

Jax

Guardian From Trandor Trilogy

Character Backstory

By Phoenix Holloway

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On the planet Soltus, a young man walked along the wooded path toward his home. Tall, athletic-looking, his wolf-like features reflecting his happiness and carefree attitude. He'd just come from a game of Kolinrook, a fast-paced team game that required athleticism and endurance. He loved the game and excelled at it. He hoped to one day join the National Teams. His coach believed it would happen.

As he approached his home, he could see his mother arriving as well, her shuttle craft touching down behind the trees. His father was currently off-planet, working for the national energy company as a consultant. He didn't see his father much, but that was okay. They didn't get along all that well.

His mom exited the shuttle craft and waved at him. "Jax!"

Jax waved at his mother and jogged over to greet her.

"Jax, you are a mess!" His mother jokingly scolded him. "How was practice?"

"Good!" Jax yelled as he jumped and spun in the air, dirt flying from his dark-colored practice jersey. "Coach thinks we may have some representatives from the National Teams here next week."

His mother laughed with him as they entered their home. At their entrance, the home automation kicked in, turning on lights and a news feed on screens scattered throughout the residence. Their home, set in the trees, a single-story, cozy home, made of wood and glass, was the only home Jax had known.

Jax headed to the kitchen to grab some snacks when one of the news stories caught his attention. The Federated Security Force had raided an interplanetary shuttle that was suspected of trafficking young women. As Jax watched, the FSF escorted several women from the shuttle's belly to a waiting medical transport.

He wasn't sure why the story caught his attention, but he couldn't pull his eyes away. His mother, seeing Jax's focus, joined him to watch.

Jax could feel sadness coming from his mother.

Jax's mother had helped him, from an early age, to develop his empathic skills. Many from Soltus possessed some form of telekinetic ability. Not all worked to improve or use them. Jax's mother impressed upon Jax the importance of his abilities and developing them.

As he continued to watch, a familiar face crossed the screen. Jax heard his mother gasp in recognition as well.

"It's Leia!" Jax heard his mother whisper. He could feel waves of anger, fear, and something else he couldn't identify.

Jax knew Leia from neighborhood gatherings and had seen her in town on occasion. He didn't know her well, as she was a few years older than he was, so they didn't attend the learning academy together.

Jax's mother had opened her communication device, desperately trying to connect with Leia's family.

"Taron, it's me, Jameen. Are you watching the screen?"

Jax could hear an excited voice coming from Taron, Leia's mother.

"Yes, yes, she does look okay." More excited talk. "Did you know she was missing?"

"I see, yes, okay." Jameen looked at Jax, her expression one of sadness. "I'm so glad they found her. Please let me know how she is doing."

Jameen disconnected from Taron and immediately grabbed Jax in a bone-crunching embrace.

"How long was she missing?" Jax asked.

"Several weeks," Jameen mumbled into his shoulder. "I didn't even know. I know we aren't that close to her family, but I didn't even know she was missing."

Jax rubbed his mother's back, hoping to comfort her sadness. He could feel the moment her sadness shifted to anger.

"Who are those people?!" Jameen shouted. "How could this happen on Soltus?!"

Jax had no answers, but Leia's face, and those of the other women and young girls, stayed with him for several days. His coach noticed Jax's distraction.

"You are distracted, Jax," his coach told him after practice. "We have the National Teams representatives coming tomorrow. You will need to have your best practice, without distractions."

Jax assured him that he would. He knew the importance of being recognized by the National Teams. Those chosen to be part of the National Teams had their future and their families' futures taken care of, plus national recognition.

Jax thought about that as he headed home. He loved the game, and having his future taken care of, as well as his family, was something everyone wanted. He felt conflicted about the national recognition part, though.

When he arrived home, he could tell that his mother had visitors. As he walked toward the main area of the house, he could hear hushed conversations. Entering the room, he saw Leia and two people he assumed were her parents.

After the introductions were made, Leia, looking serious, explained why they were here. She felt it was important to tell her story to prevent the same thing from happening to others. Leia knew that Jax was a few years younger than her, and she knew, first-hand, that traffickers took young men as well as young women. Leia also knew that her fair coloring and her wolf-like features were in high demand from traffickers.

As Leia told her story, Jax could feel her terror, but also her strength. She expressed her gratefulness for being rescued after only a few weeks.

Long after they left, her story stayed with Jax. Particularly, the part about those who worked to find them and rescue them. Leia had told them a small, private rescue group had found them and worked with the FSF to complete the rescue.

During practice the next day, Jax pushed all thoughts of Leia and her rescue aside and concentrated on the game. He could tell from the expression on the coach's face that he was

doing well. The coach had told him the National Teams representatives were watching today, and he put everything he had into the team practice.

After practice, his coach brought over a man and a woman from the National Teams to meet Jax. They spent a few minutes talking with Jax before leaving. Jax noticed that they didn't talk with any of the other players. He wasn't sure how he felt about that, but before he could explore those feelings, the coach punched him lightly in the shoulder.

"They did not come right out and say it, but I have the distinct feeling that they are going to offer you a position on the National Teams. They were really impressed with you during practice." The coach smiled broadly. "Glad to see you were not distracted today!"

After Jax arrived home, thoughts of Leia's rescue consumed him again. He researched groups that helped trafficking victims. He connected with a few of the groups he could find, but none of them claimed to help Leia and the others. When they questioned why he wanted to know who had helped, Jax said the first thing that came to mind.

"I want to find a way to help, too."

Until he voiced it out loud, he didn't know that's where his heart was leading him. But listening to Leia describe the terror for her and the others, and that it took a private group to find them, just wouldn't shake loose.

He spent another few hours researching and calling, and at one point, even talked again with Leia. Leia was grateful to those who found her, but she didn't have any additional information.

Jax joined his mother in the kitchen, his face thoughtful.

"What is going on with you?" Jameen asked. "Did the National Teams representatives not show up?"

Jax shook his head. "They were there, and coach thinks they will invite me to be on the team."

Jameen looked confused. "This is good news, right?"

"Of course," Jax said. Uncomfortable, he looked down at the floor.

When he didn't continue, Jameen crossed the kitchen and gently touched his arm.

"I can feel your conflict, Jax. What is it?"

Jax sighed. "I cannot stop thinking about what happened to Leia and the others."

Jameen nodded but didn't say anything. She could sense he had more to say.

"I know that being on the National Teams is a great honor, but it seems hollow, even selfish." Jax looked up into Jameen's eyes. "What this private group did to rescue those women and girls is—," Jax didn't finish, he seemed at a loss for words.

"I understand," Jameen said. "We both felt such anger seeing those women being trafficked. Helping them seems like a noble cause."

Jax nodded. "I cannot find any information about the group that rescued them, though."

"Did you talk to Leia?"

"Yes, but she did not have any additional information to share."

"I am sure we can come up with something," Jameen said. "Let us see what we can find out with fresh eyes tomorrow."

Jax nodded and reached over to grab some fruit from the counter. His thoughts were spinning as he tried to think of a way to find the anonymous rescuers.

He picked up a portable screen and reviewed the footage from the rescue, hoping to see something that would give him a clue.

The home alert system signaled visitors approaching the house.

Jameen checked the system. "Are you expecting someone?" She asked Jax.

Jax shook his head.

Jax joined his mother to check the screen monitoring the area outside the front door. Leia came into view first, followed by two men in dark, hooded cloaks. Leia appeared relaxed and even turned to smile at one of the men behind her.

Jameen cautiously opened the door. "Leia? Is everything okay?" Jameen looked nervously between Leia and the two men behind her. Jax moved closer to his mother to provide protection.

"Jameen, everything is okay." Leia turned to look at one of the men, who nodded back at her. "We were hoping to talk to Jax."

At Jameen's hesitation, Leia continued. "Jax was asking about the rescuers, and I couldn't say anything when I spoke to him before, but I asked if they could talk with him."

"Leia?" Jax gently moved his mother over so he could see who was outside.

At his appearance, one of the men stepped forward and dropped his hood, showing the distinct wolf-like features of someone from Soltus.

"Jax, I am Stryker. May we come in?"

Jax looked at his mother and, with her nod, invited the trio in.

The other man lowered his hood, revealing a mixed-race human with dark, wavy hair and facial stubble. He and Stryker bowed low to Jameen.

"I am Brock," the second man said.

Jameen got everyone settled in the main living area and brought refreshments. Stryker, sitting across from Jax, leaned forward, his eyes intense.

"Leia informed us that you were asking about the rescue group. We were also informed by some of the known rescue organizations that you were inquiring about us."

Jax leaned forward as well. He could feel intensity and honesty from both men.

"Tell me, Jax, why were you reaching out?" Brock asked him.

"Leia's story would not leave my head," Jax replied, his eyes intent on Stryker. "I felt the need to do more than just express outrage."

Stryker nodded. "We understand that you have prospects with the National Teams." At Jax's surprised look, Stryker tilted his head slightly. "We are successful because we are anonymous, and we work in the shadows. We would need to know who we are speaking with, and the potential for harm."

Jax nodded. Of course, they would investigate him.

"You have a wonderful future ahead of you, for you and your family, if you choose to accept a position on the National Teams."

Jax nodded again.

Stryker studied Jax for a few more seconds before relaxing slightly and sitting back.

"You must have questions about what we do. Please, feel free to ask. We will tell you what we can."

Jax let out a breath he didn't know he had been holding. He felt as if he had just passed a silent test. He looked at Brock, who also looked more relaxed.

Taking a deep breath, he dove right in with questions about what they did, who they helped, where they worked, and many other questions.

Jameen listened to the questions and answers, occasionally getting up to get refreshments for the group. She watched her son get animated when he talked about using his skills to help others, and knew, without a doubt, that this was the direction his life needed to go. She felt a surge of pride to watch her son figure out his destiny.

After their guests left, Jameen sat with her son.

"Stryker said, if I really felt compelled to take my life in this direction, I have to be all in." Jax looked at his mother, his face showing his inner conflict. "If I do not accept a position on the National Teams, it will affect you."

"Jax," Jameen said his name quietly. "I have watched you train and practice with the goal of making the National Teams, but I have always felt that it was not your destiny."

His mouth dropped open in surprise.

Jameen chuckled. "You needed to determine your path on your own, without my influence." Jameen touched his arm. "You would be great on the National Teams; I have no doubt. But you would also be great with Stryker and his team."

Jameen stood up to clear the refreshments from the table. "I am comfortable here; we have always had everything we needed." She sent a hard look at Jax. "I do not need you to join the National Teams for my benefit. You need to follow your own path. I will support you in whatever decision you make."

Stryker stood next to the shuttle on the outskirts of town. Brock was inside, getting ready for their departure.

"I don't think he will show."

Stryker shook his head at Brock's comments. He had sensed something in that young man. An intensity that matched his own, and a feeling of destiny about him. Stryker was patient. He knew Jax would be here.

Stryker sensed Jax before he saw him and let a small smile cross his face.

"Stryker," Jax said his name as he approached. His only luggage was a small bag of clothes.

Stryker reached under his cloak and pulled out a similar one for Jax.

"Welcome."