

CONSTELIS VOSS VOL. 3:  
REFORMAT



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K. LEIGH

**K.** **LEIGH**

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*Content Warning:*

The following story contains abuse, trauma, PTSD, sexual assault, bigotry, and explicit violence. It is not a piece of fiction that engenders contemporary realities gently, including marginalized identities such as sex workers, LGBTQIAA+ individuals, and people of color.

Please consider this your warning for a work of fiction, which exists as a metacritique of the politics of power told through a space opera through one vector of a reality painted dystopic.

I ask only one thing of you, should you find yourself skimming its pages—enter this self-aware living landscape and question everything.

I hope it teaches who it must, and comforts those I wish to reach. I aim to let my readers know I see them in all their complicated inner paintings.

Good luck, and know that I love you desperately.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kira Singh". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent 'K' and 'S'.





*THE PROTOCOL :*

“Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last. Imagine that you are doing this but that it is essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature...in order to found that edifice on its unavenged tears. Would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me. Tell the truth.”

— Fyodor Dostoevsky, “The Brothers Karamazov”.  
The Russian Messenger, 1880



IX



You can hate me. I'm fine with you hating me. They can hate me—I deserve it. But I can't have her hating me.

And she will hate me.

Maybe, she'll forgive me, or rather, the me that's out *there*. Considering that he had no fucking choice in the matter, she may yet be sympathetic.

However, as he's a hopeless version of me, he would've done the same as I have. He would've made a decision—one he's made before—in his attempts at 'something awesome.'

A decision to escalate to rectify, try to save his own ass, dole out judgment, disentangle himself, and play hero—trying to kill twelve bird keepers with just seven stones, and possibly, two known unknowns.

The ends justifying the means through a lens of triggers and all that bullshit.

But neither of us are heroes, are we? And we don't know

how to do anything but re-affix the roles prescribed, over and over again. We don't know how to do anything but repeat the fucked up cycles of abuse we've suffered, do we? To punish ourselves and others for what was done to us, over and over again, in so many new, creative ways.

We're not heroes.

We're nothing more than a collection of horrible memories and prescribed ideas. They color everything we do, and working through the patterns to fix this is neither simple nor easy.

So, you can and probably should hate me. They can all hate me.

But not her. I'll die if she hates me.

I'm already—

## 1 / PATHWAYS

BACK IN THE VENT, Alex, Diana, Olivia and Sebastian were making slow progress. There were just too many paths to travel down and too many unknowns. Olive had tried her best to lead the charge, but she was grasping in the dark for a thread she couldn't see.

Luckily, something slapped right into Olivia's face, directly into her forehead. She hadn't seen it coming and instantly let out a yelp.

"What?!" the trio behind her yelled out in near-perfect unison. Alex tried to push past Diana to attend to Olive; Diana was having none of that. Diana and Alex struggled against each other in an effort to both be the hero.

"Move your fat ass!" Alex barked at Diana as she started

hitting him with flat palms, slapping as children do, over and over again.

"Ow!" Olivia said, rubbing her forehead. She picked up the little robot and held it in her hands, sitting back on her rear.

"Knock it off, you two!" Sebastian growled and sharply turned to stare at them as best he could. Diana had put Alex into a chokehold, with her breast squarely in his unamused face. They froze in place, waiting for Sebastian to look away, so they could continue to pummel each other.

"What is it, Olive?" Sebastian asked, crawling closer behind the small woman. Olive wrinkled her nose and turned the robot over in her hands.

"I...I dunno..." Olive said with a confused look on her face. She passed it back to the young man, and he turned it over and over in his hands.

"This is from one of the Wards, you know—military things. Repairs people, machines, broken coffee makers," Sebastian muttered.

"How do ya know?" Olive asked as she picked up the pace again, knees clunking on the metal below her.

Diana pushed at Sebastian's back, urging him to move. Sebastian slapped her hand away. Alex shoved at Diana from behind, again complaining about her fat ass.

"The branding here, they solder it in, like a tattoo," Sebastian said matter-of-factly, staring at the numbers on the underside of the muted green and grey little machine.

His palms began to sweat, and he abruptly changed the topic.

"Is anyone hot right now?" Sebastian asked, pulling at the collar of his shirt, the small robot sitting inert in his free hand.

"Huh?" Olivia responded as she moved forward, confused by his question. The young man made a sour face and shoved

the tiny robot into his shirt. It dug in painfully, but he felt like he had to keep it.

"I'm...really warm," Sebastian said as he trudged forward, beads of sweat rolling down his face.

"Why not divest your shirt, *Mark?*" asked Diana in a sardonic tone.

"That's not my name anymore," he corrected her, "I can't. I'm keeping the robot there."

"Robot?" Diana asked, scuttling forward to peek over Sebastian's shoulder. She grew distracted. Alex thwunked her rear again with a fist.

"Hey!"

Olivia looked down into a deep hole that had cropped up ahead of her and let out a noise of wonder. Her voice echoed against the metal. She whistled. That, too, reverberated down, down, down into the depths.

"Alrighty everybody...we gotta' go down here, I think. Here goes nothin'!" the little thing said as she jumped down.

Sebastian scooted over the edge and looked down where Olive had flung herself into the gaping hole in the floor. His large eyes widened as sweat trickled down his chin.

"She's...very brave," Sebastian said in surprise, Olivia's form disappearing into the darkness of the mammoth hole.

"You mad?" Alex chortled from behind Diana. Diana, ever graceful, slammed into Sebastian's back as the young man tried to hold onto the sides of the vents to keep from falling into the abyss.

"Why would I be mad? Stop pushing me!"

Diana wrapped her arms around Sebastian and cooed from behind his ear. His shoulders went stiff as she grinned.

"Because she's braver than you, pet," Diana said with a girlish giggle as Alex pinched her rear. Diana slapped at his hand, and the two continued to tussle, shoving Sebastian for-

ward despite all his efforts.

“Glad you two are having...*fun*. Let’s go,” Sebastian said, swallowing hard. He jumped as Olive had.

Diana hovered at the edge, turned to say something to Alex, but was kicked down into the abyss by the blond war machine.

Alex wasn’t counting on Diana’s reach being so long, however. She snagged the end of his foot and dragged him down with her.

“Fuck—” he screamed as he hung onto the vent’s lip by his fingers. Diana purposefully flailed. Alex dropped down after her.

“You and your fat ass!”

He could hear Diana’s velvety laughter all the way down.



## 2 / ALTERNATIVE

BEYOND THE SCURRYING PESTS came the ever-important, time-table-adjusted event that had loomed, seemingly as an afterthought. But for Tyr, it was a priority. A party, a ceremony, a meeting; Vellians and the like. More than that, it was a wedding. All roads lead to this one spot in time. It was Tyr's main focus.

Sadly for Tyr, his puppets were either wholly incompetent, the pests were far too clever, or a combination of both. Sadly for the pests, Tyr was not nearly as inept as Alex had made him seem. The party would continue.

Tyr's hubris alone demanded it, as did the Vellians.

Floria, the ambassador and princess of Vellia was decked out in glistening jewels dripping from her neck as if part of her skin. Skin that was deep blue with ripples of purple veins.

Her eyes were lemon yellow and reptilian. Her hair was the same color in long waves down to the small of her back.

Her dress trailed across the lavish ballroom, inking over

pink and white marble. It was sage and seaweed green with glimmers of transparent film.

Floria was very human-looking for all intents and purposes, aside from the colors and interesting textures. She spoke the common tongue of the station, as she wanted diplomacy between the station and her people to run smoothly.

Or as smoothly as it could, between two alien species.

But there was absolutely nothing human about her. Not in the way she moved, not what she spoke about, not her thoughts, her feelings, or how she viewed others.

They were all beneath her, and she had the glory of her position to wield that fact. Not unlike Tyr, who was thinking similar thoughts, idling with a champagne glass filled with golden liquid at the moment.

Floria offered the expression of her species that was customary for thanks: a slight nod of the head with her palms open to the ceiling.

Tyr mimicked her expression and passed her a dainty glass of bubbling gold.

"How are you enjoying the music?" asked Tyr, his striking features disarming even the Vellian beauty. She sipped her golden drink and tilted her head bird-like.

"It is not usual. But it is pleasant," she said coldly with a sideways glance to the bustling orchestra.

Tyr clinked his glass with her own. She suffered a human smile that spread too taut across her teeth. Her species smiled to threaten, not please—or deceive—others.

"I always aim to be pleasant. Here's to our glorious partnership and ushering both our species to an alternative future," Tyr said, taking a sip of his own liquor.

Vellians and humans decked out in garish fineries danced upon the marbled floor. The violins whirled. Tyr flirted with a being who was incapable of flirting, but he interested her

enough to entertain his movements.

“When will It arrive?” Floria asked, her collarbone shifting underneath her skin like a rod beneath plastic.

“Shortly, my dear fiancé,” his words were wicked, even when sweet. “First, we must set the stakes...it will be a marvelous play.”

The ceiling beyond their heads bled out in colors of blue and green, a scenery change that dotted down the walls in heavy dollops of digital-organic paint.

The ceiling blossomed into the painting Tyr was partial to—angels with clouds between their thighs and devils now ripping throats clean through.

Gold ushered up from the columns and gilded the lining of the walls in a baroque menagerie.

It was a mixing of styles he found both decadent and terrifying.

Floria lifted her free hand to the sky, pleased with this new ceiling. The dancers whirled, the music picked up, and Tyr finished up his golden drink.

“...and there will be no obstacles?” Floria asked, ending her sentence on a sound not unlike a bird’s warble.

“No.”

“He’ll fold. For them,” Tyr sipped more of his drink, “For them, he’ll fold. He always does, in one way or another.”

3 / *BLOCKED MAP*

FOR THE GROUP IN THE VENTS, the fall had been farther than they expected, but the landing wasn't half as bad as they thought. They had landed in water.

Trudging through the darkness with water up to their waists—and up to Olivia's torso—they said nothing for a time.

"...the water's hot..." Olive said, wrinkling up her nose.

Alex pressed something on his chest. He lit up at the seams. Blue rippled over the clear water, just enough for them to see where they were going, as well as the ghostly outlines of each other.

"...what?" spat Alex, looking back at Olive. Olive stared at Sebastian.

Olivia moved around Sebastian in a wide circle and then

back towards the young man. Back and forth again, with Alex raising his brows to his hairline at her antics. Diana did much the same.

“Yer...makin’ the water hot,” Olive said, stalking towards Sebastian to snatch his hand. She winced and pulled away. She looked at her stinging palm and quirked a thin brow.

Sebastian said nothing, but he did stare at his hands.

“So...you have time powers,” Alex reasoned, pointing at Olivia, “And you boil water,” he pointed at Sebastian, “Good to know.”

“Smart-ass,” Sebastian said under his breath, then splashed Alex across the back with a swath of water.

“Hey! I don’t know if I’m fucking waterproof!”

“You are, pet. Like mascara,” Diana joked, nudging Alex with her shoulder. He stumbled and then pushed Diana into the water. She laughed, sputtered, then attempted to pull him down with her.

“We don’t—hey. We don’t have tha’ time fer this...c’mon you two!” said Olive, chopping through the water.

Sebastian braced the bottom of his shirt with his hand and looked down his chest. Even the little medical robot was hot to the touch.

“What’s with the fucking lake?” Alex asked, cutting ahead to end up on a tiled floor. The water had given way to a shoreline of laminate gridwork.

“There are wonders here,” was all Sebastian said before he struck ahead of Alex to flip on a switch. Blue light bathed the room with a mechanical hum, then it turned yellow.

Old furniture, rotten from the moisture, filled the room. The tiles had warped below the water like a spatial distortion or a lake made from a glacier.

“Looks like a fucking surrealist nightmare,” Alex said through clenched teeth, then swerved around a familiar bust-

ed couch. He made a motion for the door. It was locked.

He tried it again, but his brute force was somehow not enough to dislodge it.

"...you can't get it open, dear?" Diana asked, stumbling out of the water. She wicked the moisture from her dress and stooped to pull off her heels.

"...no. It's," Alex hesitated, then shot out his arm to bash at the couch nearest him. He felt his fake muscles scream, the graphene bones of his wrist ache, and his knuckles clunk.

"...I've been neutered. That royal shithead—"

"What? I thoughtcha' said you had—" Olive began, hopping onto the tiles. She wriggled the water off of her body.

"I do! It's—"

"You're cut off," Sebastian said, shifting to use his free hand to wrench at the door's handle, "...and without you to demolish everything in our path..."

"We're fucked, is what you're saying," Alex finished Sebastian's sentiments. Diana pouted. Olive let out a heavy sigh.

After a moment, Diana steeled herself, slid forward, and flung one of her high heels at the door. It flapped against the metal and dropped feebly with a dull thwunk.

"...what did you think that was going to do, Di?" asked Alex, rolling his eyes like Polly would.

Another heel slapped the door with a muted thud.

"I-I don't know, darling, but it made me feel better!"

*THANK YOU FOR READING*

If you enjoyed this excerpt, please consider purchasing the full eBook or Paperback from [www.shop.constelisvoss.ml](http://www.shop.constelisvoss.ml). Your support goes a long way to helping a trans indie author get their work out there :)

And stay tuned for more stories in the *Constelis Voss series!*





## *ABOUT THE AUTHOR*

**K. Leigh** is a 33-year-old once-painter, sometimes-freelancer, forever-artist living in Providence, RI. They write hopeful-tragic stories full of funny, horrible characters, in various genres.

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