth to plunge into chaos.

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Synopsis

Sometimes the only way to survive is to let insanity take over...

Edge remembers little of his capture but all of what has happened since. Sold to the Waxians, he resists their efforts to gain information on the Trivator military and weapons systems. He can feel his mind splinter from their repeated tortures, but a soft voice in the darkness urges him to resist—and fight back.

Lina Daniels is used to fighting fire with fire. She isn't afraid of death, but she is terrified of being captured. As a resistance fighter on Earth, she knew the dangers. Those threats seem minuscule compared to those on the alien world where she now found herself.

Determined to return home, her plan is simple—free the Trivator warrior she discovered and force him to take her and the other women who are with her back to Earth. That plan turns out just as hazardous as being a fugitive on an alien world! The last thing Lina expects is for the Trivator to become intensely protective of her or his stubborn determination in believing she is his *Amate!*

The soft sound of Lina's voice is the only thing that prevents Edge's mind from completely shattering. With the Waxian and Drethulan forces on their tail, it will take more than a few daring moves to escape to freedom and safety. Can a tortured warrior and his rebellious rescuer escape the forces chasing

them or will the threat of losing the last thing holding him together hurl Edge over the precipice and into insanity?

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Character Bible

Lina Daniels: Human – sister of Tim Daniels.

Tim Daniels: Human – brother of Lina; second in command for Destin Parks

Destin Parks: Human – Rebel Leader; married to Jersula 'Sula' Ikera.

Jersula 'Sula' Ikera: Usoleum Ambassador to Earth

Gail Barber: Human: former Chicago police officer

Mirela Guinn: Human; Hospitality and professional Kickboxer

Mechelle Guinn: Human; Gaming Programmer and Actress

Bailey Reynolds: Human; Physician's Assistant

Andy Curlman: Human; Diesel Engine Mechanic

Edge: Trivator warrior; expertise in combat; weapons, piloting spacecrafts and combat medical training.

Thunder: Trivator warrior; expertise in tracking and moving behind enemy lines.

Vice: Trivator warrior; expertise in tracking and moving behind enemy lines.

Jag: Trivator Warship Commander; expertise in military maneuvers and combat situations.

Razor: Trivator Chancellor in charge of the Trivator military.

Hunter: Trivator diplomat

Jesse Sampson: Human; mate of Hunter

Kali Parks: Human; mate of Razor

Jordan Sampson: Human; mate of Dagger

Dagger: Trivator warrior; expertise in combat
weaponry; fighting

Prymorus Achler: Waxian; Prime Ruler

Katma Achler: Waxian; mate to Prymorus and former
military commander of the Waxian forces.

Deppar Achler: Prymorus's half-brother, overlord of
Oculus IX: Waxian Spaceport

Stitch: Trivator doctor

Dakar (Adron) Mul Kar: Kassisan Spy for the
Kassisans and working with the Alliance.

Chapter 1

Spaceport: Oculus IX—Deep in Waxian controlled territory.

The sound of cruel laughter pierced the periphery of Edge's consciousness. He wanted to fight the darkness, but it had become a welcome haven against the constant pain wracking his body. Despite his feelings of shame at his weakness, Edge knew he would court any brief respite from the agony ripping apart his mind and body. His head felt as if it might explode after the relentless inquisition he had just survived.

He wasn't sure 'survive' was the correct word. His mind was fragmented, his thoughts flashing at a nauseatingly rapid rate where one thought would start to form, only to be replaced with another in a dizzying kaleidoscope of colors that left him weak and disoriented. Whatever drugs his captors had pumped into him this time had come all too close to breaking the fragile control he had on his mind.

"Did you see the blood coming out of his nose this time? I swear I thought I could smell the bastard's brain frying," the guard gripping his left arm chuckled.

"We're just lucky Deppar had us double strap him or we'd all be dead," the guard on his right retorted.

“What are you talking about? I was expecting him to cry like a baby this time,” the first guard replied with another laugh.

“I hope you know that you are going to be the first one he kills if he ever gets loose,” the second guard muttered. “Open his cell door.”

Edge heard another guard mumble something under his breath before the sound of metal scraping against stone screeched through the air. A groan mixed with the sound. It took a moment for Edge to realize the sound was coming from himself. Every sound was amplified in his head, causing sharp, excruciating pain to ricochet through his skull.

“He’s drooling,” the first guard chortled. “Next thing you know, he’ll be pissing his pants. He can’t even lift his head or keep the spit in his mouth. You really think he could fight me?”

“I heard Deppar is tired of dealing with him,” the cell guard said as the first two guards dragged Edge through the doorway and dropped him to the cell floor. “Talk is that he has called in someone else to retrieve the information. I heard another Waxian wants all the knowledge the prisoner has about the Trivator forces and their technology. This Waxian is supposed to be working with the Drethulans. If he is, he’s a crazy bastard. You couldn’t pay me to have a Drethulan at *my* back. I doubt this Trivator will survive long once they get ahold of him.”

“What could the Trivator know? He’s been held captive for too long to have any current information of use. If you ask me, this other Waxian or the

Drethulans should have gotten to him before he was sold to the mines,” the first guard retorted before he spit on the floor near Edge’s head. “Between working the mines and the drugs Deppar used on him, there isn’t much left of the bastard’s brain to interrogate. Deppar should just kill the big bastard now before he gets loose.”

“Well, they didn’t ask you,” the second guard grumbled as he left the cell. “You’re a grunt and grunts do what they are told. We keep our mouths shut if we want to get paid and live to spend it. Now, come on, I’m ready for some food.” The cell door closed with a clang, and the sound of the cell guard locking it was loud in the small corridor. “That reminds me, Deppar said no food or drink for the prisoner. He wants him as weak as possible for the Waxian’s visit,” the second guard informed the cell guard.

“I haven’t fed him anyway. They don’t give us enough food, so I’ve been eating what they sent down. It all tastes like shit anyway,” the cell guard muttered.

Edge rolled over in the narrow, dark cell as the guards continued to talk. A shiver ran through him as the toxic dregs of the drugs the Waxian had pumped into him seeped through his pores. He fought against the urge to throw up. The trembling in his body increased as the chill from the cold floor soaked into his sweat-dampened skin.

“Goddess, give me death,” Edge whispered, hoping she would be merciful and grant him his wish.

“Like hell. You can’t die now that I’ve found you, Trivator. I need you alive,” a soft voice answered.

..*

Lina Daniels peered through the narrow openings in the wall grill near the cell’s filthy floor. Ever since she had overheard two men in the market talking about a Trivator, she had been searching for the alien warrior. It had taken her a day to discover where they were holding him. Then, almost another week to figure out a way in and out of the building. The last thing she wanted was to end up either in the cell with him or on the dinner table as the main course for the alien bastards holding him captive.

This tiny shithole of a cell had been the last on her checklist for the day. She had come up empty handed with her search of the other cells, and this one was empty too. She had been about to give up and had even started to scoot back down the drainage channel when she heard footsteps approaching and recognized one of the men’s voices from the market.

Holding her breath, she waited to see what they would do. She was rewarded for her patience when the door opened. The man she’d been searching for was being dragged in by his arms by two guards. She watched with a combination of satisfaction and disgust as they dropped him to the floor.

The man was definitely a Trivator! She silently studied him while the guards talked. Personally, she didn't give a damn what his species or the Earth's government had said about the aliens responding to her planet's transmissions into space. As far as she was concerned, the Trivators and the Alliance had invaded Earth.

The resulting fallout had been devastating for humans. Her life and that of millions of others had gone to hell in a matter of hours. She'd spent the last decade since that unforgettable day fighting to free her fellow humans from the aliens and as well as from other humans.

It didn't help when memories of being sold by one of her own species filled her mouth with a bitter taste. She wanted to return to Earth so she could kill Colbert Allen. Who the hell cared that revenge was a bad idea? She'd had a lot of bad ideas in her lifetime and would deal with the consequences just as she always had—with a fight.

Lina ground her teeth to keep the curse from passing her lips. She wanted to tell the three guards to finish up with their sadistic enjoyment and get out. Now that she'd found what she'd been looking for, she had work to do.

It's about freakin' time, she savagely thought when the door finally closed behind the sadistic trio.

Returning her focus to the man in the cell, she watched as he rolled until he was facing the wall and unknowingly her. The grim satisfaction that coursed through her at the success of her mission was quickly

replaced with a punch to the stomach as instant recognition hit her. Dark, painful memories threatened to choke her. Blood, pain, and despair flooded her as a vision of him standing over a lifeless body ripped her back to the past.

Deeply shaken, she closed her eyes for a moment and drew in a deep breath. There was no room for her personal feelings. Whether she liked it or not, she needed this man regardless of who he was or the painful memories that he awoke inside her.

Swallowing the bile that rose in her throat, she focused on her mission. This was not just about her. If it had been, she would have been tempted to help the Waxian with killing the Trivator.

At least, she reasoned, I would be the more merciful killer. It might still come to that if he doesn't know how to fly a spaceship, she thought.

"Goddess, give me death," he murmured.

Lina froze when she heard his barely audible mumble. A surprising rage swept through her unlike anything she had ever felt before—well, almost anything. She was reserving that little dose of overwhelming rage for Colbert Allen. Still, the words were like kerosene on an open flame to her. She totally ignored the fact that she had thought about killing him less than a second before.

"Like hell. You can't die now that I've found you, Trivator. I need you alive," Lina hissed out.

In the darkness, she could barely make out that his body had stiffened in surprise. Muttering a series of expletives under her breath, Lina felt along her side

for the pocket of her pants. Slipping her hand inside, she pulled out a tiny red light and turned it on. Inserting it between the gaps of the grill, she got her first good look at the Trivator's face.

She drew in a deep, unsteady breath as the past and present collided again in her mind. There were two things which immediately caught and held her attention. First, he looked like shit. Second, she was surprised by the wave of compassion she felt when she saw the pain etched into his features.

"You were on Earth," she stated, unsure of what else to say.

"Yes," came his hoarse response.

"Can you fly one of those spaceships they've got here?" she demanded, forcing him to focus on her when his head started to roll back.

"Yes," he replied.

Lina's lips twisted and her fingers tightly gripped the light. She drew in another deep breath and wished she could just leave his ass here, but his admission sealed his fate as far as she was concerned. He knew where Earth was, and he could fly. She needed him alive.

"I'll be back. Don't you fucking die or get yourself killed before I do," she ordered.

Sliding backwards, Lina knew she didn't have much time. She was also going to need some help. As much as she hated endangering any of the other women who had escaped with her, she didn't have much choice in the matter. She couldn't haul this guy

out on her own, and he didn't look like he was in any shape to walk, much less run.

She carefully retraced her steps, mentally adjusting her plans to get the warrior out of the building. As difficult a puzzle as the problem was, what worried her most was what to do after she got him out. There were too many variables once they were outside among the rest of the inhabitants on the Spaceport, and there were only so many places you could hide on a small rock in space.

Chapter 2

"Are you sure, Lina? What happens if he turns on us?" Bailey asked, biting her bottom lip.

"Of course she is sure! Lina always knows what to do," Mirela retorted before she grimaced and added under her breath, "most of the time."

"Ha-ha," Andy replied, sitting back against the wall and stretching out her legs. "What's the plan, boss-lady?"

Five faces turned to Lina, their eyes watching her with anticipation. Gail and Mechelle, Mirela's twin sister, sat silently contemplating what she had told everyone. Gail was the oldest of them all while Mechelle was the youngest, even if it was just by five minutes.

“His injuries don’t change the basics of the plan too much. We get him out, doctor him up as best we can, and make him take us home,” Lina said.

“Well, that should be easy enough,” Mirela replied with a roll of her eyes.

Gail snickered. “Be careful, Mirela. You might end up carrying this Trivator by his feet,” she warned.

Mirela tossed her head. “It would take all of us to carry out one of those guys. I don’t know about you, but I clearly remember them being big, muscular, and....”

“... Cute,” Mechelle interjected, trying not to grin.

Mirela shot her twin a glare. “I never said I thought they were cute,” she hissed.

Mechelle smirked. “No, you didn’t. You whistled and said—”

“Okay,” Lina cut her off. “Let’s get back on topic and plan how we are going to get him out of his cell, past the guards, out of the building, and down into the access ducts without everyone on the Spaceport seeing us,” Lina ordered in a slightly exasperated tone.

Andy leaned forward and rested her elbows on her knees. Lina could tell when the other women realized that this was probably their only chance of ever getting home. They had been lucky so far, but luck didn’t last forever. Out of the eighteen women who had been abducted and spirited away from Earth by the alien ship, they were the only ones who had managed to escape.

“We’re listening,” Andy said in a quiet voice.

Lina looked around at the hopeful and determined faces. They had been through a lot together. Some of it good and some of it bad, but they had survived. Taking a deep breath, Lina motioned for everyone to gather around in a circle. Kneeling, she used the dirt on the ground as a drawing board.

"This is what we are going to do," she said in a determined voice. "I'm not sure he can walk, so I'll need one of you to go with me."

"I will," Andy volunteered immediately.

Lina nodded. "Mechelle, I want you to be ready at the entrance to the tunnels. We'll be coming in hot and heavy and will need to disappear fast. Mirela, I want you and Bailey to have a cart with a cover ready."

Mirela looked grim for a moment before she nodded. "There are a couple places where I can *borrow* one," she replied, using her fingers to place imaginary quotes around the word 'borrow'.

"Where do you want us to meet you?" Bailey asked, leaning forward and staring down at the roughly sketched map of the building.

"The building across from where they are holding the Trivator is empty. It has a chute that was left over from whatever they made there. The chute is located on the opposite side of the building. That's how I've been going in and out. I put a metal plank across from one roof to the other and crossed here. I guess they think because this is a Spaceport, no one would come in from the top. Anyway, there are no guards on this building because it is empty and none on the roof of

the other one," Lina explained for the benefit of those who had not been in on the details of her scouting mission.

"What about cameras?" Gail asked.

Lina shook her head. "None that I could see. It is like they moved in and didn't bother with security except for hiring a bunch of moron guards. The main guy is a Waxian and is scary as shit. I've seen what he can do. It surprises me that anyone would be stupid enough to work for the man. I get the feeling the life expectancy of a guard isn't very long if you mess up," she explained with a look of distaste on her face.

"God, I hate the Waxians. They aren't as easy to kill as the Armatrux," Andy groaned.

"Yeah, I think we all do," Gail replied.

Lina nodded and continued. "The chute leads to an empty section on the top floor of the building. I've been crossing over and moving through the building using their ventilation and drainage accesses. Anyway, the chute comes out on this side alley. One end is a dead end, and the other leads to a larger alley that leads to the main market area. It is a dark and seedy section. Place the cart under the chute and stay in the shadows. Andy and I will get him out of the building, up to the top floor here, and shove his ass down the chute. He falls in the cart, we come down next, you cover him up, and move at a normal pace through the market while we take up positions on each side to cover you. We'll do it during rush hour when the market is chaos, which is in six hours," Lina instructed.

“What do you want me to do?” Gail asked.

Lina smiled and nodded to the blaster strapped to Gail’s side. “You’ll be undercover. I need you to cover our backs. Fall back and keep an eye out. If those Waxian bastards discover we’ve taken their golden egg, they are going to be pissed. You are the best shot out of all of us, especially from a distance. I’ll need you to take them out if we are discovered,” Lina said with a grim expression.

“I won’t miss,” Gail promised.

“I have one question,” Mechelle said, frowning at her.

“What’s that?” Lina asked.

Mechelle rubbed her chin. “If he can’t walk, how are you going to get him across a metal plank nearly five stories up?” she asked.

Lina had hoped no one would notice that tiny detail. She glanced at Andy, who shrugged. Somehow they would get him across. Lina’s eyes strayed to the bag in the corner.

“Bailey, what kind of drugs do you have that might help us?” Lina quietly asked.

..*

Pain radiated through Edge’s arms. His guards had left them shackled behind his back. The discomfort had finally pulled him from his restless doze. His head still ached, but it was back to the steady throb that he had been living with for months now.

His body was stiff from lying on the cold floor. Somewhere in his mind, he knew he should sit up, but he didn't have the strength. He kept his eyes closed. In the darkness, it didn't matter. He could see, but there was nothing to look at except the shadowy creatures that danced in his mind and along the walls.

Behind his back, he moved his fingers and tried to focus on counting. He could feel the claws of whatever beast they had poured into his blood this time tugging at him. Sweat beaded on his brow despite the cold.

The fire was heating up inside him, and he began to shake again. His reaction to the drugs was getting worse. He jerked his arms against the restraints in an effort to reduce the discomfort. As the fire grew to a fevered inferno, he twisted around and struggled up until he was on his knees.

Edge started shaking and his sweat poured out until a light film coated his entire body. His skin crawled with the imaginary insects. An agonized groan escaped him as the feeling of being eaten alive grew. The fireworks in his brain began to explode again, flashing colors at a sickening speed.

Gasping for air, he bent forward and rested his forehead against the cold floor. He squeezed his eyes closed to prevent the burning tears from escaping. He was dying. He could feel it, but he wasn't allowed to. The voice... The voice had told him he wasn't allowed to die. She needed him. She had found him, and she needed him.

Who had found him? another part of his brain demanded.

My Amate, the other part answered.

Edge knew his grasp on reality had finally snapped. There had been no voice answering his plea to the Goddess for death. It was a cruel hoax. The voice had been another trick to test his strength.

Straightening up, he parted his lips to shout his denial. He would never give the Waxians what they wanted. He was a Trivator warrior. Death before dishonor.

“Back up,” a soft, feminine voice ordered.

The sound broke through the confusion, calming the chaos. A shudder ran through Edge and he opened his eyes. Along the far wall, he saw the insects that had been crawling over his body disappear.

“Goddess, I swear I will resist,” he whispered. “I will die a warrior.”

A barely audible sigh from behind made him frown. “Yeah, well, tell your Goddess to put your death on hold, sweetheart. There won’t be any dying today if I have any say in the matter. Now, back your ass up to the wall behind you so I can see if I can get those damn wrist cuffs off you. It’s going to be a bitch doing it from this angle,” the voice demanded.

Edge tilted his head to the side. His frown deepened as his confusion grew. Shaking his head, he was rewarded with a wave of dizziness. Falling backwards, he grunted and stretched his legs out in front of him while he rested his head against the wall behind him.

“Why are you testing me like this?” he asked, closing his eyes again.

A soft snort answered him. “Welcome to our world, sweetheart. Life is all about the tests - seeing who passes and who crashes and burns,” the voice replied. “Can you walk?”

Edge was about to reply when he felt a movement against his skin. A shudder ran through him, and he started to shift to the side when he felt slender fingers wrap around his left wrist. Warmth poured through him. This wasn't the heat of a few minutes ago, but a soothing warmth that chased away the insects.

“Goddess?” Edge whispered in awe.

This time a chuckle answered him. “Darling, you can call me anything you want as long as I don't have to carry your ass out of here. That would make my life a lot easier. It might even give this harebrained plan a slim chance of success. As it is, we'll all probably be meeting up with this Goddess of yours for drinks by dinner time,” the voice replied.

“I do not know if the Goddess drinks, or eats,” Edge replied, feeling several tugs on his wrists.

“Yeah, well, I'll have to make sure I bring a few cases of beer along then,” the voice muttered before uttering a long string of curses that had Edge opening his eyes again in surprise.

“You have very colorful language,” he stated.

Another soft chuckle echoed behind him. “So I've been told,” she replied.

The sudden release of pressure on his arms took him by surprise. He slowly pulled his arms around,

wincing at his protesting muscles. Bending his elbows, he rotated his arms until the feeling began to come back. Flexing his fingers, he suddenly twisted until he was lying on the floor, facing the wall.

A tiny red light shone from the hole where the grill had been. His top lip curled and he snarled. If the Waxian thought giving him hope would break him, he would show the man he had made a serious mistake.

“Well, you’re still fast, but that doesn’t answer my earlier question,” the voice hissed.

Edge tried to get a look at the face in the depths of the hole, but the red light was shining in his eyes. A low growl shook his frame. He wanted to reach into the hole and drag out whoever was within by their neck.

“What question is that?” Edge demanded, curling his fingers into a fist.

The red light wavered for a brief second, and Edge could make out the delicate lines of a very feminine face. The woman stared back at him, as if she, too, was assessing his features. Her dark brown eyes locked with his in a silent battle.

“Can you walk?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said, hoping it was true.

A small grin curved her lips. “Good, though if you can run, it will be even better. Expect company in ten minutes,” she replied, turning off the light.

Edge heard a soft scraping sound on the other side of the wall. Unsure if he had imagined what had just happened, he shot his hand out and he stuck it

through the opening. He reached as far as he could and felt around the other side.

Then he pulled his hand back, and slowly pushed up until he was in a sitting position again. His gaze ran over his arms while he used his fingers to trace the raw circles around his wrist where the restraints had been. Reaching down, he picked up the metal cuffs in his left hand. His grip tightened around them.

Can you walk? Can you walk? Can you walk?

Her words kept repeating over and over in his head. Unsure, he braced his free hand against the wall and pushed up off the floor. His legs trembled, and he fell against the smooth wall of his cell. Gritting his teeth, he forced his legs to straighten until he was standing.