

**Jaguin's Love:**  
**Dragon Lords of Valdier Book 8**



**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 Sally, Debbie, Julie, Jolanda and Narelle, who listen to me, read my stories, and encourage me to be me.

—S. E. Smith

Montana Publishing

Science Fiction Romance

JAGUIN'S LOVE: DRAGON LORDS OF VALDIER

BOOK 8

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First E-Book Published June 2016

Cover Design by Melody Simmons

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Summary: An alien warrior discovers his mate close to death and will do whatever it takes to heal her, even if it means setting her free.

ISBN: 978-1-942562-93-1 (Paperback)

ISBN: 978-1-942562-94-8 (eBook)

Published in the United States by Montana Publishing.

{1. Science Fiction Romance. – Fiction. 2. Science Fiction – Fiction. 3. Paranormal – Fiction. 4. Romance – Fiction.}

[www.montanapublishinghouse.com](http://www.montanapublishinghouse.com)

## Synopsis

Jaguin is one of the finest trackers on Valdier. To date, there is only one thing he has never been successful at finding – his true mate. That failure is eating away at him and his dragon. Even his symbiot is feeling the drain as the centuries crawl by with no end to the emptiness gnawing away at them. Hope flares with the discovery of a species that is compatible with their own. The Lords of Valdier have found their true mates on a distant planet, bringing hope to the warriors of Valdier where females are few and true mates almost non-existent.

Jaguin is rewarded for his help in tracking one of the Lord's stubborn females with the promise of a chance to find his own true mate on the planet called Earth. His search appears fruitless until the last mission before they are to leave.

Sara Wilson is a botanist working with the National University of Colombia. Her love of plants and their potential for medicinal uses consume her life. She feels confident she is on the verge of a breakthrough when she is kidnapped by a cartel boss with only one thing on his mind – to extract revenge. A revenge that not only comes close to taking her life, but will change it forever.

After a fruitless search for his mate, Jaguin accepts one last assignment to guard Lord Creon's mate, Carmen, during a mission to seek justice against the man who brutally murdered her husband back on Earth. Instead, he finds his true mate in the

man's cruel clutches, barely clinging to life. His only thought is to spirit her away where he and his symbiot can heal her and his dragon can claim her.

The scars left during her captivity run deep inside Sara as she struggles to come to terms with her new life. She is no longer on Earth but the fear and terror still haunt her.

She needs time to discover who she is again and whether this is a life she can accept.

Can Jaguin's love heal the scars on the inside or will his true mate believe she has traded one monster for another?

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1 .....	1
Chapter 2 .....	11
Chapter 3 .....	17
Chapter 4 .....	24
Chapter 5 .....	39
Chapter 6 .....	53
Chapter 7 .....	64
Chapter 8 .....	77
Chapter 9 .....	89
Chapter 10 .....	100
Chapter 11 .....	109
Chapter 12 .....	125
Chapter 13 .....	133
Chapter 14 .....	142
Chapter 15 .....	151
Chapter 16 .....	163
Chapter 17 .....	169
Chapter 18 .....	184
Chapter 19 .....	199
Chapter 20 .....	209
Chapter 21 .....	217
Chapter 22 .....	226
Chapter 23 .....	232
About the Author .....	28

## Chapter 1

With growing apprehension, Jaguin moved down the long interior corridor of the building he and his companions just entered. His gaze swept warily over the area, searching for danger. This mission was supposed to be simple, protect the mate of his prince, Carmen Walker-Reykill. The trouble was that there was never anything simple when it came to the unusual human female. Personally, he would have felt much better if Creon, her mate, had simply tied Carmen up and left her on board the spaceship or back at the ranch belonging to their human ally, Paul Grove.

Pushing down the feeling, he once more scanned the interior walls inside Javier Cuello's house, searching for any type of detection equipment, or weapons, that might warn the human that they were there. There was nothing but polished dark wood and off-white walls. A few paintings hung to brighten the décor, but that was all as far as he could tell.

He suspected the human male they were seeking was overconfident. Cuello was relying on those he hired to protect him. It might have worked – against other humans – but the few soldiers patrolling the area or stationed in the tall towers outside were no match against him, Gunner, Creon, or their symbiots.

They were not from this world, but from Valdier, an alien world light-years away. The Valdier were a dragon-shifting species known in their star system for

their fierceness in battle. It did not take them long to take care of the men outside before moving to the interior where Javier Cuello lived. As a Valdier warrior, he and the others of his kind were a powerful opponent when on a mission. They were made up of not one, but three components that made them a deadly force against their enemies. The first is the man; the secondary form is his dragon; and then his symbiot. They worked as a team to overcome any threat. It was the Goddess' way of balancing them. Their curse was that they could only find their true mate when all three accepted the female.

*That was an almost impossible task given how hard-headed and picky my symbiot and dragon are,* he thought with a sigh of resignation and acceptance.

Jaguin's gaze moved once more to the female beside him. A wave of envy swept through him for a moment. He and many of the other warriors on Valdier had given up hope of ever finding their true mates. Unmated females on Valdier had grown fewer and fewer over the centuries, leaving most warriors with a growing feeling of despair from never finding a mate. Without one, they eventually lost all hope. Their dragon's need to mate would drive them mad and they could only hope to die in battle before that occurred. Jaguin understood those feelings and the growing concern all too well.

The fact that he was having difficulty controlling his dragon at this moment proved he was nearing the time when he would have to return to his home in the

mountains. He would have to admit to the elders that his time had come to move on to the next life.

He had hoped to find a true mate among the humans, just as Creon and his brothers did. He had searched for the last few weeks, but none of the females he saw from a distance stirred the dragon in him or excited his symbiot. It was time to admit that it was not his destiny to find a mate in this lifetime.

This was not the Valdier's first trip to this planet, though it was for him. Zoran Reykill, the leader of the Valdier, had discovered this strange, beautiful world after escaping captivity from a traitorous group of individuals intent on restarting the war between the Valdier, Curizan, and Sarafin. The previous visits were to retrieve the father of Kelan Reykill's true mate, Paul Grove. This trip was different, though. This time they were there so that Carmen Reykill could find closure against the man who had killed her previous mate and unborn child.

Jaguin understood Carmen's need for revenge. He also knew the dangers involved in such a mission. Emotions often ran high in situations such as this and they could lead to deadly mistakes. It was his and Gunner's responsibility to make sure that nothing happened to Carmen. If she died, then so would their prince to whom they had sworn their allegiance. What made it even more challenging was the fact that Carmen was obviously pregnant. The male in him wanted to protect her, while the dragon wanted to lock her in a padded room where nothing could touch her.

The wave of unease flowing through him increased, clawing at his insides like his dragon shredding the flesh of his prey. He could feel both his symbiot and his dragon pushing against him. Something was wrong. He felt the sensation growing the closer they got to the compound. Scales rippled over his skin beneath the cover of his shirt, reinforcing the feeling of his dragon's growing agitation the closer they got to the room.

*Something not right, his dragon suddenly growled inside of him. I smell blood.*

Jaguin could almost taste the coppery-scent in the air. Concerned, he shot a sharp glance to Creon Reykill. Creon returned his wary look with a barely perceptible nod. He smelled it as well.

Jaguin felt his symbiot's agitation as it moved beside him. Its body shimmered, reflecting the colors of the hallway, and it continually shifted from one form to another as if it wasn't sure what to expect. That in itself heightened Jaguin's concern for the delicate, yet fierce female between him and Gunner.

"I don't like this," Gunner mumbled under his breath. "Creon, I think one of us should escort Lady Carmen out of here."

"No," Carmen hissed, staring at a door at the end of the corridor that a young human female silently pointed to when they entered the building. "I have to finish this."

"Stay close," Creon growled under his breath. "Remember your promise to me, Carmen."

Jaguin saw Carmen's gaze soften for a moment when she turned to look at Creon. "I will. I promise," she whispered.

"At the first sign of danger, get her out of here," Creon muttered to him before turning back toward the door. "Open it!" He ordered with a wave of his hand to his symbiot.

Jaguin heard Creon's soft curse before he waved his hand to his symbiot. In a flash, the golden body shot forward, bursting through the thick double doors at the end of the corridor. The symbiot's body shifted, forming long tentacles that reached out and wrapped around the men inside the room. Jaguin moved forward to cover Carmen's body with his own while Gunner took the position behind her.

The first thing that struck Jaguin when they entered was the overwhelming smell of blood. His symbiot surged past him and he felt a sharp pain lance through his body at its distress. The intensity of it left him stunned and he actually stumbled a step before recovering. His gaze swept the room before it froze in horror on the figure hanging limply from a roughly constructed frame. The body of the slender human female was covered in blood; her head was bent forward, allowing the long, thick braid of blonde hair to partially conceal her face. Her arms were stretched at a painful angle, supporting her body and making the torture that much worse.

A suffocating rage struck him hard followed by an intense wave of unexpected grief. Shock held him motionless for a moment. The rage he could

understand... but the grief? He drew in a shaky breath when his symbiot turn to him. He could feel its plea for help. His dragon strained to get to the woman. It was then he understood their powerful reaction, he had finally found the one thing he had spent centuries searching for.

*Our mate!* His dragon roared in grief.

\*.\*.\*

Sara Wilson clung to the small thread of life like a starving dog to a bone. She had passed beyond pain, her mind in a dazed fog. She knew enough about the human body to know that her body wasn't ready to give up yet. Her heart was still young and strong. It was her spirit that was slowly fading.

She was barely conscious. A part of her was afraid to give into the darkness clouding the corners of her vision. She was afraid if she did, that she might never wake up again. She wanted to live despite what was happening to her.

Her arms ached from holding her weight. There was nothing she could do about it, her legs refused to support her any longer. A part of her wished she had been a little more vocal when she called the men in the room sick cowards who didn't have the balls to face her one at a time. The sane part of her brain chided her for provoking them in the first place.

Emma had warned her. The younger girl gave Sara broken and tortured words of caution not to fight against the men.

“They’ll kill you like they did the other girl,” Emma had whispered. “They’ll beat you and let you heal before they beat you again. Don’t fight them. They killed her when she fought back.”

Emma had grown quiet after that, not talking. Sara understood why now. This was her second session with the insane bastards. The first time she had listened to Emma and kept her mouth shut.

They laughed when they beat her the first time. Her face, arms, and torso still showed the marks of that beating. She didn’t know who the woman – Carmen – was that Cuello kept calling her when he struck her, she just hoped to hell that the bastard never found the woman. The hatred in his gaze and in his words was easy to understand, he wanted to kill her. She and Emma were, unfortunately, a poor substitute for Carmen Walker.

Sara tried to keep quiet when their guard shoved them into the room, she really did, at least until she saw what they were planning! The guard grabbed Emma first. Sara couldn’t stand the thought of the younger, more delicate, woman being whipped. She fought – and lost.

She cursed them, struggling to break free of the bonds. When the first licks of the whip slashed across her flesh, she screamed. She sealed her lips together after realizing that the more she cried out, the more Cuello laughed. Her silence infuriated him. The only thing that helped Sara was that Cuello had no idea just how stubborn she could be. She grew up surrounded by ten cousins, all boys, in a home from

hell. Her mom was young when she had Sara. It was easier to dump Sara on her older sister and pretend that the birth never happened.

The problem was her aunt had five boys of her own and discovered being a foster mom earned her extra cash. The only girl, Sara, was shuffled to the attic of the old farmhouse along with all the discards and forgotten pieces of junk.

Sara learned two important things during her time in the hills of the Appalachian Mountains: stay outside as much as possible and never show your fear. She grew up fighting for leftovers at the dinner table among other things. When some of the boys, including two of her cousins, thought it would be fun to play doctor, she learned to fight with her fists, feet, and anything else she could use.

When she complained to her aunt and uncle, they both called her a troublemaker looking for attention and shuffled her up to the attic to think about her wicked ways. Sara snuck out of the window and climbed down the old water tower next to the house.

When she was sixteen, she left and never looked back. A teacher during her tenth year at school introduced her to the freedom she could have if she focused on her education. Sara did that, not stopping until she reached her dream of independence. She achieved her Doctorate in Herbal Medicine and Botany. That was the only thing she could credit to her childhood – her fascination with plants and what they could be used for.

Sara didn't know what had stopped the agonizing torture, but she was thankful. The sound of an explosion pulled her back from the brink of oblivion. She tried to raise her head, but it took more energy than she had left inside her. Instead, she vaguely hoped that it was the Colombian army invading to stop Cuello. She doubted that was the case, but a detached part of her brain held to the stubborn wish.

The soft sound of claws against the polished wood caught her attention. Forcing her eyelids to open, she thought she saw a flash of gold. A moan escaped her as she sagged, causing even more of a strain on her already stretched arms.

"Cut her down," a voice said behind her.

The stubborn hope flared once again. Her session was over. She only hoped that didn't mean it was Emma's turn. Fear rose inside her and she weakly struggled against the restraints.

"No," she protested, her voice a faint, thread of sound.

"You're alive!" A husky male voice responded.

Another moan escaped Sara as her wrists were suddenly freed. Something soft and warm moved over her skin and covered her shredded back. Almost immediately, the pain dissolved. Hard, muscular arms wrapped around her when she started to sink to the floor.

"Don't...," she forced out, unable to open her eyes to look at the man holding her.

"Don't what, my mate?" The voice whispered.

Sara's foggy brain heard the words, but couldn't comprehend them. It was taking everything inside her to remain conscious despite the soothing feeling along her back. Whatever they had decided to place on it was taking all the pain, burning and stinging away. She wondered if it was a type of plant found locally.

"Don't... hurt Emma," she finally finished, forcing her tired brain back to her current situation. "I... can take... it."

A warm, soothing hand ran down along her face, brushing the loose strands of hair back. She wanted to turn her cheek into it. Fear pulled at her. What if this was another trick? What if they wanted her to think they were stopping only to start all over again? Her mind shattered at the thought and she released the slender hold she had on her consciousness. Warmth surrounded her as she fell into the inky darkness. For the first time in her life, for a few brief seconds, Sara felt safe, protected. Then, she let go and everything went blissfully silent.

"Never, my fierce flower, never again," the voice said.

Sara didn't hear the words. If she had, she would have been even more frightened at the slight, hard edge to them. It wasn't directed at her, but for her. It was a promise of things to come, things that she would discover when she finally woke.

## Chapter 2

Jaguin paced outside of the sick bay, impatiently at the door. His symbiot remained inside with the healer, working to save their mate. He wanted to stay, but Tandor, the ship's chief medical officer, had kicked him out, saying his symbiot was helpful while Jaguin was just getting in his way. It would take both of them to keep the female alive.

Turning, he walked ten paces to the left before swiveling on his heel to retrace his steps. He kept the door to the medical unit within his sight at all times. His fingers automatically went to the golden cuff on his forearm every few seconds as he impatiently waited.

"How is she?" He demanded in a husky voice, stroking the golden living metal.

Images of the woman suddenly appeared in his mind. She was lying on her side. Her back was covered with a thin layer of his symbiot's gold body as it worked on healing her. The layer dissolved and he could see the thick ridges of sealed, red flesh before it was covered with another layer. The healer was working on her other injuries.

Pain, anger, and grief poured through him. He raised his head when he heard the sound of footsteps. He watched as Gunner walked down the corridor toward him. His friend's lips were pressed into a thin line.

“How is she?” Gunner asked as he came to a stop next to him.

“Alive... Barely,” Jaguin replied, dropping his hand from the symbiot band on his arm.

“What of the other female?” Gunner asked with a heavy sigh of relief.

Jaguin shook his head. “I don’t know,” he admitted. “I have focused only on the one I brought on board.”

“It is understandable, she was the one with the worse injuries,” Gunner responded with a tired sigh. “I do not understand the human males. How can they treat something so precious, so fragile, like this?”

“I don’t know,” Jaguin said again, leaning back against the wall. “Where did you get that bruise? I don’t remember seeing it before.”

Gunner reached up and rubbed his jaw, wincing when he touched the sensitive spot on the right side. The wound looked new. A mischievous gleam lit Gunner’s eyes.

“From the precious, delicate, human female that I brought back. I tried to steal a kiss,” he chuckled with a shrug. “Audrey dared me to try. How could I resist such a challenge? For a healer and a female, she can hit very hard. I will listen to her when she warns me next time.”

Jaguin shook his head and a reluctant smile curved his lips before it faded and an intense look came into his eyes. His gaze moved back to the door of the medical unit. The memories of his mate’s words haunted him.

"The female is my mate," he stated in a husky voice.

"What?!" Gunner's shocked tone ricocheted through him. "Are you sure?"

"Yes," Jaguin replied in a soft voice. "My symbiot is with her. My dragon is on edge, just as I am. It is... difficult not to be with her."

Gunner rubbed the red spot on his chin and grimaced. "Yes, it is," he muttered, straightening along with Jaguin when the door to the medical unit opened.

"Is she...?" Jaguin started to ask before his throat tightened. He drew in a deep breath before he continued. "How is she?"

Tandor's expression was grim when he nodded to both men. Jaguin watched as Tandor ran his hand tiredly down his face and rubbed his chin before his hand dropped to his side. He motioned for Jaguin and Gunner to follow him into the medical unit.

Jaguin started forward, his gaze automatically moving to the woman lying silently on the bed. He could see the thick bands of gold on her neck and wrists. His symbiot sat on the far side of the bed resting its' head on the pristine white sheets. Small threads of gold wove outward, replacing the narrow ribbons still moving over her body.

"It is a good thing you are her mate," Tandor replied in a quiet voice, walking past the two beds toward the office area to the left. "She would not have survived without your symbiot's ability to heal her. Our medical advancements are far greater than

most, but nothing can heal the body the way a symbiot can.”

“What of the other woman?” Gunner asked with a frown. “She is not mated.”

“She had a concussion, as well as other injuries,” Tandor admitted with a shake of his head. “I was able to heal most, but not even our symbiots can heal a broken mind or soul. The female was awake, but she never spoke or responded. It was as if only her body was here, nothing else. I see evidence of injuries to the females on a physical level, but can only guess at the damage done on a mental one. Time will tell if they will survive.”

“This one has to,” Jaguin retorted, turning to glance again through the clear glass where his mate lay. “She... She is mine.”

Tandor’s gaze followed Jaguin’s to the peaceful face. “I know,” he murmured. “You will need to be patient, Jaguin, until she wakes, I can only guess at the damage that was done to her mind.”

Jaguin’s gaze remained locked on the young woman’s face. He didn’t even know what to call her, just his mate. She looked like a pale statue. Her breathing was so slight that he could barely see her chest rise and fall. His symbiot moved closer, nudging one slender arm. Hope and determination flared inside him when her arm slid over the golden head. He knew that it was the nudge of his symbiot that caused her arm to move, but not her fingers. Warmth flooded him when the woman’s fingers

curled ever so slightly into the silky smooth body of his symbiot.

"I will wait however long it takes," Jaguin replied, with a deep promise in his words.

\*.\*.\*

Sara was locked in the nightmare of her memories again. A small part of her brain was telling her that it was only a memory, not real, but she swore she could feel the ripping of her flesh with each slash of the whip. Her jaw locked so tightly that her teeth ached, but she refused to give Cuello the satisfaction of hearing her scream.

Her body stiffened in surprise when a wave of warmth suddenly engulfed her. It was a golden flood of liquid, washing away the pain and soothing her. For a moment, she couldn't catch her breath. It was as if she were being torn apart. One part of her was locked in the horror of her captivity, while the other part was free as another world rose up to surround her.

Confusion swamped her as the vivid images exploded in her mind. She expected the memory to take her to a time either when she was a child or back in Columbia when she was working at the University there. Instead, the world was strange, different in a good way, from anything she had ever seen before.

Her fingers involuntarily spread as she reached for the tall grass. It was purple! She had never seen grass like this before. Her hand brushed over the tops.

Her lips curved upward as it tickled her palm. The faint smile turned to a frown when another wave of warmth filled her.

*What is going on? Am I dead?* She wondered, gazing around the meadow.

*No, elila, you are not dead, merely sleeping,* a husky voice responded.

As she tried to take everything in, her heart pounded so hard that she thought it would explode. The faint sound of a soft murmur brushed over her a moment before she felt something cold against her neck. Within seconds, her body relaxed. Whatever she was given was pulling her deeper into the vast pit that she had unwittingly stumbled into.

*I'll hide here,* she thought as her body landed in a soft bed of gold. *He'll never find me in the dark.*

### Chapter 3

A soft moan escaped Sara three days later. She forced her eyelids to open a crack. Her fingers curled into the covers. She was surprised at their softness. Cautiously, she opened her eyes a bit more so that she could get a better look at where she was.

When she turned her head, she saw Emma sitting in a chair in the corner. The younger girl looked even paler and more fragile than before. Sara shoved her own feelings of weakness aside and pushed up until she was in a sitting position. A soft growl of annoyance escaped her when her arms trembled.

“Damn it,” she muttered, lifting a shaky hand to brush her hair back from her face.

Sara’s hand froze in surprise when she realized that while she might be weak as a kitten, she wasn’t in pain. A confused frown creased her brow. That was impossible. It couldn’t have been more than a few days since Cuello had ordered her strapped to that horrible wooden frame.

She slowly lowered her hand and gazed around the room. It was stark in some ways, almost futuristic looking. There was a wide door on the other side of a clear panel that looked like it might lead out to another room. There were two beds in the room she was in and several comfortable looking chairs.

Her gaze moved back to Emma. Worry pulled at Sara when she saw the haunted look in Emma’s eyes. Pushing the thin sheet covering her legs to the side,

Sara paused for a moment. There were no bruises marring her skin. She rolled her shoulders and waited for the pain, but none came.

Emma's eyes cleared for a moment and she silently shook her head. The look in them didn't reassure Sara. Instead of relief, a look of terror flashed through them before they glazed over again and turned dull. Sara could almost feel Emma pulling away from the world.

She tightened her jaw in determination. She didn't spend half her life fighting for her freedom just to kiss it goodbye. Her gaze flashed past Emma to the doors before they moved to the office. She could see that the door to it was open. Maybe, just maybe, whoever it belonged to had left a weapon of some type inside.

Sara straightened and stiffened her spine. The first mistake the bastards made was to heal her. She didn't know how they did it so fast, but she wasn't going to let them torture her or Emma ever again. The second mistake was leaving them alone. If there was a way out, Sara would find it and whether Emma wanted to go or not, she wasn't leaving the other woman behind.

Turning back to Emma, Sara gave the other woman a look that used to send more than one of her cousins running for cover. When Sara decided she wanted something, nothing stopped her. This time, she wanted her freedom.

"Let's go," she ordered in a harder voice than she meant to. "I need you here with me, Emma. We are going together or not at all, do you understand?"

Emma nodded and rose to her feet. Sara saw the younger woman sway, but there was also a quiet resolve when she pulled her shoulders back. Sara smiled and reached her hand out. Her fingers closed around Emma's hand and she gently squeezed it.

"We'll make it," Sara promised. "I won't let anything happen to you."

Emma's lips parted and she looked like she was about to say something before an overwhelming look of sadness darkened her eyes and she shook her head. Sara could tell the other woman was struggling to say something. It was almost as if Emma forgot how to speak. She was about to ask Emma what was wrong when the double doors slid open.

Sara's lips parted in surprise and shock when a huge golden creature trotted in, carrying something in its mouth. Her throat worked up and down when it suddenly stopped and dropped the soft fabric figure. She unconsciously pulled on Emma, tugging the other woman behind her when the creature tilted its head to the side and stared back at her.

Sara's right hand rose to her throat. Her fingers froze when she felt a delicate rope of metal hanging around it. The moment she touched it a sense of déjà vu struck her and the familiar wave of warmth flooded through her fingertips and down her arm.

"It was you...," she whispered.

Her eyes jerked upward when the shadowy figure of a large male suddenly darkened the entryway. Her eyes widened as recognition dawned on her. It was the man from the forest in her dream.

“No...!” Her cry rose along with her anger.

Her mind shattered, no longer seeing that she and Emma were not in the cells in Cuello’s compound, just recognizing that they were once again captives. Her gaze flew around the room, searching for a weapon. Not seeing any, she clenched her fists and relaxed her shoulders.

“Emma, when I tell you to run, you run and don’t look back,” Sara hissed, her eyes narrowing on the man in front of her.

She could feel Emma’s hand on her lower back tremble in response. All she could do was try to delay the man long enough for Emma to find a way to escape. Drawing in a deep breath, Sara started forward when the huge golden creature bent and picked up the object that it was carrying in its mouth once again and stepped in front of her.

Sara paused in confusion when it raised its head to her and pushed the object toward her. Her gaze moved back and forth between the creature and the man. She wasn’t sure what to do.

“My symbiot... It wishes for you to have this,” the man said. “I searched for human objects that are given to the sick. This came up. My symbiot saw this as your favorite.”

Sara didn’t say anything; she just stared warily at the man. Her brain picked out words in his sentence that didn’t make sense to her... symbiot... human object... sick...

“I wasn’t sick, I was... beaten,” Sara bit out in a husky voice.

"I know," the man replied in an accented voice that she couldn't place.

"Where are we?" Sara demanded, glancing up at him. She still couldn't see him very clearly with the dim light inside and the brilliant light of the corridor shadowing his face. "Are you with the military?"

The man hesitated before he responded. "You are on board the *Horizon*. You and the other female needed immediate medical attention. I am a warrior, one of the best trackers for my people."

"Cuello...," Sara started to say, stopping when the man took a slight step forward.

"The male and his companions are dead. You need never fear them again," the man replied in a calm, hard tone. "I would have preferred to have killed him myself, but Lady Carmen completed that task, as was her right."

Sara started when the golden creature nudged her hand. She had forgotten all about it. A frown creased her brow and she trembled. She was fast losing the small amount of strength she had when she first woke. Between the beatings and lack of food, her body was running on empty.

"What is this thing?" She asked, staring down into the golden eyes. When it first came in, it had looked like some kind of huge cat. Now it looked like the sloth figurines that she loved to collect. "It was a cat a minute ago."

"Yes, it can change shape. It knows you like this creature so it wishes to calm you," the man said.

Sara's hands automatically reached out when it leaned toward her and dropped a fabric replica of a sloth. It fell into her outstretched palms. Tears burned her eyes when the creature slowly sank down until it was sitting and stared at her with wide, golden eyes. Her gaze lifted to the man again. This time the soft light shining down illuminated his face.

"Where... Who... are you?" Sara asked in a faint voice.

"You are aboard the Valdier Warship *Horizon*. I am Jaguin, a warrior from the east mountain region. I am... your protector," he added, taking another step closer.

Sara could feel Emma's hand violently tremble. It was a reminder that she wasn't alone. Her body swayed as her mind tried to comprehend what the man was and wasn't saying. Her lips parted and her throat moved up and down. She tried several times before the words finally came out.

"What are you?" She whispered, staring at him with wide eyes. "What do you want with us?"

The man paused in front of her. She already knew the answer. There were no creatures like the golden one watching her intently. There were no human men that looked like the man standing in front of her. Unless she was in some strange movie set, something very, very strange had happened back at Cuello's compound, something that involved golden tentacles and bizarre lights.

"I am an alien," the man finally replied. "You are my mate."

Sara's eyes widened even further before the last of her strength dissolved. She knew she was done when the darkness that was pushing at her continued to grow. She felt Emma's hands wrap around her, but there was no way the other girl could hold Sara up.

"Oh, great. I'm done," Sara forced out as her eyelids fluttered several times.

Once again, she felt the rush of warmth surround her. This time, it was soft and soothing but hard and muscular. Her head rolled to the side and her cheek rested against the coarse material of the man's shirt.

*Out of the frying pan...*, Sara vaguely thought as the darkness consumed her.

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### Excerpts of S. E. Smith Books

If you would like to read more S. E. Smith stories, she recommends [Abducting Abby](#), the first in her Dragon Lords of Valdier Series. Or if you prefer a Paranormal or Time Travel with a twist, you can check out [Lily's Cowboys](#) or [Indiana Wild](#)...

## **About the Author**

S.E. Smith is a *New York Times*, *USA TODAY*, *International*, and *Award-Winning* Bestselling author of science fiction, romance, fantasy, paranormal, and contemporary works for adults, young adults, and children. She enjoys writing a wide variety of genres that pull her readers into worlds that take them away.