

The characters Jeffrey Andrews, Na'Krista Nahala Keth, Kamram Keth, Na'Kesta Keth, Tegram Keth, Traci McDonald, Bosteg Haas, Kestam Ramm, Treman Baze, Merret Treet, Tascal Hone, Hallett Trasc, Hammet & Na'Kayla Nahala (nee Keth) Craine along with the characters Torvald and Victoria Svensen are the property of Kellan Meig'h and may not be used without express written permission.

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“Scribe”

by Kellan Meig'h

Chapter Nine

“A Rare Opportunity Realized”

Jeff sat still in the audiologist's examining chair aboard *The Oraskinal*, head tilted to the right while the Elazi doctor made an impression of his left ear. The procedure wasn't that hard, it was just the rubber wedge in his mouth, holding it open widely that was the annoyance. Apparently it was necessary so the earplugs to be made from the impressions would be tight in his ear canals.

The need for the plugs was simple; the propulsion unit of *The Flagship Korrallid* made a low-pitched growl that would eventually drive him bonkers. At first, Jeff said he would just deal with it. After wearing headphones that replicated the dissonance, he was sure the sound would drive him wild in short order.

A piece of foam had been inserted deeply in his ear canal, then the doctor had filled the passage with a two part rubber material. He would have to sit still for a few minutes until the material had set up firm. It amazed him how the ear doctor had extracted that first impression in his right ear so easily, since his own molded shooting plugs were so difficult to get in and out. Jeff really hoped that the noise dampers would do their job, since he didn't relish the idea of being heavily medicated during the two week passage to Elazia.

“I am finished for now,” the doctor stated after the plug and wedge had been removed. “Your noise dampers will be ready tomorrow, Jeffrey Andrews. If you would like, I can call you when they have been completed.”

“That would be fine.” Jeff replied. “I can be here in a few hours after you call, unless I can get a ride in a shuttle.” They were joined at that moment by Na'Krista, who was dressed in her off-duty favorites, blue jeans and a vintage San Jose Sharks sweatshirt.

“Are you ready?” she asked her future *One Love*.

“I'm done here.” Jeff replied.

“Our ride is waiting for us so we must hurry. The shuttle to Outpost Auburn is leaving in a few moments.”

The two lovers made their way off of *The Oraskinal* and made a mad dash across the blacktop to *The Zenith*, a small ten-seat shuttle. There were several occupants already onboard, including one Tegram Keth.

“Tegram, so good to see you up and around.” Jeff offered up as he sat down across from the pale Elazi.

“Traci suggested I get out and get some fresh air while she works on our computer systems. I was going to visit with Rommer Kraf this afternoon and come back by shuttle late this evening.”

“Why don't you stay overnight with us?” Jeff suggested.

“If I would not be in your way.” Teg asked.

“We would welcome your company.” Krista put forth.

“Very well. I will stay in your home tonight. I will need to be back in Auburn by noon for a ride back to *The Oraskinal*.”

“We can have you back by noon.” Jeff offered up. “I need to pick up my earplugs tomorrow and make sure they work correctly.”

“Then I will make sure you have transportation from Auburn tomorrow.” Tegram offered.

“I think it's settled. You will stay with us tonight.” Krista stated with a wide smile on her face.

Jeff had fixed some venison steaks for their dinner and after they had finished consuming their meal, the trio retired to the living room to enjoy the fireplace. The host had poured some genuine moonshine, made locally, for their after-dinner drink and supplied some sugar wafer cookies that he had baked earlier.

“I have enjoyed the meal greatly,” Tegram offered up, holding his glass aloft for a toast. “May the two of you find peace and happiness together.”

Jeff reciprocated. “Even though she is not here right now, May you and Traci find happiness in each other.”

After the toast had been consumed, Tegram poured another shot and sat back in his chair with a serious look on his face.

“Jeffrey, there is something we must share with you, since you will soon become an Elazi citizen. It is very important that you know our dark past.”

“Okay, Tegram. Go ahead.”

“Back in our past, some three thousand-odd years ago, we were a warring race. We were like your Vikings in a way. We fought each other, sacked one another's villages and killed those who would not become part of our houses as low-paid labor. It was not a high point in our history, since we were on a path that would have ended up in the total annihilation of our race.

“There came a birth within the now-extinct House Tal-Semmarai, one that appeared to be what you would refer to as a throw-back, an artifact. He was Al'Merrit'an Temmer'lan, a solid white. You see, sometimes solid whites were afflicted like Al'Merrit'an, with stubby hands, short legs and white irises with pupils that were vertically slit. These artifacts generally were very mentally stunted and did not live beyond twenty years or so. He was different.”

Teg took a sip of his liquor and continued.

“You see, Al'Merrit'an, traditional spelling, was a very brilliant Elazi. What he lacked in height or physical ability was far overshadowed by his knowledge and understanding. He was so brilliant, he was asked to be a war priest by his house. With some reservation, he accepted.

“He served his house, helping to keep his warriors safe by praying for revelation. One revelation given to him came from *Od'Tra the Wise*, concerning the question and answer to war. When he gave this revelation to his house, they had him locked up, concerned that he had lost his sanity. After the house council deliberated for months, he was released and the members of House Semmarai went far and wide, sharing this revelation.

“As you might guess, the first ones to share this information were not taken seriously, sometimes murdered for professing what was seen by some as heresy. It was not until long after Al'Merrit'an had passed away that we declared global peace. It was a great day for the entire Elazi race. Peace and prosperity had been given to us by that revelation.

“Two-thousand, five hundred years later, the Bil-Cmela showed up, sending a scout ship dirtside. We had gained some technology but we were not a space-faring race at the time. The Bil engineers that had been sent to the planet surface were looking for what you call aluminum to repair their mother ship. When they realized just how much raw bauxite Elazia possessed, they returned one year later with a huge standing army. It took less than two days to subjugate the major population centers of the planet.”

“I see.” Jeff commented. “They just planned to take over.”

“The Bil-Cmela took control of our planet.” Teg corrected. “We have what is probably the largest open pit mine on any populated planet that we have been to. The Bil-Cmela made sure we worked as many hours as was physically possible. If someone fell from overwork, we would push them aside and continue on. We shipped billions of tons of refined aluminum off the planet, one transfer ship at a time. I remember that well, since I was born nineteen years before the insurrection. I labored in the *San'Rah'Al* mine and refinery complex, starting at my fifteenth year of age.

“The Bil-Cmela made one major mistake in their subjugation, though. They began to teach us to use their superior technology, so they could sit back and relax while we did the work. We learned all that we could and then we learned the Bil language to read their technical manuals. We were poised to strike and that day came when it was a Bil-Cmela holy day.

“They left *The Korrallid* in our care, a very stupid move, to come dirtside for what you call Summer Solstice. When their day-long celebration began, we locked them out of their computer systems so they could no longer control any ship function. Some ships still dirtside such as *The*

Oraskinal, originally a material transfer ship, were taken into orbit, stranding the Bil-Cmela. We then mounted war against those on our planet while others, myself included, took *The Korrallid* back to the Bil-Cmela homeworld. Once there, we declared open war upon them.”

“So, you took the fight to them.” Jeff mused.

“Yes, we did.” Teg agreed. “I was onboard *The Korrallid* and I observed the carnage when the first bombs were launched at their major cities. We then sent down scout ships that we had armored and armed, ripping apart their infrastructure. We nearly annihilated them and almost put them back at a level of civilization you would call The Stone Age. Barely three days after the bombardment began, the Bil-Cmela were calling for cease-fire and unconditional surrender.

“We accepted their surrender, on conditions. They knew how to create a 'Singularity' which we could not, since we did not have the raw materials or equipment to use for that. The Bil race are magnificent ship builders with no exception. They would create our ships, the 'Singularities' that would power them and we in turn would peacefully trade with them. They also had to sign a peace pact that stated they would never again leave their solar system with war or subjugation on their minds.”

“That is kind of dark, isn't it?” Jeff commented.

“We were not proud of what we did to the Bil-Cmela, Jeff. We spent a considerable amount of Elazi resources to rebuild what we had destroyed, trying to make things right. In the end, the Bil-Cmela told us that we had done enough and that they were appreciative of our efforts to remediate the results of our warring rage.

“The Elazi Global Senate decided that we would use our newly found space-faring abilities to contact other worlds and establish peaceful trade relations. We had done just that for over one hundred years, until your General Calhoun decided to declare war upon us. Up until now, we have been trying to be 'tactful' in our defense. That time is almost over.”

“Tegram? We are not going to return to our warring ways, are we?” Krista asked reverently.

“We aren't going to become senseless killing machines Na'Krista, but we will be going on the offense. Our target at the moment is General Calhoun. We want to take him alive and unharmed but if that will not work, then we will take him out.”

“Who has gone after him?” she wanted to know.

“Ninth Squadron. Na'Kayla will be leading the Ninth and part of the Fourth in a coordinated attack on General Calhoun's safe-house.”

That thought made the buff-colored Elazi femme blanch.

Sub-commander Na'Kayla Craine brought her platoon leaders around a table where she had put out a map of the area surrounding Folsom Lake. She pointed out an area on the West side of the

lake and put a small marker on it.

“This is the safe-house General Calhoun is using,” Na'Kayla explained. “Apparently it was an abandoned property where he had the electricity and water turned back on to so they could occupy it. It has a partially fortified gate in front but I suggest we approach by water. There is a trail from the shore that we can use to access the back yard of his hideout. I have rented four pontoon boats that will carry forty-eight of us. The rest can infiltrate the property from the main street. The fence in front runs about seventy feet in each direction from the gate and there are no additional fences past that.”

Na'Kayla motioned to Temmet 'Tim' Treet'an, a solid black trooper, who began to place differently shaped markers on the map.

“I have performed recon on the property to confirm his soldiers stand guard in these general locations.” 'Tim' put forth. “We would have better luck with a Southerly assault for the ground based troops. The woods are closer to the house on that side. The water approach is only good until the lawn in back is made. Once on the grass, the troopers will be in plain sight. If we wait until dusk, when the soldiers are beginning their last-meal, we might take them quickly.”

Na'Kayla put another document on the table, a blueprint of the house.

“We know the General uses this room as an office,” she put forth, pointing out a room on the back corner of the house. “During the evening, he keeps the blinds closed. That will work in our favor. I would prefer we use a very quiet tactic to literally sneak into their midst. Any questions?”

“Is lethal force being allowed?” a smoke gray trooper asked.

“Last resort is lethal force. Do whatever you can to subdue the soldiers without killing them, if you can. If you see no alternatives, take them out.” the Sub-commander replied. “I know I'm not good with that but those are my orders.”

Na'Kayla watched the armored troop shuttles take off, then she motioned for the pontoon boats to begin their short trip down the lake. She didn't like the prospects if they were unsuccessful in their approach to the property. That back yard was both a blessing and an impediment at the same time. The field would not be littered with obstacles but they would be in plain sight.

Several minutes later, a short communication from her *One Love* let her know the Fourth Squadron was in the woods, awaiting her landing. She knew the impending assault was near so she bowed her head and said a prayer for their safety. Once she had completed her request for intervention, the dock came into view.

Na'Kayla's squad quietly disembarked their transportation and kept a low profile as they made their way up to the back yard. Taking a careful look around, she spotted no soldiers in the suggested guard posts. Signaling Fourth Squadron, she led her troopers toward the house.

They held at a strategic point while the second group made their way to the front door.

Na'Kayla could hear voices inside the kitchen, laughing and joking. They must have been right in the middle of the meal period. Nodding to her troopers, she clicked her microphone twice, the signal for the Fourth to move.

Once inside the home, pandemonium broke out from the RUSA soldiers attempting to neutralize any Elazi trooper they could. Due to the armor the alien forces wore, this was causing 5.56 NATO rounds to ricochet around the room. That was bad for the RUSA forces, since their armor was not as substantial.

Four soldiers made an attempt to hold the kitchen but they were faced down by almost a dozen Elazi troopers. Three of the renegade soldiers were quickly neutralized by some railgun fired two ounce beanbag rounds fired at them from the dining room. The fourth tried to slip around the end of the breakfast bar only to come face to face with an Elazi trooper holding a charged Squad Impulse Rifle.

At least a dozen or more RUSA soldiers were trying to keep the Elazi from the hallway that would lead them to the study, failing miserably due to their inferior armor. Several Squad Impulse Rifles were being used judiciously to take them out without possible loss of life. The troopers had been directed that lethal force was to be used as a last resort and they were trying to stick to that order.

One of the RUSA soldiers cut loose with an M60 Automatic Rifle, forcing the Elazi to retreat momentarily. The Troopers responded by firing a salvo from their Impulse Rifles, laying waste to the American soldiers nearest to Na'Kayla's forces. A volley of beanbag rounds pretty much put an end to the altercation, once the RUSA soldiers realized they were outgunned and short several key players, including one Captain Brandon, who should have been present and giving direction for their defensive actions.

Once the excitement had calmed down, an extensive search of the house was undertaken. The troopers turned the house upside down, only to fail at finding the rogue officer. Knowing that he had not left the building, a further search found General Calhoun hiding in the attic. The belligerent officer was brought before Na'Kayla, kicking and screaming, to be formally charged.

"Who the hell are you?" he spat out once the Sub-commander had removed her helmet.

"I am Sub-commander Craine of the Elazian Trans-Atmospheric Forces." she replied. "I am charging you with war crimes against citizens of Elazia and The United States."

"You cannot charge . . ." He bit off his words when the pale Elazian female soldier brought forth her fighting knife in a flash and put it to the side of his throat, right under his left ear.

"I want nothing more than to kill you slowly, you *Bas'ra M'Taagh!* You killed my sister's first *One Love* when you ordered projectile fire upon *The Great Hope!*" Na'Kayla stated in a malevolent tone. "It would make all of us glad to see your organs removed, cooked and fed to you before you died!!"

"You wouldn't dare kill me!" the rogue commander spat out.

"You think I would not?" Na'Kayla asked, right before she pulled her knife against his skin lightly, bringing a bright line of red. "I heard what your RUSA forces did to our people. It would please me to no end to kill you in the slowest, most painful manner possible."

"You're crazy, you insane bitch," General Calhoun muttered under his breath.

"You dare to call me a bitch?!?" Na'Kayla blurted out. "That is the most disrespectful thing you could have done, considering the fact that I have a surgically sharp blade held to your throat! On my planet, you would now have to answer to my husband and I'm sure he would have no problem with beating you senseless." They were joined at that moment by a very upset Hammet Craine.

"I hear from my fellow troopers that you have disrespected our squad leader who happens to be my *One Love*." Hammet put forth with just a touch of anger in his voice. "I will give you but a few moments to retract your statement and express sorrow for making such a grievous mistake. If you do not, I will take you outside and we will talk about it. I think I do not have to mention that I will use my fists to talk with."

General Calhoun looked Trooper Craine over, noting his size and apparent bulk. Even out of that armor, the RUSA officer knew this Elazi would mop the floors with him. In an attempt to keep his life, the general decided to eat a huge helping of humble pie.

"Uh, Sub-commander Craine, I apologize for my outburst. It was a statement that I regret making. I should not have said what I did."

Na'Kayla nodded as she sheathed her knife. "I accept your apology. I will be taking you into custody and you will be charged with crimes against Humanity and Elazia. Do you have anything to say to those charges leveled against you?"

"I'll wait until I have spoken to a lawyer." the general replied. "I will say this; I have many good officers that will continue my fight. We may not outnumber you but we will not give up now, not ever."

"Suit yourself." Na'Kayla said as she turned to one of her squad leaders. "Get him to Outpost Roseville. Try to make sure he arrives mostly intact."

Dark had come by the time the last of the RUSA soldiers had been loaded aboard a shuttle headed for Outpost Roseville. Na'Kayla and Hammet were sitting on the front porch of General Calhoun's former temporary hideout, enjoying the quiet while they waited with a few others for their ride back to their base.

"Ham, do you think Sanmet Krol was right? We should have left when we were attacked in the beginning?" the pale gray Elazi femme posed.

"He was right, my *One Love*." the smoke gray one replied. "We should have left, but it is too late now. We have an obligation to eradicate this problem."

Na'Kayla gave thought to that. She had been brought here in the first wave of troopers after *The Great Hope* had been destroyed by General Calhoun's misguided soldiers. They had been told to be defensive only, not openly trying to injure or kill the RUSA forces. It was clear that tactic had failed because the rogue soldiers would just continue an assault, even when it was clear that they would fail.

Na'Kayla looked at the nearby homes, wondering what living on Earth full-time would be like. It was possible that the Elazi would maintain a presence on this planet once the impromptu war was over. She also wondered if Hammet would stay, if she were permanently assigned here. He had been making comments as of lately that indicated he was ready to go home any time now. If it came down to that, she was sure she would tender her resignation and return to her home world, since she had served the minimum number of years of service.

The gray femme thought about her home on Elazia. It was large, by Elazi standards which meant it was huge by Earth measure. The engineers that had designed it were veritable masters at natural cooling systems so her home was almost too cool in the summer months. It was right across the road from her sister's home, which was convenient for them when they were in a visiting mood.

The Keth-Craine home was situated not far from her parent's home, which was a bonus. She could walk there in fifteen units of time or she could use a skimmer if it was handy. Kas'Madelle or Tefaal could be reached in just moments by general transit or by personal vehicle.

Na'Kayla wondered if she could take an Earth vehicle home with her. She had her eye on a new Ford F-100 pickup, a type of vehicle not found on Elazi. Vehicles tended to be either a comfortable passenger unit or a rough, simple utility vehicle. The very idea of a comfortable utility truck was just not heard of. It would be easy enough to convert a new vehicle to use an electric motor powered by a combination of induction and batteries.

There were some import rules that she would have to follow, though. The engine and transmission would have to be removed and left behind, as well as the fuel and emissions systems. Na'Kayla could then declare it as 'Yard Art', since it would not run. There were no rules against re-animating former vehicles, though. A number of Elazi drove Bil-Cmela manufactured vehicles, even though they were old and constantly in need of repair. A new truck, however shouldn't need much to keep it operational, since she would put together a 'spares kit' for her 'Yard Art' before they left for home. That is, if she would be allowed to go home.

Several days later found Jeff in an unusual state of alert, since he was going to be going up to *The Flagship Korrallid*, if only to to stow his clothing and personal effects in his assigned quarters for the trip. There was also the matter of his work assignments on board while they were under way. Everyone on board, with the exception of Ambassadors and Command Level officers, were expected to help with the daily maintenance chores.

He was currently sitting on his bed, watching Na'Krista put on the pressure suit that would be worn under her armor. Jeff likened it to a scuba diver's drysuit, only much thinner and it was possible that the suit possessed far more elasticity, too. He was making mental notes that would

help him don his own suit that was laying across his lap at the moment.

Krista looked over at her future husband and smiled. "Well, start putting it on. Once you get to the point that you need to squeeze your upper body into the suit, I'll help." she stated with a wink of her eye.

"Are you sure this will fit?" Jeff questioned.

"That suit will fit Hallett." she replied. "Just slip your feet into the suit, zipper in the back. Pull the legs up but remember, you will have to bend over to duck your head into the opening so don't pull it up too far."

The Earther shook out his undersuit and arranged it in front of him, zipper in the back as directed by his future wife. He slipped on the socks used to protect the suit from his toenails, as if they were sharp like Krista's, and put his legs down into the suit.

Jeff was surprised by the ease that his legs settled into the garment, hugging him closely due to the elasticity of the material. Copying the manner that Krista used in donning her suit, he put his arms into the sleeves and pulled them up to where he could get his hands through the wrist openings. Ducking his head through the zippered opening after he had stood up, he reached up, gently stretched the neck seal and pulled it over his head.

"Very good!" the female Elazi commented as she helped her future *One Love* to straighten the neck seal out. She then made him stand still while she tugged at the suit a bit here and there to settle it onto his body better. She then zipped it up for him.

"This isn't that bad," Jeff noted as he did a bit of straightening of the suit himself. He then began to put on his armor that would contain the pressure undersuit should they experience a sudden decompression out of the atmosphere. After a few minutes, he was ready for the sleeve to glove adapters.

It was a metal ring that contained an inner seal that was slipped onto his wrist, seal pointing toward his elbow. The sleeve of his pressure suit was pulled over the ring and then an o-ring was pushed over that, trapping the sleeve into a groove in the metal ring. His gloves would then lock to the metal ring, creating the seal to protect his hands from the vacuum. The inner wrist seal would protect his suit from depressurization, should a glove develop a leak. The assembly was finished by locking the metal rings to the wrists of his armor, making it easier to don and doff the gloves. The bubble helmet ring and seal was then installed, followed by his backpack, gloves and helmet.

"Communications check. Can you hear me?" Krista asked while she looked at his display on his left sleeve. She tapped the temperature control adjustments to an equivalent of sixty-eight degrees, just to make it more comfortable for Jeff.

"I hear you just fine." he replied. "Um, my ears just popped on me. Is this the normal pressure for the suit?" he asked.

"I didn't hear you through your helmet. Press the bottom button on the left side of the display to go into voice activation mode." she directed.

“How about now?” he asked after making that adjustment.

“I hear you clearly. What did you say before that I didn't hear?”

“My ears popped. Is this the right pressure for the suit?” Jeff asked.

“It is the same as on board ship.” She started to say something else when their radios picked up a signal.

“This is *The Talon*, calling Technician Na'Krista Keth. We are on final to your location.”

“*Talon*, this is Technician Keth. We are ready for equipment loading once you arrive.”

“Technician Keth, we are on the ground in front of Jeffrey Andrews' dwelling and we are powered down into idle mode. Please load through the aft rampway.”

They both put their environmental systems on standby and removed their helmets for now, since there was no reason to waste the oxygen supply and tax the CO₂ scrubbers. Once Jeff had removed his headgear, the sound of the Elazi craft outside could be clearly heard outside. Taking a deep breath, he followed his future mate down the stairs, towards an opportunity that had been realized by very few people before him; a trip into outer space.

Na'Krista and Jeff made their way through *The Oraskinal*, headed for the Ambassador's quarters where her parents were presently. Their digs had a wonderful port-side view that would be a thrill for Jeff to watch the scenery while they ascended out of the atmosphere. It was a short hike through the ship but eventually they arrived at the designated door.

“Mother, Father, we are here.” she announced through the comm set by the door.

“Come in!” her father said cheerfully in return through the speaker. The door slid open, revealing a rather large room. “Come in, please. We are going to launch in a few minutes, as soon as the loading deck is secure.” he added from where he stood, just inside the door.

Na'Kesta came into the room through a doorway to the adjoining room, carrying a small bottle and some glasses. She offered the glasses around, filled them and then Kam offered up a toast.

“To Jeffrey and his first trip outside the atmosphere.”

They all knocked back the drink so Jeff did likewise. Once again, it was that *Haad-N'Ga* that was being partaken. This time, the drink didn't seem so nasty to him. Maybe it was an acquired taste.

The small group was interrupted by an announcement throughout the ship;

“This is High Commander Dunmin Dorsett. Please make yourselves ready for takeoff. For our

two special passengers, lunch will occur in approximately ten minutes.”

Everyone put on their bubble helmets and Na'Krista made sure Jeff knew how to read his environmental control panel. She briefed him on the use of the intercom and temperature controls, just so he would feel secure. They then took up their seats that were arranged in a semi-circle in front of the viewing port.

Jeff felt the ship rumble deep within the bowels as the Singularity drive came on-line, then the ship shuddered like a small scout ship taking off. That's when he noticed the ground dropping away very slowly. The view changed as the ship turned to head Eastward and began to gain altitude. Not far off the port bow, an F-22 Raptor took up position, most likely an escort until *The Oraskinal* was too high for the Air Force jet to maintain contact.

The Earther had flown on both military and commercial aircraft but this was something entirely different. As they continued to climb, the view became breathtaking over the Rocky Mountains. He was sure that one could see into Canada if they had powerful-enough binoculars. Eventually, the sky became black, the curvature of the Earth's atmosphere could be seen and the stars stood out in their stellar brilliance.

“That's it, you're officially in outer space.” Kamram commented.

Jeff, however was speechless. He sat there, totally stunned, staring at the viewport. After the initial shock finally wore off, he made a comment of his own;

“Oh . . . My . . .”

Na'Krista had turned on a video screen next to the viewport, showing the view straight ahead of their ship. She nudged her future husband to get his attention, pointing out the display. On the screen, looming ahead like a giant black spot on the starscape, was *The Flagship Korrallid*.