

The characters Torvald Arend 'Tor' & Victoria Angela (nee Connell) Svensen, James Conrad & Cathryn 'Cathy' (nee Hunter) Svensen, Brett, Dana Lynn (nee Svensen) and Sabrina Angela Kashnikov, Roger, Gytba Louise (nee Svensen) Roger Jr. & Heather Louise Delancey, Axel Torvald & Madelyn (nee Barrett) Svensen, Bradley Torvald 'Brad' & Janet Lee (nee Mondragon) Svensen, Trenton, Nancy Jeanne (nee Svensen), Trenton Junior and Chelsea Corbin, Ronald Arend 'Ron' & Brenda Mae (nee Cartwright) Svensen, Lawrence James 'LJ' & Alicia Leanna (nee Svensen) Hood, Valerie Connell, Walter Lee Sr. & Harriet (nee Bishop) Connell, Walter Lee Jr., Michelle Annette 'Misha' (nee Kazjinski), Walter Lee III, Joseph Franklin 'Joe' and Sarah Noel Connell, Robert James & Elizabeth Ann (nee Caine) Sands, Barbara Caine, Edward and Mary (nee Leese) Caine, Richard & Wilhelmine Marie (nee Kurzweil) Delancey, James William & Nancy (nee Roland) Kurzweil, Erich Martin & Ivanova Marie 'Iva Marie' (nee Schmidt) Kurzweil, Jason & Natasha 'Tasba' (nee Porter) Cummerow, Peter the dispatcher, El Casa Del Burrito[®], Leonard's Restaurant[®], Hunter Auto Parts[®], Right Way Groceries[™] and Steven Nanomantube are the property of Kellan Meig'h and may not be published or reproduced in any form without express written permission. Any resemblance to any fur or person, either living or dead is purely coincidental.

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“End Game”

By Kellan Meig'h

Chapter 01 – “Portola Hills”

Father and son wrestled the very heavy leather-covered couch out of the back of Axel's 2014 Holden Maloo pickup and up the three steps to the front door to the new home for the Immortal Couple. It was a bit of a struggle but they made it through the front double doors, across the entryway and through the living room. Torvald and Axel took a short breather before continuing across the country kitchen and finally into the family room with the heavy piece of furniture.

“Um, could you put the couch over there for now? Please?” Victoria asked the males, studying just how the furniture fit the room. She could see their frustration as they lugged the couch to the other side of the area, near the window to the back yard. “Come on, you two. I'm just trying to get our furniture situated,” she reminded them, giving them a smile before turning back to giving the room her attention.

“I'm sure I would have preferred to have a moving crew to do this for us,” Torvald stated, giving his mate a kiss on the neck after he walked up behind her quietly and slipped his arms around her waist. Their son just rolled his eyes and made himself scarce in another part of the house.

“Will you stop that!” she chided him, first batting playfully at his muzzle while he was still kissing her then turning to face him and return the favor. “I made some sandwiches for you two hard working males,” she told him, nodding to the kitchen. “Why don't you and Axel go out on the patio where it's shady and I'll join you in a minute?”

“That sounds good to me, Hon. I'll go find our son,” he told her, getting their meals from the kitchen and then finding his offspring who was checking out the built-in cabinetry in the study. Together they went outside and sat down on the steps of the back patio deck, enjoying the afternoon shade. Axel took a bite of his sandwich, his mom's special tuna sandwich recipe, then looked at his father.

“I know what you're going to ask,” the elder Svensen stated. “I didn't quite retire like I thought I would. The Chief talked me into becoming a reserve officer. I still get to keep my rank as Detective, though.”

“Somehow I didn't really see you retiring completely,” Axel proffered up after swallowing his mouthful of food. He took a sip of his soda, then continued. “I know you really like your work, so you telling me that

you're a reserve officer now doesn't surprise me.”

“I hate to think I've become that predictable,” Tor commented, thinking about the situation. He had wanted to retire but the reasons the chief gave him for becoming a reserve officer were just too compelling. He could draw his retirement plus make a few dollars on the side doing a day's work here and there. The tigress sitting down with them snapped Torvald out of his reverie.

“How's the sandwich?” she asked her son after she opened her soda.

“Mmm, just fine, Mom.” he replied. “Madelyn has tried to make this recipe and she still hasn't gotten it down.” he added.

“Give her a chance,” the femme feline suggested, knowing Axel's wife was trying her very best to learn that particular recipe.

“That's the last of the furniture,” Torvald pointed out to his wife, glad that part was over with.

“I guess we need to see if that plumber can get the jacuzzi tub finished this evening,” she suggested while she gave them some potato chips to go with their meal. They had purchased an even larger tub than what they had at their old home and arranged for it to be installed before they moved into the ranch. It had almost worked out but the tub ended up being two days late in arriving. That was the reason for the plumber to still be busy working on installing it.

“The plumber was saying something about needing more couplers when I passed him in the hallway,” Axle told them as he pulled out his cell phone to see who was calling him. It was his wife on the line. “Can't hide from Madelyn with a cell phone,” he jokingly commented as he accepted the call.

The parents watched as their son wandered over to a bench and sat down, having a very pleasant conversation with his wife. They were glad he had found such a rare gem, a femme that seemed to compliment him in every way. She was musically inclined, she tried very hard to make Axel's favorite foods along with her own favorites from her mother and she really loved him. That was what they enjoyed the most about her, the fact that she was head over hoofs in love with their son.

“It was just a question about some amplifiers that came in a little while ago by UPS.” Axel informed them after he wandered back over to sit down by his parents again. “I ordered a pair of Line 6 combo amps and she wanted to know if they were for display or to be held for some fur.”

“Aren't those the ones that you had to send back because they had problems?” the tigress asked.

“Yeah, Line 6 had some issues with them a few years ago but they seem to sell well enough now that they've corrected the problems. I get a request for one just about once a month.” the young stallion admitted. “So, Mom, you're getting the study?” he asked.

“Tor is taking what was the music room across the hall for his office,” she replied, passing him the bag of chips. “It's bigger because he needs room for his books and such and plenty of room for an imposing desk to sit behind.” That made Axel smile.

“Um, are you going to do some thinning out on the back part of the property?” Axel asked his parents, having gone up to see the uphill side of their acreage the previous day. There had been a very bad fire back in 2007 but the landscape seemed to be recovering some nine years later.

“Actually, we thought we might plant some more native conifer trees and shrubs in a few areas that a specialist suggested might suffer from erosion.” Victoria replied. “We're stewards of this land now so it's up to us to take care of it.” she added.

“Yeah, I see your point,” their son offered up, thinking about how some furs only wanted to clear the land and build shoddy homes on it for the sake of turning a profit. “I guess after we eat, Dad and I can go over to my place and get that big desk he's been bugging me to give him,” he suggested. “It would be his big, imposing desk to sit behind.”

“I appreciate your giving me that desk, Son.” Tor told him. “I'll take very good care of it.”

Mitch was packing a few things for his trip to the Immortal Couple's homeworld, a couple of changes of clothes and his toiletries. While he packed, he kept thinking this was a big mistake on his part, to go put them under house arrest. What he was mostly afraid of was the possibility of the stallion still harboring some residual magical abilities from being on planet IS-51322.

That though really scared him, the possibility that he could be destroyed on the spot by Torvald for just suggesting they be put under arrest. As far as he knew, Tor and his mate Victoria were just doing their job as they were directed and nobody along the way told them that they might have to answer to the Celestial Police. His musings were derailed by his wife entering the room.

“Mitchell, are you packed yet?” she asked, picking her bag up and putting the strap over her shoulder. He looked up to see she was wearing some jeans, a conservative pale pink short sleeve blouse and her brown casual flats. He liked it when she braided her hair, her long, black tresses being almost waist length.

“I'm as packed as I will ever be,” he replied, zipping up his pack and slinging over one shoulder. “I guess we shouldn't delay the inevitable. Let's go have them transport us to IS-17429 so we can meet with Torvald and Victoria.”

“Mitchell, you have a bad feeling about this one, don't you?” his wife asked as they drove over to the Investigative Branch headquarters in their electric Vauxhall Vectra sedan.

“I can't lie to you, Lisa. I have a *very* bad feeling about this.” he admitted to his mate. “They're a real nice couple, Hon. He has an exemplary police work record and she is an assistant manager of a real estate agency. They have numerous friends that have all vouched for them so you can see why I'm hesitant to do this to them.”

“Well, then don't go put them under house arrest and just tell the court they couldn't be found,” she suggested, giving him a crooked smile.

“Can't do that, Lisa. My boss has already filed a complaint against them with the court. I have a bad feeling Dave will be my undoing yet.” That little snippet of information made her frown.

“I can't tell you how much this upsets me, Mitch. I don't want to be harvesting your fruit each fall.” she brought up. It certainly wouldn't be the first time an investigator was 'sanctioned' by either the Gods or the

Consortium and it wouldn't be the last time that it happened.

“I can't say I would want you to be doing that either,” he chimed in, knowing it might happen anyway. “Well, let's just see where this takes us,” he suggested, looking around at the scenery. Just as well enjoy it while he could, since it might be the last time he would be mobile in this planet. It would tough to move around afterward if he was unfortunate enough to be 'sanctioned' for his actions.

Brett was kneeling in front of Dana, looking up anxiously, waiting to see if his wife was going to be okay or if he needed to intervene in the situation. She had finally decided to attempt putting that support belt on by herself, having the forethought to have her hubby stand by, just in case. He was relieved when her eyes seemed to focus again and the color returned to her nose and tongue.

“Oh ... wow ...” she said softly, gently putting her paws to her belly and pressing in just slightly. Her eyes seemed unfocused again for just a moment, then she closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

“You're okay, right?” the male tiger asked, putting his paws to her hips to steady her. She nodded, not very convincingly.

“Um, yeah, I think so ...” She stopped talking to sit down on the bed and get her breath back. “That hurt,” she added, still grimacing a bit. Her incision had healed rather nicely but the pain of having that C-Section done was still sticking with her for the moment.

“The doctor said you might be in pain for some time, Hon.” he pointed out. “Let me help you stand up, then I'll help you out to your rocker. It's almost time for Sabrina's feeding.”

“That couldn't come none too soon for me,” she replied, getting herself steeled for the pain that would shoot through her when she stood up. “Brett, my breasts are so full right now it's painful.” she shared with him. “If Sabrina doesn't finish me, I'll have to use that pump again.”

“Well, let me help you up,” he said as he stood as close as he could to her and slipped his arms under her armpits. He gave her a three count, then helped her to stand up. She still let out a small groan in reply.

“I hope I start getting better soon. I can't have you stay home with me or have my family take care of me all the time.” she suggested.

“Just give it another few days, Hon. Maybe you'll feel better and I can leave you by yourself for half the day or so.” He retorted as he helped her to the nursery.

They made their way to the nursery, Brett helping his wife to sit down in her rocker. They had stopped just momentarily to take a picture of Sabrina napping quietly in a cute pose. Dad carefully picked up his daughter and helped mom to get her situated in her arms. The little femme quietly began to suckle, getting her belly filled again.

“Um, Brett, I've been thinking about something,” she offered up. “I keep thinking that Sabrina might be immortal.” That got his attention.

“Hon, why do you think that?” he asked, sitting down next to her. She gave him a pensive smile, then sighed.

“Um, Sabrina's belly button looks like she's a lot older than she really is.” Dana pointed out to her mate. She pulled back the blanket that covered the little one and showed him just to reinforce her statement. He looked closely, nodding his head. Sabrina did look like she might have been several years old in that respect, not newborn. “I'm thinking we need to talk with Dad about this. Look at Bradley, his daughter Nancy and his brother Ronald. They're all immortals so this is really bothering me.”

“Do you feel up to a ride over to your parent's house?” he asked, knowing this meant a lot to his Significant Other.

“Um, yeah. Maybe tomorrow morning when I've rested up a bit, we can go over and talk to Dad about this.”

Mala was helping Willi Marie set the dinner table, putting out the plates and silverware for them. She had been invited to have a meal with them, since she had been helping Wilhelmine to understand the various laws and regulations of the Consortium. Willi was busy herself, trying to cook and keep her mother out of the kitchen.

“Mom! That's way too much Tabasco sauce in the gravy!” she blurted out, trying to shoo her mother back into the dining area.

“That is not! You kits loved it when I made the gravy like that!” Iva retorted, giving her daughter a hug. “I hope your little ones like their food fiery,” she added, sneaking a bit of ground chili powder into the mashed potatoes.

“I'm hoping this meal is all I've been told about,” Mala stated, straightening the centerpiece again. It was a vase with roses that were a vivid fluorescent orange hue from Mala's home world. “It is very hard to find beings that cook with fire spices.”

“Trust me,” Willi offered up, “if you like hot, I do hot. Well, more like *HOT!*, I've been told by Tasha.” She smiled at the remembrance of Tasha's first run-in with her famous Five Alarm chili. The way the femme equine made it, the concoction doesn't taste that hot at first but after a while, the subtle blend of chili peppers do their thing. Tasha damned near drown herself at the kitchen sink trying to put the fire out.

“I'm concerned it might not be spicy enough,” the blue femme retorted. She was munching on a Scotch Bonnet pepper that was supposed to be a decoration on the table, not a snack. That made Iva gasp at the thought of eating something that potent.

“Would you like me to stir-fry you a few of those to put on your meat?” the blond equine asked, smiling at her mom's reaction to Mala's nibbling.

“I would really enjoy that,” she replied. “Maybe six or so?”

“Six stir-fried Scotch Bonnets coming up!” Willi said cheerily as she prepared to slice up the peppers. While she put on some nitrile gloves to handle the cut peppers with, her mother came back into the kitchen with her.

“Wilhelmine, you haven't said much about our meeting with Bethany.” her mother brought up. Iva

watched as Willi stopped slicing the peppers, then sighed. It was obvious that the young mother-to-be was upset by all of this and her outgoing personality was a mask that she was hiding behind.

“Mom, I ... I'm afraid,” she offered up, going back to working to get her mind off of the situation.

Mala put her paw on Willi's shoulder, giving it a friendly squeeze before speaking. “You shouldn't be afraid, Wilhelmine. This is very natural, just like the sun coming up each morning.” the blue femme put forth. That made Wilhelmine look up, trying to stifle a sob before she replied.

“I know, Mala. It's just ... It's like this; I don't want my children to grow up like I did. I don't hate my mother for not telling me because that was her prerogative.” Willi looked over at Mala, just to see if she was following her thoughts. “I want my little ones to know who and what they are from as early an age as possible.”

Bradley drove up in his brother Ronald's driveway, parking his 2010 Ford Falcon coupe not too near the garage door. Getting his photo album and a box of fresh breakfast pastries in his paws, he got out and went into the garage to meet with his sibling over an early breakfast.

“Hi Brad,” the younger Svensen said after he looked up from his project, a custom leather case for his latest find, a vintage Pentax K1000 35mm camera. “Well, you're looking rather young this morning,” he added, giving his elder brother a hard time.

“Hi Ron. Still working on that camera case?” he asked, sitting down on a stool near the bench. “Yeah, I decided to skip the gray fur coloring. I just as well admit it, I need to move on with my life. As should you.”

“Yeah, maybe you're right,” Ron replied. He touched his muzzle, thinking about how much time he spent trying to look his actual age.

“Here's the pictures I took down in California. You might like the ones I took of grandpa Torvald and grandma Victoria.” Brad stated. He put the album on the workbench and flipped it to a particular page for his sibling. He was sure his little brother would get a kick out of the pictures on that page.

“Oh ... My ... Gawd!” Ron spat out, looking at the family resemblance between the males in the picture. “You know, I've never seen more than two blond stallions together in my whole life! Here's three!” he stated, looking at Torvald, Axel and Brad all standing shoulder to shoulder, mugging for the camera with swords and axes. “Grandpa told me on the phone that you and Axel looked like brothers.” he added.

“Yeah, he did say that he would give you a call.” Brad proffered up. He picked up another work in progress, a custom case for his own pet project, a Polaroid 110B Land Camera that had been converted from Type 42 bridge film to pack film. “Um, Ron, could you tool this case for me or is it too late?” he asked, noting it was partially assembled at this point in time.

“No, I can take it apart to tool it, Brad. It's just tacked together to see how it fits the camera at this stage. Just look in my design book and get some ideas for it. All the pieces are right in that same box.” he pointed out. “By the way, that 110B takes great pictures.” he offered up.

“Couldn't resist the lure of pack film, eh?” the elder brother asked.

“Sorry, I just couldn't help myself. That black and white Polaroid-Fuji film gives your work that old-fashioned appearance that you just can't do digitally.” He was still looking at the pictures, reading the captions on the little cards beneath each image. He stopped to carefully examine the large picture of the Immortal Couple.

“Something catch your eye?” Brad asked.

“Um, yeah ... this picture of Grandpa and I guess whom we should refer to as our Grandma Victoria.” he admitted. “She's very pretty in this shot. The light flatters her. Nice shot.”

“That photo doesn't do her justice.” Brad stated. “She's so much prettier in furson. I think you will really like her.” The elder brother looked up to see Ron's wife come through the door to the garage, refreshments in paw. The solid red chestnut equine femme smiled as she spoke.

“What are you two troublemakers up to? No good I'll bet,” she put forth as she sat some drinks on Ron's workbench. “I heard you drive up,” she told her brother-in-law, passing him a cold glass of milk.

“Thanks, Brenda. I brought that album by for you two to look at,” he pointed out. She looked down to see a picture of Torvald, Axel, Bradley and Nancy, all giving the camera some very theatrical stares.

“Will you look at that! Four blond equines, trying to be anything but serious!” she blurted out before laughing at the picture. “You two can't take a normal picture, can you?” she added.

“You know better than that,” Ronald stated. “We never could look normal for a picture. Just look at our school pictures! That's proof enough!” She rolled her eyes.

“Okay, let me see what your Grandpa and Grandma look like,” she asked, putting Ron's orange drink near him. He flipped back a few pages to show her the picture of the Immortal Couple. She studied it for a bit, then smiled. “I see where you two get your good looks from.” she proffered up. “So, any plans to go see them again?” she asked.

“We were actually thinking of having them come up here and visit for a bit,” Ron offered. “They're both retired from full time work so we discussed having them come and stay with us for a bit, then with Brad for the remainder. Grandpa says he hasn't been here since 1893 and he really wants to see the new Space Needle.” While they were talking, Brenda was still studying the pictures. When she read the caption under the picture of Victoria and Valerie, she gasped.

“Um, what startled you?” Brad asked.

“I went to school with the Connell kits when my parents lived in Ceres! Vicki was my best friend in high school!” the chestnut femme blurted out. She then turned to find the cordless phone. “Brad, what's their phone number?” she asked, getting ready to call a long-lost friend.

Torvald finished shaving his beard, rubbing his chin with his hand to make sure he had gotten every stray whisker from his lightly tanned facial skin. Satisfied he had done a decent job, he set to combing his collar length blond hair. He combed it back, frowning when it fell into a part again. Getting a bit of mousse to help the situation, he worked it into his hair before using a fine-toothed comb to straighten it out.

Looking into the mirror, he observed Victoria wrapping a fluffy white towel around herself as she stepped from the shower. She put her long, black hair up in another towel, then slipped on her shower shoes.

“Hey there, Beautiful,” he said softly as he walked up to her, giving her a loving hug. Her arms went around his waist, hugging him back. He put his finger under her chin, lifting her face to look up at him. She smiled, her copper colored eyes sparkling, her lips sliding open in a smile to show off her perfectly aligned white teeth. He kissed her, then tugged at her towel. It fell loose, held in place only by their bodies against one another. She tugged his towel in turn, loosening it from his waist. They stepped apart momentarily, allowing the two pieces of terrycloth to flutter to the floor.

He pulled her close to him, his hands feeling the smooth texture of the soft light mahogany hued skin of her back, her warm body pressed up against his lightly tanned muscular physique. She looked up at him, smiled and opened her mouth as if to say something. The sound that came from her mouth sounded more like an ... alarm clock?

“Victoria, what is it?” he asked, confused because she was still making this strange noise. He loosened his hug, letting her step away from him just a bit. She still made that noise, tilting her head and frowning her brow as if confused herself. That noise droned on but now another sound could be heard. A femme voice. A femme voice demanding something. And it sounded urgent ...

POP!

Torvald was jarred from his dream state and back to the real world in a harsh way by his mate giving him 'gentle' direction.

“Turn off that damned alarm clock!” the tigress yelled, practically shoving the stallion from the bed to get his attention. “Really! Why did you set an alarm clock?!?” she mused loudly.

“Sorry, Hon,” he apologized, catching himself before he hit the floor. He fumbled around on his night stand, frantically trying to find that clock before ... never mind, she threw her extra pillow at him to 'urge' him on.

“I think you knocked it onto the floor,” she offered up, looking up at the ceiling, thinking it would have been nice to have slept in at least until the sun came up. It was still not quite daybreak outside.

“I found it,” he said as he shut it off and looked to see if he was in deep baechu kimchi with his mate. She was scowling at him but her ears weren't laid back, a sign she wasn't totally upset with him.

“Torvald, unless you're going to work, you *will not* set an alarm, do you hear me?” she asked, still scowling at him. All she wanted was to sleep in for a change. Was that really asking too much?

“I hear you loud and clear,” he replied, setting the timepiece back on his nightstand. His mate smiled at him right before heading to their master bathroom to shower up. Maybe he was still her good graces.

The stallion put on some clean underwear then his sweatpants before following the tigress into the bathroom. While she showered up, he trimmed his beard with a new Braun trimmer she had purchased for him. He was still getting the hang of using it, having to trim his beard just a bit shorter than he had wanted to due to a few miscalculations in which trimming guide to use.

“How did that trimmer work, Hon,” she asked as she stepped out of the shower and headed for their full-body fur drying booth.

“Well, it does a great job if you use the right attachments,” he replied, thinking this was a minor *Déjà vu* moment. She had a towel wrapped around her body and another around her now-shoulder-length jet black hair.

“Come here so I can see,” she asked over the top of the drying booth door. She smiled once she could observe the outcome, a tight but carefully trimmed stallion's face. “It isn't bad, Hon. A little short but it looks very neat.” she added, giving him a kiss. Victoria then begrudgingly turned and pushed the 'Start' button, her fur beginning to dry due to the miniature warm air cyclone building up inside the enclosure. After a few moments, she started using a slicking brush to keep her fur from being too fluffy.

“I was thinking, maybe today we could ...” Torvald stopped talking when he heard the phone ringing. “Um, I need to go get that,” he stated, thinking it was odd for someone to be calling this early in the morning.

“Torvald,” he greeted the caller on the other end, not quite putting two and two together when he observed the Caller ID displaying the phone number with a 206 area code.

“Hi, this is Brenda, Ron's wife,” the femme on the other end told him. “Um, I hope I didn't wake you up.” she added, sounding a little sheepish.

“No, we're up,” he retorted, smiling at her obvious embarrassment.

“Listen, Is Vicki nearby?” she asked.

“Um, not in the room but she's here.” he replied.

“You're not going to believe this.” Brenda began, “Victoria and I went to school together. We were best friends in High School.”

“Oh really?” he mused in a conspiratorial tone.

“Yeah, we were. I lost track of her after she married that tiger and I moved up here to go to college.”

“I see ...” Tor said quietly, looking over to see his mate, still brushing her fur after stepping out of the booth.

“Let me talk to her but don't tell her who it is, please?” Brenda asked.

“It would be my pleasure!” he replied, smiling widely. This would be fun. He turned and headed for the bathroom, trying to hide his amusement while he prepared to give his mate the phone.

“Um, Tor, what's up?” Victoria asked, noting his posture and demeanor. Something *was* up.

“♪ I know something that you don't know! ♪” Torvald taunted his mate, smiling at the look on her muzzle. This was going to be priceless. He was trying to remember where he had put his little Kodak point-and -shoot camera as he gave her the pawset.

“What is it?” she asked hesitantly, wondering what could be up. He didn't reply, he just gave her the phone.

“Um, hello?” Victoria said into the receiver hesitantly, hoping this wasn't going to be something bad.

“Hi, this is Brenda, Ronald's wife.” the femme on the other end stated.

“Oh, Hi. Um, why are you calling so early in the morning? Is something going on up there that we need to know about?” the tigress asked.

“No, everything's okay up here. I just realized nobody got around to telling you my maiden last name. It's Cartwright.” There was moment of silence while that information registered in the tigress' brain.

“Um, Brenda Mae Cartwright, that went to Ceres High School? My best friend in high school?” Victoria asked very carefully.

“That's me, Vicki.” she replied. The tigress' eyes grew wide and her mouth slid open.

“Oh, My ...” Victoria was stunned. “Bren, I haven't heard from you in a long time!” she finally pointed out. She never noticed the pictures Torvald was taking of her.

Mitchell woke up, blinking to clear his eyes and yawning widely. Looking at the clock on the nightstand, he observed the time; 9:37 a.m.

“Lisa, wake up,” he said softly, giving his tigress wife a nudge under the covers. “Hon, it's after nine in the morning.” he added. She stirred a bit, then yawned herself.

“Um, is it that late? It feels like it's ...” She stopped talking when she paid attention to her internal chrono. It was actually nine thirty three, according to her communications implant. That had to be accurate because she had synchronized with NIST when they arrived here. A quick check confirmed she was right about the time.

“You know you freak me out when you do that,” Mitch stated, giving her a crooked smile. “I'm always afraid you're vapor-locking on me when you get that blank look on your face.”

“I would have thought you would be used to being around a chimera by now, Sweetie.” she suggested. She kissed him on the shoulder as she walked by him to get to the bathroom first.

“I dunno, Hon. It's still scary. Especially that control box you insist on carrying around. What if it fell into the wrong hands?” he pointed out.

“Mitch, remember to say 'paw' instead of 'hand' here. They're a fully anthropomorphic society. There's no humans here, in case you forgot.” she brought up.

The tiger looked down at the floor, nodding in agreement. “I'll have to remember that.”

“You know, there's a Denny's up the street a mile or so. Can we eat there, Hon?” she asked. “I think

they're the same as the ones on our home planet.” she added.

“Yeah, I guess that would be alright.” He got up and stretched out, arching his now-supple feline back to get the kinks out. “Yeah, breakfast at Denny's then over to see the Svensens. Gah, I hate this job,” he offered up to nobody in particular. “We're going to go make their day for something I think should be overlooked, now that I've been working on this case and weighed the facts.”

Lisa looked out of the doorway to see Mitch shaking his head. “Sweetie, how so?” she inquired.

“Well, nobody ever told them about the laws governing the parallel universes. Without the knowledge, they had no idea they were doing wrong.” he put forth.

She still looked on at him, giving thought to the situation. “Maybe the courts will be lenient.” she mused.

“Gah. Maybe I can pull in a marker or two and get them some decent counsel. They don't deserve this in any form.” he allowed. “I'm really apprehensive about this, considering the Consortium's dim view of us. I'm especially bothered by their friend Aslaug Larsdatter. That equine female seems like the type that would chase us to the ends of the universe to get even for anything that would happen to the Svensens.”

Lisa thought about this for a moment, then shrugged her shoulders. She gave her hubby a hug, then kissed him on the cheek. “Come on, Mitch. Let's get dressed, go eat some breakfast then go see them. Maybe this will all work out for the best.”