

Alpha's War by Zoe Perdita published by Eccentric Erotica

His twin might be a better thief, but Sebastian was the better liar.

The cat shifter told himself that as Ian Black fitted the collar around his neck, those long slender fingers brushing his skin. Goose bumps rose with the touch. Seb narrowed his eyes and snorted, swatting Ian's hand away.

The wolf smirked. Ian might be an alpha and the boss of the most dangerous shifter gang in Haven City, but he wouldn't hurt Seb. Not now. Ian promised to protect him – if you could call this ruse protection.

“You have to look the part,” Ian reminded him. The bright Chinatown lights shone on one half of his face through the car window while the other half stayed in shadow. His blond hair was brushed back and curled around his earlobes and the base of his neck. The hair that was probably soft and smelled like wolf musk and spice.

Fisk, Seb's identical twin, would know. Fisk fucked around with Ian before he settled with the enforcer, Breaker.

Not that Seb was interested in finding out what Ian's hair smelled like or felt like. He wasn't interested in other men, like his twin brother was.

Seb glowered. This was the price of protection – the price of being involved with a changing world. Better than sitting on the outside, rotting in that hole of an apartment and waiting for the axe to fall.

“I've done it before,” Seb said.

A smile slipped over Ian's perfect lips as his eyes took in Seb's outfit. The tight leather pants. The bare chest. He looked like some gay club kid ready to party. Or a member of the Village People. How embarrassing.

“Oh, I remember,” Ian said.

“Yeah, because you're the one who forced me and Fisk to dress like this.” Seb wiggled in the seat to show off his discomfort with the clothes. The leather squeaked when he moved.

Besides feeling ridiculous, the biggest thing he didn't like about the outfit was the color – black. It made him look pale. Sickly. Fisk and Seb might be twins, but Seb wasn't as healthy or athletic as his brother. An old case of silver poisoning saw to that.

Ian straightened his tie. “Well, you are my pet.”

“I'm playing your pet,” Seb reminded him through gritted teeth. He hadn't run afoul of the Black Wolves and gotten himself mixed up in their business like Fisk had – even if that was partially Seb's fault to begin with.

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Seb remembered when they first met, just over a year ago. Ian Black stuck out on the street. His whole demeanor screamed 'rich guy' like it was tattooed on his forehead. Seb caught the wolf musk on the air and glanced at his feet, heart pounding. His fingers itched for something to do, and the spare cash would help since Fisk wasn't in town at the moment.

As they passed on the sidewalk, Seb slipped his hand into Ian's pocket and grabbed the wallet.

The wolf didn't even notice.

Then Seb snatched the folded cash (only one hundred and seven dollars in bills) and dumped the evidence in a trashcan down the street. He looked at the name on the driver's license before disposing of it.

Ian Black. The infamous gang leader of the Black Wolves and the reason Fisk split town.

At the time, Seb laughed.

Now, it didn't seem as funny. Because of two minor indiscretions, Fisk had to work off his debt to the wolf shifter gang in Seb's stead. Fisk did it to keep Seb safe, and he knew that. But that didn't mean Fisk could always keep Seb safe, or that he would even try. Leaving town didn't do a damn thing for Seb's well being.

It took too long for his twin to realize it. After Fisk pulled that last job for Ian, his debt to the Black Wolves was forgiven. But Fisk stuck around this time, not for Seb, but for the beta wolf enforcer, Breaker.

Only problem was now they were both trapped in the middle of a gang war that was designed to end the shifter violence in the Flats – the poorest and most crime-ridden neighborhood in Haven City.

How were they going to end said violence? With more violence.

Seb almost laughed again, despite himself.

Ian studied him from the shadows. His bright blue eyes, the same color as a magic user, made him stand out. Most wolves had dark eyes, like Breaker. Of course Ian Black couldn't be like most wolves.

Then Ian leaned toward him and grabbed Seb's chin in his firm hold. His eyes shone in the darkness of the car, and Seb sat still, waiting for the perfect moment to yank his chin away.

"You could be my pet. Wouldn't that be fun?" he breathed.

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Seb moved, glad the shadows hid the heat seeping up his cheeks. At least his heart didn't pound in his chest. Ian always flirted like that, and it meant nothing. He probably did it to get on Seb's nerves. "Not interested."

"In me or anyone?" Ian mused, brushing his hand over his suit. It was a nervous habit he had meant to look carefree. Seb spent enough time reading people to know better.

"Just because I don't want to hop in bed with every girl I meet, doesn't mean I've never dated anyone."

"Girl, huh? You should at least try women. They tend to know what they're doing," he said, his voice light and playful.

Seb rolled his eyes. "I thought you were gay."

Like Fisk. His stomach clenched at the thought. Not that he cared if Fisk was gay. When his twin came out at fifteen, before their mom died, she hugged him and said she'd love him no matter what. Center of attention, like always. While Seb sat in the corner quietly picking up the pieces of their shattered lives.

Ian shrugged. "I experimented in my misspent youth. You should try it."

Deep breath. Ian was goading him. And the only way to win was to play along. Seb smiled and leaned forward. "I'd love to experiment. But not. With. You." He poked Ian's chest with every word.

The wolf took a sharp breath, his mouth dropping open just a fraction.

What the hell was that look about? Seb scooted back and forced himself to smile coolly.

In the rearview mirror, Breaker glanced at them, but he didn't say a word. He already aired his discomfort with the plan before they left the penthouse. With his usual restrained tone, Breaker reminded Ian about the current situation in the Flats. "Two more attacks at the docks. Milo said the Dragons were involved. And the Bears shot up a poker game in Chinatown last Saturday."

Of course he wouldn't like it. They were marching into Mao's Tiger den right at the start of a war between the Russians and the Triad. Sergei, the leader of the Bear shifter gang, would be pissed when he found out, and an unpredictable Russian wasn't something Seb wanted coming after the Black Wolves.

But Ian was hell bent on staying neutral in light of this – probably because the gang war was his idea all along.

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If the shifter gangs fought it out with each other, the Black Wolves wouldn't have to take them on. Good thing too, since his operation was all smoke and mirrors. The Black Wolves only consisted of three wolves and, now, two cats. The odds weren't in their favor.

Well, they weren't before Seb and Fisk joined. This crazy ass idea would work if they all played their parts to perfection. If not, they'd all be dead anyway so it wouldn't matter.

That meant Fisk had to get the Tiger's ledger while Mao entertained them tonight. Just another way to antagonize the Tiger gang leader. And there'd be no proof Ian was involved because according to the rest of Haven City, Fisk and Seb didn't exist. They were one person – Tommy Booker. A poor high school drop out with a petty theft record who was now Ian Black's personal sex toy.

Since Fisk was burgling Mao, Seb got to play Tommy.

Lucky him.

Breaker pulled into an alley on the side of the Jade Palace restaurant and turned in his seat. "We're here," he said, his deep voice rumbling through the car.

Seb snorted. "You don't say?"

Breaker's bland expression didn't falter at Seb's sarcasm. The enforcer was probably used to it with Fisk. He nodded once and stepped out of the car. Then he opened their door like a good bodyguard.

If only the shifter gangs understood how capable Breaker was at more than just guarding Ian Black. But Breaker swore he hadn't rid Haven of the other shifter gang's top enforcers. A little over a year before, someone started killing all the worst of the worst in the local shifter gangs. These were the guys that didn't get put in prison with a sentence that stuck. Guys with little to no redeeming qualities.

Seb researched each case when Fisk got involved with the Black Wolves and realized someone in that gang was responsible. Which meant either Breaker was lying – unlikely. Or someone else did it. Someone who was also a member of the Black Wolves, but it couldn't be Milo, the techie omega. He was too small and too weak.

That left one possible answer.

Seb was sitting right next to the man, and strangely he couldn't muster up the energy to be frightened.

Ian looped his hand around the chain and pulled lightly.

Seb stepped into the alley after him. The cool air struck his bare skin, and he fought the urge to shiver. Fisk wouldn't do that, and he couldn't show weakness in front of the Triad.

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They might find out the truth – that Tommy Booker was just a cover. And that Fisk was upstairs robbing their boss's office while they ate dumplings and chicken feet below.

Breaker knocked once and a tiger opened a slot in the door. He glanced at them all and the lock slid open. Then the tiger ushered them inside. His dark eyes sized them up, and his jet black hair was pulled into a ponytail at the base of his neck. Like most tigers, he was sleek and slender, his cheekbones cut high. His body was all sinewy muscle. He smiled at Seb shyly, his cheeks dimpling.

Taking a chance, Seb smiled at the tiger. The warmth of the kitchen colored his face. Good. It made it look like Ian's pet was blushing. He needed to play the part to perfection or someone might be suspicious. He might not be gay, but Tommy Booker was.

Ian yanked on the chain, and Seb stumbled after him, schooling the glare into a look of bewilderment. He couldn't give that look to his owner without the Tigers getting suspicious. They were already on edge after what happened to the Russian's stronghold and the fire on the docks.

Even with the siege on Sergei's mansion, the Bears still held all their territory in the Flats. Most of the Russians the cops caught were released. The ones they held would be out of jail in a few years. They didn't have the evidence to put them away long term.

The raid put all the shifter gangs on high alert – tension buzzed across the Flats like static electricity. Seb wasn't sure if that was a good thing or not.

As they walked in, Seb caught snippets of conversation. Hushed and worried voices whispering in Cantonese about the cops and the bear shifters. At least, that's all Seb understood. He had so much free time growing up that learning the languages of the shifter gangs seemed like a good idea. Especially since he was stuck in the Flats.

The tiger led them to a backroom. The walls were covered in a gaudy gold leaf wallpaper, Victorian with an oriental touch. Two large Ming dynasty vases sat on either side of the room – priceless. A huge scroll hung on the eastern wall, a serene scene of tigers playing in a river. From the look of the parchment, Seb guessed it was from the Sung Dynasty. He'd never seen anything else like it. Did the other Triad gangs have similar artifacts?

If Fisk could get in here and burgle the place they'd make a fortune.

Mao looked up when they entered. She was draped in a red silk dress that plunged dangerously low in the front. A slit came up to her thigh. Her black hair, sleek as ever, hung loose over her shoulders. Her entire body tensed, like a windup toy ready to move.

“Black,” she growled and motioned for them to sit.

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The table was set for dinner with white and blue china – Ming Dynasty. Antique. Most people would keep that locked away – not use it for dinner. She was trying to show off her wealth and power.

Ian nodded but didn't move to a chair. "Mao. You invited me here for?" he asked, a note of restrained anger in his voice.

Seb watched Ian's jaw tighten and his knuckles blanch on the leash in his hands. He was almost as good an actor as Seb himself.

Almost.

Her dark eyes flashed, and Seb felt Breaker stiffen behind him. The enforcer was ready to draw his weapon, but if that happened, Fisk would never have the chance to get what he needed and frame it on the Russians.

Plus, they were surrounded by tiger shifters. Not good. If things got violent they'd end up at Mao's mercy. From what Seb heard she didn't have any.

"I did. We need to talk, and I need to apologize," she said through gritted teeth.

Seb glanced at Ian, and silently congratulated the man for his stone like appearance.

"Do you think an apology is enough? I spend half a million for Rapture, then the Triad destroys my supply. Was it Tigers or one of the other gangs?"

The two men in the corner stepped forward, but Mao put up a hand to motion them back. "It wasn't Tigers. Dragons or Monkeys, but they're not saying. Not to me," she said and glanced at the guards.

One of them lowered his head, and the other held his chin high.

Seb studied them – they weren't tigers.

The one who bowed his head had a mossy, wet fragrance lingering around him. A dragon. The one who jutted his chin looked like he was about to laugh, and just barely held it back. He smelled like a jungle rich with spice and adventure. A monkey.

Seb heard of his practice before – a way to keep each member of the Triad honest. Every gang had certain members inside that belonged to a different shifter gang. That meant Mao had Tigers working with the Dragons and the Monkeys. Must make things difficult when the Triad gangs started fighting with one another.

Division between the Russians and the Triad was expected. Not division amongst the Triad itself. They might consist of three separate Chinese shifter gangs, but they usually acted as

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one force. Maybe this gang war was going to work better than the Black Wolves originally anticipated.

Although this was only the beginning.

Who knows what might happen in the long run, Seb told himself. The cops couldn't free the Flats of shifter gang control, who said one tiny wolf pack with crazy ideas could?

"I guess I won't get my money back," Ian growled, leaning over one of the high backed chairs.

Mao's eyes narrowed into black slits, and she crossed her arms. Seb wondered if he should be interested in women like her. Dangerous and beautiful. Shit. Those words described Ian to a tee, but he'd never admit that out loud.

"We made a deal, Black. I don't want this to dissolve our business relationship. I can get you more Rapture, but I can't give the money to you," Mao said, every word sounded like she had to work to get them out.

The leader of the Tigers disgraced in front of the Black Wolves – no wonder she hated the position she'd been put in. Ian better not press his luck, but what the hell was he going to do with more Rapture? The reason Ian burned the R he got from Mao in the first place was to keep it off Haven's streets. It was a dangerous drug that destroyed every city it touched. They'd never clean up the Flats with a new group of R junkies hanging around.

Another shipment disappearing in the same manner would put more suspicion on their gang than needed. The boss better be able to see that.

Ian licked his lips and sighed. "You strike a hard bargain. Fine. More R. How soon can I get it?"

What the hell was Ian thinking? Seb studied Ian's face, but he came up blank.

Mao pointed at the table again. "We can discuss this over dinner, Mr. Black."

Then Ian smiled that dangerous smile that didn't reach his eyes. It lingered on his mouth like he was deciding what kind of terrible thing to do next. A shiver trailed up Seb's spine. "You're not trying to stall me, Mao? Or poison me?"

She snorted at that assertion. "Poison? You should know me better than that by now. I'd slit your throat with my claws not use a coward's weapon. I'm trying to apologize."

Ian nodded and slipped into a seat, pulling Seb onto the floor next to him. Then he glanced at the cat and tossed him a pillow, like an afterthought.

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Seb grabbed it and knelt, unclenching his fists. This was the worst, most humiliating part of the whole game. And Ian, of course, played it up like he always did.

Breaker stood behind Ian, his handsome face blank, but his gaze ever watchful. His brown eyes pinched at the edge, and Seb figured that expression was for Fisk. The enforcer worried about his mate. Every time they pulled a stunt like this one of them got hurt.

That sent a whole new shiver up Seb's spine and sweat beaded on his back.

Fisk, don't do anything stupid, he begged his twin silently.

Ian's hand clamped on Seb's shoulder. A hand that already touched Fisk more times than he cared to think about. Seb bit his bottom lip hard and focused on looking innocent and scared.

This was going to be a long night.

The servers brought in plates of food. Appetizers of raw meat they cooked over bright flames. The fat dripped into the fire and the scent made Seb's stomach grumble. Ian held one to Seb's lips with a serene smile on his face.

Obediently, Seb opened his mouth and chomped on it. The meat melted on his tongue – better than canned tuna or baloney any day.

In any other situation, he'd grab it from Ian's fingers and shove it into his own mouth, but he couldn't do that in front of Mao without giving himself away. No wonder the boss always chose Seb for these parts now that he had both twins in his gang. Breaker wouldn't let Ian mess around with his mate, for one.

The other reason, well, it was all too obvious.

Ian Black was an annoying asshole, Seb thought as he chewed.

Then Ian held a tiny cup of tea out to Seb, and the cat took it. Thankfully, Ian didn't insist helping him drink too. Ian would probably spill it on purpose just to wipe it off Seb's bare body, knowing him.

"Your pet seems more relaxed than the last time I saw him. You treat him well?" Mao asked as she ripped a hunk of sizzling meat in half with her fangs.

Seb froze and looked at the floor, holding the teacup loosely in his hands before taking a sip. How the hell did Fisk act around Mao? Seb wouldn't know – he wasn't there. The last time he played this part no one caught on, but that'd been in a crowded Russian nightclub, not at an intimate dinner with the Triad.

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"I treat him as well as he deserves to be treated," Ian growled and yanked at the leash, forcing Seb's head up. "Isn't that right, pet?"
Acting time.

Seb's bottom lip trembled, and his green eyes widened into great orbs. The fringe of caramel colored hair fell over his forehead, cheeks heating, as Ian pulled him closer. "Y-yes," he stammered.

Mao leaned forward and grabbed a fried shrimp. Seb's mouth watered at the smell. "How insolent that he looks straight at you."

Bitch, Seb thought, but kept the frown from his lips.

The tiger who smiled at Seb on the way in stared at him now. His dark eyes as unreadable as his expression.

Ian chuckled, a rich and easy sound, and a manicured finger brushed the hair from Seb's eyes. "That's not how I see it. He's so enamored with me he just can't look away. Can't get enough, can you?"

Of course he'd push it in that direction. Seb nodded, shoulders trembling, as the finger wound over his collarbone and down the smooth expanse of his chest. Like Fisk, Seb was compact and lightly muscled, but he was slender due to his illness. Physical activity weakened him, which made working out regularly difficult.

Good thing Mao didn't notice that detail. Or maybe she thought he lost weight due to his imprisonment.

Ian's fingers flitted over Seb's exposed nipple, and it nubbed into a dark pink ball under the touch. Seb schooled his glare, staring at the man right in front of him.

What the hell was Ian up to? Pushing it a bit far.

Even Breaker stared at them, brows furrowed, before clearing his throat and glancing away. He was trying to get Ian's attention discretely, like he usually did when his boss was acting like a fool. Seb wished the alpha paid attention to it.

Ian didn't.

Then he leaned into Seb, his mouth so close their lips brushed. "To be fair, I can't get enough of him either."