

*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.*

Copyright© 2012 - 2013 Kellan Meig'h All rights reserved, both USA and World.

## “Scribe”

by Kellan Meig'h

### Chapter Eleven

#### “Subterfuge”

Several days later, Jeff watched on in anticipation as the senior Elazi Load Master secured his International pickup truck to some mooring points in Landing Bay Port Upper of *The Flagship Korralid*. After a discussion with his future brother-in-law Kalram, it was determined that his trucks' diesel engine would run just fine on the vegetable based fuel that the heavy equipment of Elazia used.

Jeff knew Kam had pulled more than a few strings to get this to happen, since unless he changed his mind, the truck would have a new home on the world that he would soon call his second home. Jeff could not imagine what it would actually cost to ship his truck that weighed over six thousand pounds with the Mattracks installed. So far, he had been told not to worry about it.

Looking over at the truck tied down right next to his, he did wonder who was taking a new Ford F-250 diesel with them to Elazia. It might very well be Na'Kayla that was doing this, since she was in on the conversation regarding the Bil-designed compression ignition engines.

Na'Krista was busy at the moment with a project her father put her to task on, so Jeff decided to go by the armory to have his armor looked at and adjusted for proper size. Kam had offered up that he felt the fit of his future son-in-law's armor looked like it could be improved so the Earther took the elder Elazi's advice. Besides, it would give him a chance to look around.

After a short hike, which didn't take too many wrong turns, he found the armorer, right where Krista said he would be.

“Specialist Elram Trane'lan?” Jeff asked.

“That would be me.” the smoke gray male replied. “And I would guess that you are Jeffrey Andrews'lan.”

“You are correct. I should state that I came here because Kamram thought . . .” The armorer interrupted his thoughts.

“You need that armor fitted correctly.” Elram nodded as he walked around Jeff slowly. “Kam was right; you need a full fitting. I understand this suit was put together without you being fitted?”

“That's right.”

“Not a bad fit, just not good, either. Here, come back to the back of the shop.”

Jeff followed Elram to the back of his work area where the armorer had him strip down to his pressure containing undersuit. He then watched as Elram produced what amounted to a measuring tape from his pants pocket.

“Okay, let's take this slowly. First, I'll measure you, then I'll fit each part as we go.”

The two males worked at getting the alloy suit fitted correctly, even going as far as swapping out his pressure suit for an undergarment that was one size larger. The armorer had to comment on that.

“You see, that pressure suit has more give, allowing you to work the closure by yourself.” Specialist Trane pointed out, showing Jeff the trick to working the closure without assistance. “For the life of me, I do not understand those soldier types. They like their undersuits to be too tight.”

“I wonder why?” Jeff mused.

“I'm not sure.” Elram replied. “Well, let's try your suit on you again. I'm sure it will fit very nicely this time.”

Jeff began to put on his new set of armor, still marveling at the modular Bil-derived design. Once he had gotten the suit mostly on, Elram gave him some pointers about putting the helmet adapter ring and life support backpack in place by himself. Following the instructions given, Jeff soon stood in full Elazi armor, fitted properly.

“How does your armor fit? More importantly, how does it sit on your body?” the armorer asked.

“It fits well.” Jeff allowed. “It no longer feels like it's hanging from my shoulders.”

“As it should.” Elram agreed. “Now that this problem has been taken care of, you might want to go by Uniform Issue. You will need work clothing while you're on board.”

“I will do that.” Jeff stated. “And I thank you for getting this suit fitted correctly.”

\*\*\*

Several hours later, Jeff finally found his way back to his temporary digs aboard *The Korrallid*. This had been a long day for him; getting checked in with the cafeteria system so he would have the right meal voucher, getting his truck logged into the Load Master's weight tally sheet and finally, getting his “duty clothes” issued to him. When the door opened to his suite, Krista nearly tackled him when she greeted him with hugs and kisses.

“I missed you!” she blurted out, taking his duffel bag and carry-case from him, right before she kissed him again.

“I missed you, too.” Jeff retorted. “So, how did your project go?”

“It was not what I thought it was.” she offered up as she helped her future *One Love* to carry his items into the suite. “I was operating a camera for a video conference between my mother and some Earth military types. It was boring, to tell you the truth. I know it's important work, but it was so boring.”

“Is that all?” Jeff asked further.

“No, I was working on your file on my tablet. Would you mind telling me your thoughts concerning being aboard this ship?”

Jeff gave his intended a crooked smile. “We're going to bore to death everyone that reads that accounting of my life.”

“Jeff, I don't think so. Jo-Linn read a bit of the story and she liked it. She said your life was very interesting.”

“Well, I guess it's because I lived it that it seems so mundane.” he countered. Giving thought to that notion, he guessed that it would be true, the feeling of normalcy to his story. That is until he came onboard *The Flagship Korrallid*. “I'll tell you this; I'll give you my thoughts on coming aboard this ship if you will share your childhood with me. You know, I think you know more about me than I do about you.”

“Maybe I do.” the buff-colored femme agreed. “Okay, I will tell you about my upbringing, after you share your thoughts with me.”

“fair enough.” Jeff acknowledged. “Well, I was awe-struck when I finally saw the ship for the first time. I think you remember that . . .”

\*\*\*

That 'evening', after a quiet dinner in their suite, Krista sat down on a soft settee in the middle of the room and indicated for Jeff to join her. She waited patiently while he put together some glasses of wine made from kebra fruit and eventually sat down by her.

“Thank you for the wine.” she offered as they toasted their first dinner in their quarters.

“No, thank *you* for finding your way into my life.” Jeff countered.

“I'm glad we found one another.” Krista put forth. “And, I owe you a story about my childhood. I was born in Kas'Madelle, twenty-seven Elazian years ago. I attended school at the age of five, taking a general knowledge course of learning until the age of nineteen. That was continued with a year of generalized higher education, followed by two years in Hes'Mi'Dalla Lower University.

“I studied writing, since that's what I liked to do as a young adult. When I turned twenty-three,

I had to serve my mandatory four years in the military. For some reason unknown to even my father, they thought my skills were better used in videography, since I was exposed to it during my one year of higher general education.

“Once I was through my basic military training, they shipped me directly to the Bil homeworld, since they are masters of electronics in general. I was trained in video and still photography, including repair and maintenance of my equipment. Once I had my accreditation in order, the Elazi military shipped me back home to train new recruits.”

Jeff mused about something. “So, your military service obligations are almost over?”

“I wish.” she lamented. “You see, I was deeply in love with another soldier, Sanmar Deen'lan. He was due to ship out on *The Great Hope*, headed here to Earth. It was very short notice, just twenty days of warning. We decided to become joined before he left Elazia but someone was causing delays in our very simple paperwork, holding up our joining.

“We were finally joined in the shuttle from *Squadron Base Arritz De'Nar* to the spaceport, the two of us standing in one row of seats and the priest standing in the row in front of us. Sanmar left that day for his post on *The Great Hope*, so we never consummated our joining. Well, you remember when *The Great Hope* was destroyed by that insane General.”

“I remember that.” Jeff agreed.

Krista seemed quieter now, probably trying to hold her emotions in check. “Well, I was very distraught when I heard what had happened to Sanmar. I think you can understand that. I didn't see any further prospects for a joining since my first one failed, kind of an Elazi thing. Something that you might call a bad omen. Before my parents could stop me, I signed up for another hitch in the military.”

“I see.” Jeff said reverently. “You know, I did the same thing when my family was killed.”

“So, part of that new hitch was coming to Earth.” she continued, “I wanted our people to see just what was going on here. I have won a few awards for videography excellence in the last year.”

“Now that's impressive.” Jeff commented.

“I have three years left on my enlistment.” the buff-colored female stated. “I have to serve here on Earth for one more year, then I have to finish my term at *Training Base Maren'Adelle*, instructing new troops.”

“What about our trip?” Jeff inquired. “How will this time effect your enlistment?”

“I asked for leave, since I have six Earth months available to use.” she replied. “I put in for four months with a two month contingency. My father intervened on my behalf so as long as I do some remedial training for the ship's videographers, that time won't count against my accrual.”

“I'm sure over the next fourteen days, you can kind of fill in the spaces concerning your childhood.” Jeff brought up.

“I will, but we need to get some rest.” Krista pointed out. “We start our work shift at zero-seven-hundred. That's eleven hours from now.”

“You're right, we need some rest.” Jeff agreed. “We need to get up early so I can get used to this new regimen aboard *The Flagship Korrallid*.”

\*\*\*

The next morning, Jeff and Krista were getting dressed for the day in what amounted to stretch opaque bodysuits over what he suspected was the Elazi version of an adult diaper. While he could pull on the elastic garment with ease, Na'Krista had to use that small powerpack to cause the suit to expand, making it easier for her to don. It still amazed Jeff that she could slip on a garment without having to consciously deal with her tail. They put on some booties that had a rubber-like sole to them, clipped their badges to their suits and headed out to first meal and their first day of work.

“So, will they give us warning when we leave orbit?” Jeff asked.

“No, they won't. We left orbit,” she added, looking at a chronometer on the bulkhead wall at a cross-point, “Mmm, four hours ago, more or less.”

“Wow, leaving orbit didn't wake me up.” he mused.

“Can you hear the Singularity Drive under power?” she wanted to know.

“Uh, no. Not at all.”

“That's good. We're probably too far forward for you to hear the noises that it makes. Well, mother said to meet the family in Dining Hall Seventeen Upper. Apparently they're serving bacon and eggs this morning.”

“Now that will hit the spot.” Jeff agreed.

“The cook is also doing a roast Targ and a dessert from N'ga berries.”

“You mean the berries that *Haad N'ga* is made from?” Jeff asked.

“*N'ga* berries are very tasty, I'll have you know. Our family grows them and I have some *N'ga* production on my property, well, what will be our property. It's what else that goes into making *Haad N'ga* that gives it that tangy taste.”

“Okay, thank you for that clarification. Now, how far is dining hall seventeen upper from here?”

“We're almost there.”

'Almost there' turned out to be another twenty-seven bulkheads and one level up. At one point it was necessary to do a slight detour due to maintenance being performed in a hallway. Eventually,

they arrived at the appropriate dining facility.

“Over here!” Traci shouted from a group of tables. Once they were close enough, she got up from her seat beside Tegram and hugged both Krista and Jeff.

“I see everyone is here,” Jeff commented, noting his future family were all working on plates of food. “So, we just get in line for our first meal?”

“You had better hurry.” Kamram pointed out. “I think they are running low on roast Targ.”

Na'Krista guided Jeff over to the full service line and helped him with the unusual silverware. The knife was more like an Alaskan Inuit Ulu and the other piece of silverware was more of a spork in nature. They put them on their trays, poured some Esedrah fruit juice into glasses, then stood in the proper line to be served.

The line crew loaded a plate with bacon, scrambled eggs, a generous slice of roast Targ and finally, a dessert that looked like a shortcake with berries, nuts and a type of a cookie with whipped cream on top. There was toast available along with strawberry jam packets. Down at the end of the serving line was an urn of what must have been coffee.

“Father had that urn installed and he brought up at least two tons of coffee beans.” the femme Elazi offered up. “Not every dining hall has a coffee urn so I expect we will have to dine early to get morning coffee.”

Jeff sampled it, finding it to be very good. “Yeah, I can see how others will come here, just for the coffee.”

“Uncle Tegram is trying to open a coffee shop on the promenade.” Krista added.

“I didn't think coffee was all that popular with the Elazi.” Jeff mused.

“There are many Earth delicacies that are popular, like cantaloupe, apples, strawberries and peaches.”

“I see.” Jeff offered up as he waited for Krista to sit down before he sat down with her at the family table. “So, any thoughts of growing coffee on Elazia?”

“I am going to try my skills at coffee production.” Kamram offered up. “Some of our holdings have similar weather and soil to Central America's highlands. I think the coffee trees should grow well.”

The Earther put the Elazi equivalent of pepper on his eggs along with some genuine Heinz® ketchup on them. He then put some hot suace on his roast Targ. If this was how breakfast would be for the next two weeks, he was going to be spoiled by the time they arrived on Elazia.

\*\*\*

Their early first meal taken care of, The couple found themselves back near their cabin,

preparing to enter the number seven port systems chase-way corridor. This was an area that served multiple portside decks with power, water, air circulation, data systems and waste removal. Stepping into the zone, Jeff looked up to see it was roughly two decks tall and as wide as several of their suites. There were bulkhead doors every three bulkheads longitudinally that could seal off this zone in case of an emergency.

“Here is the locker assigned to us.” Krista pointed out, keying her code into the access lock. The door slid into the jamb, revealing a small workspace, just big enough for two persons. “Now you need to check your code.” she added.

Jeff keyed his code in, making the door close. He then opened the door back up and stepped inside behind his chosen one.

“Not very big, if you ask me.” he commented.

“It's just a place to store our equipment.” she countered. “Here is the locker to keep our anti-stat suits in and this is our wipe cleaner,” she directed, pushing a small knee-high cube out into the hall. She then found a box with several wipes inside and attached that to the top of the little machine, followed by pulling a hose from the hook inside the door and filling the unit with some water and a bit of pink fluid.

“Hmm, this is an odd suit,” Jeff commented, taking one of the flexible one-piece garments from the locker. “Uh, this has your name on it,” he added, giving her that translucent suit and taking the other, slightly larger suit adorned with his name from the small storage space.

“The opening is across the shoulders, similar to a zippered plastic pouch.” she offered up as she slipped her suit on. Once she had it pulled up to her waist, she asked for some assistance. “Could you pass me that white plastic box on the top shelf?”

Jeff did as he was asked, finding the box held caps for her claws. She used some bottled adhesive to glue the bright green items over her claws, making sure each one was adhered tightly.

“The gloves aren't claw-proof, since the Bil-Cmela do not have claws.” she elaborated.

“I see.” Jeff mused. In a way, he wanted to meet a Bil-Cmela, just to see what this race was all about.

Jeff followed Krista's lead, tugging on the translucent garment that had the booties, gloves, hood and face mask all integrated into the design. His future wife showed him how to adjust the external strapping for the mask and had him curl up into a ball so she could close the suit with most of the air evacuated from it.

They slipped bands onto their wrists to help hold the gloves in place, then another elastic band around the waist to keep the suit snug to their bodies. The band around their left wrist was a monitor of some sort, currently showing the ambient temperature in the room. The Elazi femme took two devices that looked like radios from their chargers, turned them on and attached one to Jeff's waist belt, then placed the other one on her belt. Na'Krista then gave her future mate some further instruction.

“This port is for the drinking water,” she pointed out, touching the left side of his mask. “This one here on the right side is for auxiliary breathing air, just in case the ductwork starts to lose pressure. There are emergency breathing air hoses every half-bulkhead span, behind the blue access panels.” She then produced an air hose from the wall and instructed Jeff in how to attach it. She then detached the hose, gathered up what looked like two mop handles and guided Jeff to a hatch after she closed up their small workspace door.

Jeff spun the wheel on the shoulder-high hatch and swung it open, exposing shiny ductwork beyond. Krista went in first and helped Jeff by pulling the wipe cleaner unit up into the ducting when Jeff hefted it up to her. He then handed up the handles, climbed into the ducting with Krista and shut the hatch behind him.

“Okay, this isn't that bad,” he commented, taking a wipe from its box and mimicking Krista in attaching it to his handle, creating a mop out of the two items. “How about I do high and you do low?” he suggested.

“That sounds very equitable.” Krista agreed. She then raised the radio to her mask and keyed it up. “Control, this is Technician Keth'lan.”

“This is Control.” the radio crackled back.

“Myself and civilian Jeffrey Andrews'lan are in ductwork Seven Port at bulkhead one-thirty-one, headed to bulkhead one-seventy.” she put forth.

“Copy you are in ductwork Seven Port at bulkhead one-thirty-one, headed aft.”

“Thank you, Control. Na'Krista Keth'lan clear.”

“Further, pulled pork for last meal. Control clear.”

“Mmmm . . . Pulled pork!” Na'Krista commented with what might have been a wide smile behind her dust filter mask. From what the Earther could see, her eyes were twinkling with the thought of the evening meal.

Jeff began to wipe down the walls of the ductwork, thinking about how strange it was to be doing this. Had anyone suggested to him that he would be cleaning the ducting in an alien ship, he would have laughed at them. Now here he was, doing just that. He had to agree with Krista that the duty was not that difficult, just slightly tedious, making sure every inch of surface had the light fuzz cleaned from it.

As he worked, Jeff took stock of his surroundings. The ductwork was shiny but not polished, probably to keep the dust accumulation down. There also seemed to be panels that could be opened with tools, not at regular separations but at least once every bulkhead span.

At regular intervals, there were side branches of smaller ductwork, dropping to kneeling height and then to sitting. These areas had to be done by hand but they did not take long. Each off-branch seemed to be a bit dustier than the main ducting, Jeff noted. This was reinforced by the



need to cycle out his wiping cloth after each side branch.

The wipe cleaner itself was easy to manage, since they generally just pushed it along with their mops or gave it a gentle push with a foot when it was needed. It was quiet and took about five minutes to clean the wipes once they were loaded into the intake hopper. After a while, Krista stopped Jeff and leaned her mop against the wipe cleaner.

“Let's give the dust a few moments to settle, then let's eat an energy bar.” she suggested.

“So, how do we eat while wearing these respirators?”

“We have to undo the closure and take the hood off.”

Jeff nodded. “Okay, fine with me.”

\*\*\*

A solid white Elazi female sat at her console, running a diagnostic on her communications equipment for a second time. The Comm Officer, Sa'Tanya Trem'lan, picked up a hand-held radio and made another attempt to communicate with a work crew in her assigned area.

“Control to Na'Krista, do you copy?” she stated, worried that nobody, even the Earther had not replied. “Na'Krista, please report?” All she heard back was static.

The Comm Officer at the console opposite Sa'Tanya got her attention. “Officer Trem'Lan, is there a problem?”

“I've lost communication with Na'Krista Keth'lan.” she offered up to the smoke-colored female at the other console. “Na'Marti, could you try contacting them on your console? I can't even pull up the video from that zone.”

“I will try for you.” Na'Marti replied. She turned to her console, flipped a few switches and spoke into her desk-mounted microphone. “Na'Marti Sern'lan to Na'Krista Keth'lan, do you copy? Na'Marti Sern'lan to Na'Krista Keth'lan, please report.” Nothing but silence came out of the speaker. “Well, I'll have to send a security detail to see about her, since both of her parents are ambassadors.”

“I've already called security.” Sa'Tanya put forth. “They will be there in a few moments.”

“I hope nothing bad has happened to her.” Tanya offered up.

“Me too.” the dark hued femme replied. “I hope it's nothing but a comm error of some kind.”

\*\*\*

A solid black male stood at an auxiliary console and watched the monitor while Krista and Jeff undid the seals to their suits and flipped their hood and masks over in front of them to rest on their chests. While they opened their energy bars to consume them, the Elazi male typed a very

long string of characters on the keyboard in front of him, granting him override access to a number of systems.

Another short string was tapped in, causing a number of flashing alarm lights to come to life on the console, followed by buzzers sounding. Nodding at the net results, the unknown male typed in another string of characters, a very unusual command to be using, and slipped out of the small control room.

\*\*\*

Hallet Trasc was laying on his bunk, reading an Earth novel by Steven King that he had come across, one of the writer's later works titled 'Under The Dome'. It was quite interesting, not what he had expected at all. The Dah'Trat trooper had come to enjoy Earth mystery novels, particularly those of a Sci-Fi nature.

While the trooper enjoyed this tome, his terminal began to beep, alerting him to a situation. Hal picked up the tablet laying on his night stand and tapped an icon, making the unit operate as an auxiliary display and virtual keypad. What he observed on the display both shocked and disturbed him.

Prompted by what he observed on the display, Hallet tapped his communications link on his wrist and shouted out commands while he was bailing out of his rack;

“Orange Detachment! All personnel to Port Seven Chaseway! Two, Three, Four, go to bulkhead one-fifty access! The rest of Orange, meet me at bulkhead one-thirty access! Move!!”

The solid black trooper hit the deck running, stopping only for a moment to gather up his weapons belt. Clad only in lounging pants, he did look somewhat out of place as he ran through the dormitory zone, on his way aft.

Along about bulkhead one-eighteen, Hallet was joined by Orange Seven, Trooper Marlett Blane'lan. All the younger soldier had on was a simple thong that he wore under his pressure suit, an obvious sign he was probably in bed at the moment. At least he had the common sense to grab his jumpsuit and his weapons belt on the way out of his room.

“Hallet, what's going on?” the junior grade soldier asked.

“Ductwork depressurization in the zone Na'Krista and Jeffrey are currently working in. All communication with them has been negative.”

“Blast!” the shorter male spat out. “So, I have to try to get us in there, past the interlocks?”

“Don't know.” Hal replied. “Let's see what we have when we arrive.”

\*\*\*

The slight draft through the ductwork increased in volume at the exact time their monitors on their wrists began chiming out a warning. This caused Krista to look at her monitor with a frown.

“Jeff, we have to get out of here. The atmosphere in the ductwork is being evacuated.”

“Damn it!” the Earther replied. “Okay, back the way we came?” he asked while they closed up their suits.

“Yeah, just leave everything right here.” she stated.

They began to run toward the last airlock door at bulkhead one hundred and thirty-nine but Na'Krista stopped her future hubby when she observed the little amber light above the door was illuminated.

“Blast! The door is locked!” she spat out. “Go back the other way! We've got to make it to the access door near bulkhead one fifty!”

The pair set out in a flat out run, headed back the way they had come from. The small wipe cleaning unit had began to move from the increased draft in their workspace, making them have to dodge it as they headed for the airlock in question. Jeff could see the doorway that was their destination, but the light over it was flashing blue, something that might indicate a problem.

“Blast!” Na'Krista spat out when that light changed to solid amber, indicating it was locked, too. She stopped, quickly looked around, then grabbed Jeff's arm as she began to run again, past the airlock door to a destination unknown to the Earther. The femme Elazi stopped at a blue access panel located several yards down the ducting and began to struggle with the latching mechanism.

“Help me open this!” she shouted, letting Jeff take over. The door was labeled “Emergency Air Lines” but when the door finally gave way, the interior was devoid of any hoses.

“Oh Shit!” Jeff blurted out, knowing it was a grave situation now.

“No, we're not giving up!” the buff colored female stated. “Come on, we're gonna see if we can fit in a breaker compartment.”

Before Jeff could question her thoughts, she ran past him so in a mindset of preservation, he followed after her in a dead run to a door marked “Electrical Sub-Panel Seven Port.”

Un-dogging the door with a quick spin of the wheel and quickly stepping away from it as it swung open under pressure, Krista pointed to the cavity, which was very small and full of what appeared to be circuit breakers, meters and other switches that Jeff had no idea what they were.

“We will not fit in there.” Jeff stated.

“Get in!” she retorted. “NOW!!”

Jeff did as he was told, climbing in and turning around to face the doorway. He was partially right; the space was tight but they might just fit, if they tried hard enough. His intended backed into the cramped compartment in front of him, bringing the door with her. That portal opened

outward and the air pressure inside the room was higher than the ductwork outside, preventing her from closing it by herself. The Earther reached over Na'Krista's shoulders, grabbed some bracing on the hatch and pulled sharply, helping to get the door closed far enough that Krista could spin the inside handle clockwise, dogging the door shut.

Jeff was going to say something about being safe for the moment, that was until he noticed the fact that their suits seemed to be inflating by themselves and the air felt kind of thin to his lungs.

“No, no, no!!” Krista blurted out as she bashed the display on her wrist in frustration.

“What's going on?” he asked, still wondering what was happening.

Na'Krista shook her head. “Some *B'Taagh* is deliberately purging the atmosphere in this breaker compartment!”