

## Frozen

### Prologue

They were alone in the alien tent. The block of ice, with the creature frozen inside, stood quietly dripping in the middle.

"Do you think it died like that?" he asked softly.

"Yeah, I think so," she answered absently, not really paying attention.

"I know how it feels," he remarked, "trapped..."

She turned to look at him then. An offhanded remark died on her lips as she got a good look at his face. Drawn, his features set in pale alabaster, he continued in a whispered monotone.

"On my first cold sleep run, for some reason, I woke up in my capsule... five... days early. I couldn't get back to sleep... I couldn't get out... I was locked in there... half-frozen... like a coffin. I never dreamt again."

She looked at him, aghast, not knowing what to say. He shook himself, as though trying to physically shake off the memories, then left the tent without another word.

oOo

Alonzo woke up, slowly becoming aware of his surroundings. At least, he thought he was. All was silent. He tried to open his eyes. And discovered he couldn't. It was dark behind his eyelids, very, very dark. And he was cold, so very cold... Where was he?

He tried to sit up, but realized he couldn't move. What was going on here? He tried to think of the last thing he remembered before going to sleep... Cold sleep! He was in a cold sleep capsule. But then, why was he awake? Or better, how *could* he be awake? As the truth dawned on him, fear clawed around his heart. Frantically, he again tried to move, but as before he couldn't, even so much as wriggle his toes. His mind was awake, but his body was still asleep, frozen...

A soft, *warm* hand shook him lightly. A voice drifted through the haze of his mind.

"Alonzo, wake up," the voice urged. "You're having a bad dream again."

He tried to open his eyes. A relieved sob escaped him as he found that this time he could.

"Shh," the voice whispered, as a hand stroked his hair. "It's okay now..."

He clung to her then, while the fears of the dream dissipated, basking in her warmth, in her \*aliveness\*.

oOo

"Alonzo, it's only a dream. It can't really hurt you!" she pleaded.

"Julia, you've no idea what you're talking about. You've no idea what it is like," Alonzo replied. "I \*am\* back, there and then. I'm lying in my capsule, my body frozen, but my mind very aware. And I wonder. I wonder how long I've been asleep. I wonder how long I'll be awake, locked in there, frozen, suspended, helpless. Will it be hours? Will it be days? Months, maybe? Will I \*die\* there? What will it be like to die? Will it take long? Will it hurt? Or will I go crazy first?" he swallowed. "I'm scared, Julia. I'm scared to go to sleep and go through it again. And I don't want to talk about it, I just want it to stop!"

She was silent, her heart going out to the pilot and his hurt. He was still fighting demons in his dreams. Only this time they weren't Terrian demons, they were his own.

"Alonzo, I still think it would help if--" His fist, slammed in frustrated anger on the desk, stopped her.

"Can't you just drop it?" His raised voice echoed through the dome as he opened the door from the med room.

"But Lonzo--"

"Just leave me alone!" he yelled. He stormed out of the Bio dome, the double doors rattling behind him.

In the central room, Yale and Devon, as usual hunched over the maps, plotting out their travels for once winter was over, looked up to see what all the commotion was about, and saw Julia standing there, a defeated look on her face as she gestured helplessly.

"What has happened?" Yale asked the doctor.

"Nothing really," she replied. "Alonzo hasn't been sleeping much lately. It makes him cranky and unreasonable. I've been trying to talk to him, but he won't listen to a word I say. Maybe he's right, I don't know. I mean, dreams aren't really my expertise anyway. They're his more than anyone's."

"Has he been having dreams again?" Devon asked, suddenly worried. Alonzo's dreams usually had to do with the Terrians and often also with her son.

"Yes," Julia answered, "but not the Terrian dreams of before. Ever since we thawed that frozen Terrian body, he's been reliving some nightmare from his past. He told me he once woke up early on a sleep run and had to wait in the capsule for its designated time to warm up. Obviously the Terrian locked in the ice has triggered his memory. And I don't know how to stop these nightmares."

"Recurrent dreams are a sign of thoughts that occupy the dreamer much, consciously or unconsciously. They can cause the sleeper to wake up terrified or even stop them from sleeping at all because of fear of nightmares... Nightmares occur mostly because something seriously disturbs the dreamer," Yale quoted, an absent look on his face.

"Yale?" Devon called, "what are you talking about?"

"Huh? Oh," he chuckled as he turned to her. "Just quoting some ancient information from my data."

oOo

Alonzo became aware of feeling cold... so cold... Groggily he tried to open his eyes, but the world around him remained dark, a black so deep he had never experienced. Getting worried, he tried to sit up. Through rising panic he realized it wasn't possible. He couldn't move at all, neither a finger nor a toe. As the truth dawned on him...

He bolted from the bunk he was sleeping on, a cold sweat on his brow, gasping for breath. He realized he'd been dreaming The Dream again, the one that had him frozen but awake in his cold sleep chamber, almost a century ago, on his first sleep run. With angry movements he put on his boots and pulled his jacket over his head. He'd be damned if he tried to sleep again!

Sleeping these days meant going over and over the same thing, until he awoke, frightened half out of his wits, sweating and shivering, heart hammering in his throat. No matter how many times Julia said with the right amount of sedative he should be able to sleep dreamlessly, he never did. But enough was enough. He would not sleep ever again! Knowing deep in his heart this was not really a viable solution to his problem, he stomped out of the dome. Maybe a walk would help him clear his mind.

Outside, it was dark, it being the middle of the night. The two moons had set hours ago, and the only illumination came from the countless stars, the constellations becoming more and more familiar to the Eden crew. He stared up for a moment, wistfully. Life had

been so simple, before. Traveling between the stars, jumping from station to station, from decade to decade without aging, new experiences waiting, always, just over the horizon. But now, he was stuck here, on this forsaken heap of dirt called planet G889, left with nothing but the damn dreams -- and Julia, a tiny voice whispered at the back of his mind. His mood softened for a moment, thinking of the feisty doctor that had come to mean so much to him over the past few months. But with all her efforts she had not been able to stop the dream from happening over and over again.

As he put his hands in his pockets to keep them warm, he hunched down in the collar of his jacket. Heck, it was \*cold\* tonight. Silently Alonzo moved through the camp, on his way to the perimeter control panel to shut it off. He wanted to go up the hill, to have a better look at the stars. Maybe their silent blinking would give him the peace of mind he so craved.

Suddenly he became aware of a soft humming. -- a powered up Mag Pro, his brain informed him. As he turned to see where the sound came from, the pitch of the hum increased, indicating a shot about to be fired.

"Wait!" Alonzo wanted to shout at whomever was taking aim when out of the corner of his eye he noticed a tiny flash of starlight bouncing off metal. The shot went off as he dropped to the ground.

oOo

At the sound of the Mag Pro being fired, the whole camp was in a sudden uproar. Voices were raised in the dome, questioning, sounding frightened. Danziger stumbled from his tent, frantically trying to put on one of his boots, with the other foot only clad in a patched up sock.

"What the hell's going on?" he yelled. "Who's on watch?"

"Me," a shaky voice said from his left, a voice he recognized as belonging to a very frightened Morgan Martin.

"Martin, what're you shooting at, in the middle of the night, without warning? You're supposed to call out a camp alert first if you see something!"

On the other side of the camp, a shadow emerged from the ground.

"Th-- there," Morgan stuttered as he pointed.

At that moment Julia came rushing out of the Bio dome.

"Alonzo," she called, "have you guys seen--"

As the shadow came closer, they saw it more clearly and three voices said in unison, "Alonzo?"

"I'm alright," the pilot answered, brushing the last of the snow from his jacket. "Damn you, Martin, you could've killed me with that shot!"

"I... eh..."

"Solace, what're you doing out here in the middle of the night anyway?" Danziger demanded, before Morgan could come up with a plausible explanation.

"I couldn't sleep," Alonzo explained, curtly. "Not that that's any of your business."

"Oh buddy, are you wrong there," the mechanic replied. "When you start roaming about the camp in the middle of the night, scaring the guards, it \*becomes\* my business! The other day you had Baines so frightened he nearly locked himself in the TransRover again! Something has to be done about this!"

oOo

When Alonzo entered the med tent and saw the machinery Julia had set up, he hesitated.

"Are you sure this will be okay? Will it really work?" he asked her.

"Yes, Alonzo, I'm sure," she answered. "This mask," and she pointed to a rather odd-looking contraption, resembling a VR eyepiece, but bigger and with wires trailing from it, "will monitor your sleep. When it detects you've entered REM sleep it flashes a light that enters your dream. It'll remind you that you're dreaming and that you can exert control over the events. After that it is up to you. Once you've changed the dream from the nightmare in which you're trapped in the cold sleep capsule to one where you can actually get out of it, I'm sure the dream will disappear," she finished.

"Yes," Alonzo sighed wryly, "so then I can dream my regular Terrian dreams again..." Julia smiled at his comment and lightly squeezed his shoulder for a moment as she put the mask over his eyes.

"I'll be monitoring your heart rate and brain waves. If anything should go wrong, which it won't," she assured him, "all I need to do is wake you up."

"Well, okay. I trust you, Doc," he said, his dimples showing briefly, as she applied the tranquilizer to help him sleep.

oOo

He was cold, so very cold. How could he be so cold? His brain sluggishly reminded him that he had dreamt himself into cold sleep. Something to do with a bad dream? What was it? His mind tried to grasp the reason he was here, but at first it eluded him.

Oh yes, now he remembered. He finally was on his first sleep run. Yes, that was it! He could still remember how excited he had been on getting his first consignment. So, he guessed, his maiden voyage was nearly over now. But why did he feel so cold? It had never been like this during the training in flight school. It wasn't supposed to be so cold... was it? A tiny sliver of fear began to wriggle around slowly deep inside his brain. This was not good...

He tried to move then, but his body refused to respond to the commands his brain was sending. The fear grew stronger, something was definitely wrong. Think, Solace, think, he urged himself. And fueled by anxiety his mind started going over the possibilities. The only option that made any sense however, horrifying as it was, was that his capsule had malfunctioned and he had woken up too soon.

Okay, he reasoned, so he just had to get back to sleep. But no matter how hard he tried, he remained conscious. Wondering how long it would last. How long had he been under? There was no way to tell. It could have been only days; it might have been months. He realized he could grow old, wither and die here in this very capsule. The capsule had become a coffin.

As the full force of his predicament hit him, hot panic raced through him. He tried to scream as the adrenaline hit his frozen nerve synapses. But he couldn't scream, he couldn't get out, he couldn't move. All he could do was lie here, half-frozen, waiting to die. He could feel the walls of the capsule closing in, the lid boring down on him, until he could no longer breathe. As he sucked in the next breath, he started hyperventilating, his heartbeat rising, the blood pounding in his ears.

oOo

Julia Heller looked down at his sleeping form. Alonzo looked very peaceful; there were no outward signs that he was reliving a nightmare that had happened nearly a century ago. He was dreaming though, she could tell that much, seeing the frantic movements of his eyes behind their lids. Suddenly a monitor beeped loudly. As she turned to see what

had caused it to call out a warning, all the monitors started clamoring their alarms at once.

His heart rate was quickly passing the boundaries of safety. His blood pressure was moving up rapidly and according to the MEG-meter the deep-sleep theta brain waves first changed to a more active beta and then went completely off the scale.

Julia almost panicked then; he was going out of control. He would die if she didn't act fast. She reminded herself to calm down, all she needed to do was wake him and she quickly readied the sedaderm. But as she injected him, there was no change in his condition.

At that moment Morgan, who had been standing watch again, rushed into the tent. "What's going on?" he asked, "what's all the racket about?"

On seeing the pilot that lay unmoving on the cot, hooked up to the various machinery that was beeping and blinking wildly, he mumbled: "Oh my God..."

"He's having a nightmare," Julia said, outwardly calm, as she readied another syringe, this one with a beta-blocker, desperate to lower his heart rate.

"A nightmare?" Morgan asked, "it looks more like he's overloading!"

"What do you mean," she wanted to know, taking a moment to look at him before turning her attention back to the pilot.

"You know how, in VR, you're still aware of all things around you, while in your mind you're living elsewhere? But your body knows you're not really living in VR either, so it does not respond to anything you experience? And it does respond to things it experiences in reality?"

"Yes," she said, catching on. "But when the VR becomes too intense, the central nervous system reduces input from the outside world protecting it from sensory overload. And then the body starts responding to the VR world. Oh God, he thinks he's \*really\* there again!"

Her heart skipped a beat at realizing what she had made him do, while his voice sounded in her mind, over and over again. I trust you, Doc, he had said. And she, she had let him down! Julia swallowed, hard, mentally shaking herself. There was no time for this now. Alonzo needed her help, not her self-reproach!

"Morgan, you seem to know more about VR than any of us. How do we get him out of

this?"

"Gee," Morgan said, despite the seriousness of the situation flattered that the knowledgeable doctor asked \*him\* for advice. "Normally, I'd say, remove the VR-gear, even if that's dangerous too. But in this case--"

"Maybe if we try to put him \*in\* a program, he'll snap out of his own dreams?" she wondered.

"Hmm," Morgan hesitated. "It might work..."

"Okay, Morgan," she decided. "We don't have much choice here. If we don't get him out of it soon, he'll die. And I'm all out of alternatives. Go get your gear and pick the most relaxing program there is!"

As Morgan hurried out of the tent, Julia stared at the pilot, a worried frown on her face. Oh God, what if I can't make him snap out of it, she wondered.

She remembered when she had first told him about her theory. "Alonzo, lucid dreaming is the answer!" she had said. "In a so-called lucid dream, the dreamer \*knows\* he's dreaming and can control the dream. It means that you get to decide what happens. All we need to do is make you dream lucid."

"But isn't that dangerous?" he had asked, doubtful.

"No! Yale says they've been experimenting with it as early as the 20th century."

"So, how does it work?" he had asked then, still reluctant, but with a hopeful note edging into his voice.

"Well, once you enter REM sleep, your brain needs to be given a signal, like a flash of light, to remind you that you are dreaming. Once you remember that, your conscious mind takes over the dream and controls it. According to Yale's data, you're only limited by your imagination. Please Alonzo, let's do this. Let me help you. I hate to see you so unhappy. And we've tried everything else!"

He had given it a moment's thought. The idea of going back into the dream and then \*controlling\* it had appealed to him. "Let's do it," he had decided.

A moment later, the tent flap was pulled aside and she was transported back to the present. Julia turned, expecting Morgan with the VR program. But it was Yale, a rather disheveled looking Yale, who had obviously only just crawled out of his bed.

"Julia, you need to come right now!" he declared. "It's Uly. He seems to have a nightmare, but Devon can't wake him up. We need you to take a look at him right away."

It was only then that the tutor noticed all the activity on the monitors. "What's going on here?" he asked.

"It's Alonzo," she replied. "He wanted -- I advised him to go back and dream about his experience in the sleep capsule that has been giving him these nightmares. He was supposed to control his dream and get it out of his system. But I can't wake him!" she cried.

"Julia, did you try to induce a lucid dream?" Yale asked in dismay as he noticed the now discarded contraption. "But that is very dangerous! They canceled the research back in the late 21st century when several of the more sensitive subjects had died inside their dreams."

"You never told me that," she muttered, dejected.

"No," he said, not unkindly, "but I didn't know you were planning this experiment. Do you think Uly's nightmare has anything to do with Alonzo's?" he asked next. She was silent for a moment, gathering her thoughts.

"I don't know. Morgan and I were hoping to get Alonzo out of it by putting him in a relaxation VR program. But if Uly's experiencing the same thing-- I'm afraid the Dream plane has something to do with that."

"So," Yale said slowly, thinking aloud, "maybe if we get Alonzo out of his nightmare, Uly will probably wake up by himself, don't you think."

"It's possible..."

oOo

Alonzo was still mentally shivering with the cold that he could feel clawing deep in his bones. He was going to die here, half frozen in this sleep capsule, he knew it. And most likely his ship would coast through space, out of control, for eternity, with him turning to dust inside. He remembered the ancient stories about the ghost ships that had once traversed the waters of old Earth. He would become like that, a ghastly story to tell the freshmen students at the Academy.

Nooo! his mind screamed at him. He couldn't let that happen! He wasn't supposed to die, not yet, not for a long, long time! Again, he gathered the last of his willpower and told himself, move Solace, move! Yet as before, his body remained motionless, the only reward being more adrenaline to attack his frozen nerve ends.

As he mentally lay back a moment, trying to think of what to attempt next, he suddenly became aware of a small voice, far away. It sounded like a young boy. A voice? How could that be? He was far away from any civilization, locked up in the cold sleep chamber in his ship. How could he hear a voice? However, he strained to hear the voice as it promised life and an end to this torture.

"Alonzo," the voice called, "you must let go."

Let go of what? Of life? Is this what it's like to die? But he didn't want to die! Again, the screams he couldn't utter reverberated through his mind, drowning out the far away voice.

oOo

Uly sat up with a gasp.

"Mom," he cried out, "I can't do it, he doesn't listen to me!"

"Uly, what are you talking about?" Devon asked, as she hugged him with relief. Thank God, he was awake. Not making much sense, she thought, but at least awake.

"Alonzo!" He struggled to get free from her embrace. "He's dreaming a terror dream, but he has to wake up now. And he can't. The Terrians said I should call to him, and he doesn't listen."

As she looked at him without understanding, he gestured impatiently. His mother would never really understand the Dream plane, not the way he and Alonzo did. But Alonzo was lost right now. He had to go see him in this real world; maybe then he could reach him.

As Uly scooted out from underneath the blankets and pulled on his boots, his mother grabbed his arm.

"Whoa there, where do you think you're going?" she asked.

"To Alonzo. I've to try and help him."

"Uly," she started to say, but on seeing the look in his eyes, that grown-up \*old\* look she had come to associate with the Terrian side of her son, she sighed. "Okay, then, but I'm going with you."

oOo

As they entered the med tent, Devon stopped abruptly, halted by all the frantic activity going on in there. Alonzo was on the cot, hooked up to several pieces of machinery. Yale was hunched over the monitors, occasionally calling out their status to Julia, who was standing over Alonzo, while Morgan was sitting in the corner, fiddling with his VR gear. What on earth was going on here?

Uly however, did not seem surprised at all and immediately went to Alonzo's side. He tugged Julia's sweater.

"Julia, I tried to help him. But I can't. He doesn't listen to me. Maybe the Terrians can reach him."

Yale and Julia both turned at hearing his voice, surprised to see the young boy. A look of relief washed over their faces as they saw he was wide-awake. They shared a look. At least Uly had woken up on his own strength.

"I've no idea what he's saying," Devon interjected. "But he was adamant about going to see Alonzo."

"I think I know," Julia said, as she crouched to meet Uly's eyes at his level. "Uly, tell me, how can we help Alonzo?"

"I don't really know," he admitted. "But they said I should call to him on the Dream plane. But he's screaming so loud, he doesn't hear me."

She cringed upon hearing the boy's words about Alonzo's suffering.

"Maybe he'll hear the Terrians when they call him. I'm not strong enough..." Uly faltered as frustrated tears formed in his eyes. Julia's heart went out to him as she saw them. He was only a young boy, but since the Terrians had healed him, he'd had more responsibilities placed on his shoulders than any 8-year-old should have to handle.

"Okay," she said gently, as she took his small hand and gave it an encouraging squeeze. "So, how do we ask the Terrians to help?"

"Oh, I can do that!" He brightened and turned towards his mother. "Can I, Mom?"

Devon hesitated a moment, then she nodded.

A cold shiver ran down her spine, as her son closed his eyes, lowered his head and softly trilled. For a moment, nothing happened. Then the ground started to shake. Morgan jumped up from his seat and cringed against the tent's back wall.

"Wha-- wha--" but before he could finish, the ground in the middle of the tent broke and a formidable looking Terrian appeared. The adults all took an involuntary step back from him, while Uly happily stepped forward as the creature trilled a greeting at the boy. Uly, without hesitation, took the hand the Terrian held out, while he put his other hand on the silent pilot's larger one.

oOo

"Alonzo?"

There, there it was again, that small voice. Alonzo perked up his ears at hearing the call. The voice was much stronger this time, almost as if powered by another force.

"Alonzo, you're dreaming. You have to wake up now!" the voice, a young boy's, it seemed, urged him.

What was it talking about? He was *\*not\** dreaming, that was the problem! He was already wide-awake here, in his capsule, aboard his ship!

"Alonzo, listen to me. You're not on the ship; you're here, on the planet. You're only dreaming! You can wake up, just try it!"

Then, mingled with the boy's voice he heard another... voice? A garbled noise that he could understand nonetheless.

"Dream walker, you are a strong dreamer. But unfocused, untrained, wild... You will need to learn much. And you shall. But now is not the time, now you have to let go of your fears."

As Alonzo mulled over the words, he suddenly realized he wasn't feeling so cold anymore. Cautiously he tried to move his limbs...

oOo

As they saw Alonzo's hand twitch the assembled party in the med tent let out a collectively held breath. As Uly let go of both the pilot's hand as well as the Terrian's

leathery one, he trilled once, before the Terrian disappeared into the ground again.

Julia rushed forward, slipping on her diaglove, not really trusting the monitors that had stopped their incessant beeping. But her quick sweep revealed the same thing. Alonzo's heart rate and blood pressure had dropped to more acceptable levels. His brain waves were changing to the beta pattern, meaning he was waking up.

"Alonzo, can you hear me?" she asked.

He groaned as he opened his eyes. "Wha happ'n?" he asked groggily while a relieved smile washed over her face.

*[Voice of Julia Heller]*

The Terrians had said Alonzo's skills on the Dream plane were very strong. They had forgotten to mention his as yet untrained skills could also be dangerous. They had not helped to save Alonzo for his own good though. They needed him to help guide Uly towards adulthood in this strange new world. Let go of your fears, they had told Alonzo. And in the end, it turned out to be as simple as that. Once he stopped fearing the dream so much, it stopped plaguing him in his sleep.

**Author notes:** The data Yale quoted has been paraphrased from the FAQ on dreams and nightmares found at [http://www.lib.ox.ac.uk/internet/news/faq/by\\_category.dreams-faq.html](http://www.lib.ox.ac.uk/internet/news/faq/by_category.dreams-faq.html) (link no longer valid)

The mask really exists and is called a DreamLight mask, helping people to achieve a state of lucid dreaming. Of course Julia jury-rigged it... :-)

I'm also indebted to Terrence Bastian's explanation on brainwaves and how to measure them at <http://home.dmv.com/~tbastian/files/brain-wv.txt>

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