

# **Risking His Pack**



# **Risking His Pack**

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This story contains no scenes of sexual assault.

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## Risking His Pack

The worst part of being a slave is hearing the punishments. Salcid sat on the end of his bed with his head in his hand and his triangular ears pressed flat against his head. No matter how hard he kept his ears against his skull or pressed his hands over them, the crack of the whip still made him jerk.

It didn't matter if he looked up or not. His windowless room was two yards by one, just enough for a bed with a drawer underneath it. The thin wooden wall, not enough to keep back the cold but sealed enough to lock in the stench, didn't shield him from the crack of the whip or the high-pitched yelp of his nephew.

He sighed and tried to think of a better life but failed. He had been a slave his entire life, working at the Germudrir Mill since he was a pup. Now, twenty-one years later, he was still at the mill with no future besides long hours, freezing winters, and dying from some accident. None of the dalpre lived to old age at the mill; the oldest was only thirty-four.

Dalpre. He silently cursed his body between the cracks of the whip. Just because he had the ears and tail of a dog,

he was less than human, a slave with no hope. The rest of the Germudrir Pack was like him, humanoid canines. It was some mage's cruel joke of combining a human with animal traits to make the perfect slave race. He was born a slave and would die one.

His nephew yelped louder. The cracks of the whip stopped but Salcid didn't lift his head. The last ten would use a heavier one, one that designed to cut through flesh and leave him bleeding. Salcid still had the scars when he was whipped many years before, it ached whenever the rain came.

Salcid closed his eyes tightly and tried not to listen to the men walking outside. In his mind, he could identify them by the sound of their breath, their gait as they shuffled across the hard-packed ground, and even the chuckles as they watched a poor dalpre get beaten.

His curse, his manifestation of power, made the voices crueler. He knew they were telling the truth when they talked about beating other dalpres for the fun of it or when they mocked Poil, his nephew. The guards at the mill were cruel men used to abusing the dalpres who couldn't fight back.

Salcid didn't have fight in him. He was a thinker, not a fighter. He understood the mechanics of the saw blades and helped maintain the water chutes and wooden gears that kept them spinning as they cut down the thick trees into planks. Foram, the mill owner, didn't send Salcid to learn how to use the mechanisms, he just randomly picked Salcid out when the last mechanic had died when a catwalk had collapsed on him.

A crack of the heavy whip shot through Salcid's room. He jerked violently as if he had been the one struck. He didn't know why Poil had ran off like he did, but the brutal beating would ensure no one would ever try to escape again.

## Risking His Pack

Salcid clamped his hands over his ears and prayed he couldn't hear the next blow. It was futile, but the act of praying helped with the agony in hearing his own family being beaten.

## D. Moonfire



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## Chapter 2

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# Risking His Pack

Later that evening, the Pack had dinner under the watchful eyes of the guards. Three long tables had been set out in the open yard between the dalpre barracks, the barn, and the main house. It was early evening, a crisp one where the fall air left his breath fogging in the light from the lanterns that surrounded him.

Poil sat in the middle table, bandages covering his back. His tail, a black one with a white tip, was curled under the bench as he tried to eat with his left hand. His right was bandaged from finger to elbow.

His mother and sister sat on both sides of him, helping him as much as they could. Poil resisted, yanking away from either of them. He was always a stubborn pup and even worse as a young man.

Salcid focused on the man across from Poil. Lonmir was the oldest of the pack and the Alpha. A dour man with drooping ears and a lazy eye. He was talking quietly but sternly to Poil, who only nodded at the appropriate times.

“Sal?”

Salcid looked up and then to the side. When he saw that it was Mamgum sitting next to him, his heart beat faster and his ears perked up.

Mamgum smiled at him and leaned into him, the side of her breast pressing against his shoulder. She was short and stocky, but it was an easy strength that let her pick up as much as the men whens he put her mind to it. "You are lost tonight."

He took a deep breath, filtering out everything but her scent. When the musky heat rolled across his senses, his smile grew brighter and he leaned into her. "Sorry, too many things in my head."

"Chasing Poil in circles?"

Salcid nodded and looked back at other injured dalpre. Salcid's own scars ached at the sight of the bloody furrows that the whip had cut into the younger man's back. He remmebered the pain and agony too well, there was no escaping it.

"Do you know why he ran?"

Salcid shook his head. "To escape?"

"No," Mamgum lowered her voice and leaned closer to him, "for freedom."

It was hard to concentrate with her so close. He held his breath and bowed his head until their muzzles brushed against each other. "Freedom?" he asked in a whisper.

"He said that there was a notice on Foram's desk. Something about the dalpre being freed."

Salcid's pulse sped up. "At the mill."

"No," whispered Mamgum, her brown eyes shinging, "everywhere. The world has freed us. But then Foram chased him out. He was going into Rock River's postal office to make sure, they'd have a notice if it was true."

"T-That can't be true," said Salcid as his voice cracked.

“I know, but what if...? What if we finally have a chance?” Salcid could smell the excitement rising from her. It was a familiar smell to him, one that he enjoyed more than once when they spent the night in each other’s room.

Salcid glanced up at the windows of the main house. Inside, Foram was having his dinner and working the books. The mill was reasonably profitable and one of the primary sources of exports for the entire area. After a second, Salcid shook his head. “No, it can’t be. They would tell us.”

Mamgum scoffed. “Foram would tell us? He’s give up the slaves he’s had since his daddy’s daddy’s time?”

“Someone would tell us. The *bortim*’s men, if anything.”

“*Bortim* Lurkulan hasn’t been to the mill since we were both pups in nappies.” Mamgum sighed and pulled away. “I thought you said you had hope.”

Salcid glanced at his newpew. “It’s hard to keep it when we’re stuck here.”

## D. Moonfire

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## About D. Moonfire

D. Moonfire is the remarkable intersection of a computer nerd and a scientist. He inherited a desire for learning, endless curiosity, and a talent for being a polymath from both of his parents. Instead of focusing on a single genre, he writes stories and novels in many different settings ranging from fantasy to science fiction. He also throws in the occasional romance or forensics murder mystery to mix things up.

In addition to having a borderline unhealthy obsession with the written word, he is also a developer who loves to code as much as he loves writing.

He lives near Cedar Rapids, Iowa with his wife, numerous pet computers, and a pair of highly mobile things of the male variety.

You can see more work by D. Moonfire at his website at <https://d.moonfire.us/>. His fantasy world, Fedran, can be found at <https://fedran.com/>.

## D. Moonfire

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# Fedran

Fedran is a world caught on the cusp of two great ages.

For centuries, the Crystal Age shaped society through the exploration of magic. Every creature had the ability to affect the world using talents and spells. The only limitation was imagination, will, and the inescapable rules of resonance. But as society grew more civilized, magic became less reliable and weaker.

When an unexpected epiphany seemingly breaks the laws of resonance, everything changed. Artifacts no longer exploded when exposed to spells, but only if they were wrapped in cocoons of steel and brass. The humble fire rune becomes the fuel for new devices, ones powered by steam and pressure. These machines herald the birth of a new age, the Industrial Age.

Now, the powers of the old age struggle against the onslaught of new technologies and an alien way of approaching magic. Either the world will adapt or it will be washed away in the relentless march of innovation.

To explore the world of Fedran, check out <https://fedran.com/>. There you'll find stories, novels, character write-ups and more.

D. Moonfire



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