

The characters Jeffrey Andrews, Kristan 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, Gillat Deen'lan, Marlett Blane'lan, Sa'Densa Nasia Andrews'lan (nee Deen'lan), Argess & Arrissa Wrraal, Rellen Sandren'lan along with the characters Torvald and Victoria Svensen are the properties of Kellan Meig'h and may not be used without express written permission.

Copyright© 2012 - 2015 Kellan Meig'h All rights reserved, both USA and World.

“Scribe”

by Kellan Meig'h

Chapter Seventeen

“Adjustments And Discoveries”

Jeffrey, Na'Krista and Argess watched from an observation port while the deck crew carefully repositioned the *Fask-aal's* craft over some tie-down points in Landing Bay Port Lower. It seemed like the deck crew really didn't like the fact that the ship was even on-board, since it bore the markings of being a 'civilian' conversion. They had made several comments that seemed to indicate a former warship should be scrapped and not continue to be pressed into service in a less-dignified manner.

“They had better be gentle with my ship,” the huge mercenary mused.

“The deck crew will be careful,” Na'Krista retorted. “They know who they will have to answer to if they damage your ship.”

While this was going on, Jeff was taking in Argess' craft. It had wings to it, now folded for storage and the landing gear had wheels that looked to be able to make landings on a runway. It actually looked like it could fly in the atmosphere like an Earth-born airplane. Well, it wouldn't hurt to ask.

“Argess, can your ship fly inside the atmosphere? I mean, glide while not under power?”

“It can glide, to a fashion.” he replied with a smile. “Actually it is much like some of the Bil atmospheric fighters; A Lestim Avro-Eight Mk Three has a glide ratio just slightly better than a rock.”

“I see,” Jeff mused. “back on Earth, there is an obsolete fighter craft called the McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II. It was always said that it had a glide ratio like a building brick.”

Argess nodded. “It would seem, some things are similar on every planet. The Xenid had fighters that were very effective in space but almost unusable in the atmosphere.”

“Xenid?” Jeff questioned.

“The Xenid were from Xenos Prime. A race of beings that has an exoskeleton body.” the tall warrior offered up. “They gave Elazia a try at conquest, finding the Trans-Atmospheric Forces more than a match for their abilities. They gave up on Elazia, only to try invading the *Fask-aal* homeworld of *Fask-aal-za* a few cycles later. We decimated their forces and when they tried to run, we launched magnetically attached leach weapons to shut down their *FTL* and impulse drives.”

This confused Jeff. “So, you didn't let them leave?”

“They were coasting toward the rim of our solar system.” Argess informed the Earther. “We installed repulsors on the leach weapons, not allowing a Mech Suit anywhere near them to remove the weapons.

“It took about a solar cycle for them to return in utility ships, begging our high command to trade with them for food and medical supplies.” The *Fask-aal* turned to Jeff with a smile on his face. “We are not completely cruel toward our enemies. We traded for a few solar cycles, then we allowed them to leave our system with one flagship. Once they were out of range, we scuttled the *FTL* cores on the other three ships.”

“Um, what is a Mech Suit?” Jeff wanted to know.

Krista decided to answer that question. “A Mech Suit is a mobile work or fighting platform. You get inside it and you operate it like it were an oversize suit of armor. Some are for general utility work on the hull of the ship on in an unpressurized area of the interior so they are lightly armored. Just enough to protect you from a meteorite strike. Others are heavily armed and armored for fighting in zero atmosphere or on dirt.”

“That seems like something I might like to see.” the Earther commented. This whole trip was bringing science fiction to life for him, actually making it science fact. If he could just get his head around that whole 'Quantum Singularity' technology. His musing was interrupted by Argess, spitting out an epithet in his native tongue.

“Is there a problem?” Na'Krista asked.

“Yes, there is.” he replied as his face dropped. “You see that glossy black ship docking right over there?” he asked, pointing out the sleek little craft in question.

“What about it? Does that mean trouble?” she wanted to know.

“That would be Second Adjunct Arrissa Wrraal, my mate.” he informed them. “I will be shredded when she finds me.”

Jeff seemed confused. “If you didn't want her to find you, isn't a ship this big . . .” He was interrupted by the huge *Fask-aal*.

“We are bonded.” he explained. “She could track me across the known galaxies with pin-point accuracy. I do not know how *Fask-aal* females do it, but they can. There is no use to hide since she knows exactly where I am.”

While they watched, the space-suited femme stepped from her ship, sat down her bags, took a moment to orient herself, then looked straight at them through the visor of her helmet. Argess waved sheepishly, then pointed toward the air locks. She nodded, picked up her bags and headed that way.

“I must go face the music,” Argess offered up, right before he turned and headed to meet his *One Love*.

“Well,” Jeff mused; “*It seemed some things are very universal, such as being read the riot act, long version.*”

Kam sat at the table in his Ambassador's suite, looking at the small piece of jewelry he held in his hands. He was well aware of what it stood for, but it still bothered him that he had not been aware of it until now. It was merely by chance that he had observed the titanium and Marsenite bauble sitting on Kess' night stand with the light glinting off the purple stone in the center. After nearly fifty years of devotion to his *One Love*, he had just now discovered this shocking revelation.

While he waited on Na'Kesta to return to their quarters, he thought about what he would ask of her. How long had she been *Tah'Nash*? Did she sign up before or after they were joined? No matter how Kam formulated his questions, he didn't want to come across harshly to Kess, alienating the one that made him whole. He just wanted to know . . . *why* . . . why hadn't she told him before now?

His musings were interrupted by Na'Kesta entering the room.

“Hello Kam,” she said warmly as she closed the door behind her with a press of a button. Turning back to her mate, she explained her delay in returning; “I brought us some . . . food . . . for mid-meal . . .” The smile on her face faded when she observed her mate, holding her *Tah'Nash* ring in his hand. Like it or not, it was now the moment for her to come clean concerning her affiliation with this political group. The pale gray femme knew it was time to pay the piper.

Kam cleared his throat, then he spoke softly to his wife. “I found this on your night stand, quite by accident. Would you care to explain the presence of this ring?” he asked, noting the sadness that washed across Na'Kesta's face for just a moment.

She placed the food on the table, then she sat down slowly in her chair across from him, formulating her thoughts as she did so. She hoped her husband would understand.

“I . . . *gods*, I should have told you about this many cycles ago! I . . . I was *Tah'Nash* before we were joined.” she hesitantly elaborated. “I . . . erm . . . I was instructed to watch you by my area coordinator. He said you were dangerous to our cause.”

“How was I considered dangerous to your cause?” Kam wanted to know.

“You were part of a separatist movement, a minor adjutant when you attended Sedran Political College.” Na'Kesta offered up. “I . . . joined your group, meaning to keep an eye on your movements. I ended up falling in love with you, instead. I was torn by all that was going on in my mind, especially my love for you. I told my superiors that you were not a danger to us. I told them, if they wanted to have someone watch you, they would need to find someone else to do their dirty work. All I wanted at that point was your unconditional love. I could have cared less what group you aligned yourself with.”

The buff colored male thought about that for a few moments. It was true that he had been part of the Separate Governments Movement but that all ended when he found his true calling.

“Na'Kesta, there is something I must know,” he stated. “Normally, I would never look through your things because I love you and I trust you. This discovery today has caused me to make a cursory scan of our quarters.”

“And what did you find?” she questioned as she nervously squirmed in her chair. For some reason, it didn't feel very comfortable to her at the moment. There were a few things she wished would not be discovered by her *One Love*.

“This small box that has been in our home forever.” Kam took the small wooden case from his lap and sat it on the table. “You know, I have never even thought of looking inside it until today. It seemed odd to me that you would bring this box with you on every trip away from home. I thought, maybe you might have kept it around like a 'Good Luck Charm'. Need I open it to display the contents? I'm sure you know what is inside.”

“Yes, my *One Love*. I do know what is contained in that box.” she agreed. “The case contains a full set of claw sheaths, all razor sharp, with the tools to put them on and take them off.” she replied.

Kam thought long and hard before he asked the next question. “Have you killed with them? I ask this because there is no normal reason for them to be this sharp. If they were like mine, they would be dull, since you can't go harming dignitaries when you clasp hands with them.”

“I have never taken a life with them,” she replied firmly, looking him in the eyes to make her point. “I have broken skin and brought blood, yes but no life has ever ended with them.”

“And what of Trooper Blane'lan? Is he part of the *Tah'Nash*? I ask because I have observed the two of you on occasion, discussing matters of some kind or another. Matters that you normally would discuss with Sub-Commander Trasc, his superior.”

This was a tough question to ask of her. If she outed her Adjutant, it would be a sure thing that he would be court marshaled if Kamram decided to take that information to the Military Tribunal Board. She knew, however, she had to come clean with everything. Looking up to her mate, she grimaced before she answered.

“Yes, Marlett is my First Adjutant. He has served me for a number of years, now.”

“Do you trust him?”

“Yes, Kam. I do.”

That was all fine and dandy but he needed to press further; “Could you trust him with Na'Krista and Na'Kayla's lives?”

That question seemed to shock the pale gray femme. “I could trust him to do what needs to be done. He would never endanger someone close to me. He knows the consequences. He would give his life for any of ours.”

“Then this conversation will stay between the two of us.” he offered up. “I want you to know that I love you too much to hurt you in any way. As far as anyone is concerned, I know nothing of your involvement with the *Tah’Nash*. As an Esteemed Ambassador, I know you have our world’s best wishes at heart. No other being needs to know of this.”

“Thank you, my *One Love*.”

“You are welcome.” After a moment, Kam continued. “You need to let Marlett know that I am aware of his position.”

“Are you sure?”

“I may have to call on his loyalties. He needs to be ready when I do so.”

“I will do that, Kam.” Kess could see the tension in her mate’s face drain away, once they had talked this issue over.

Kam looked at the carrier full of food and made a suggestion; “Now that we have that small piece of business taken care of, let’s have a light meal. That roast *Targ* smells good.”

Na’Kesta went to the cupboard and retrieved a few plates and some utensils for their meals. Once she had the plates in her possession, she tried to catch her breath. Even though Kam had told her he would keep her secret, it still bothered her that he knew so much. While she was busy setting out the meal, the video-comm in their quarters chirped, using Kamram’s tone.

He sat down at the terminal and pressed the icon to make the connection, waiting for the hyperspace signal to resolve. Once the screen came into resolution, he observed Bosteg Haas, rummaging through some paperwork on his desk, looking rather haggard, like something was eating at his soul. What really stood out was the huge dent in his upper torso armor, just above his sternum. The Field Commander cleared his throat, looked up at the camera and stated very sadly,

“Kam, I have some bad news. Na’Kayla and Hammet have been captured by the RUSA.”

All the buff colored male heard after that, right before he passed out, was the sound of shattering dishes.

“So, this is a Mech?” Jeff commented while he waited for the ion powerplant to come on line. “You know, there was a movie on Earth about a female fighting these very evil aliens. She used a machine sort of like this, one that was a wearable forklift.”

“Well, this one is different.” Krista pointed out. “I have watched that vid so I know the machine you are talking about. These mechs are quite different, the regular Selzanne Work Mechs will work in or out of the atmosphere and the Selzanne Battle Mechs will withstand just about anything you could throw at it, for a short time, anyway.

“This training unit we are using is made a bit wider so an instructor may sit inside with you. There is no bubble on it because trainers are never taken out of the atmosphere.” After removing the checklist from its holder, she began to assist Jeff with all the pre-flight checks.

“I'm ready now?” the human questioned once the Master Power light was solid blue.

“You are ready.” she agreed. “Take it very easy. The flight propulsion units are off-line so you have to walk the Mech to the first testing station.”

“Here goes nothing,” Jeff muttered as he gently 'stood' the mech up from a kneeling position and took a hesitant short step forward with the left 'foot'. He looked over at his pseudo-instructor, who had crossed her arms and leaned back into her support bolsters, making herself comfy.

“Continue. You are doing fine.” she commented with a wide smile. “I will tell you if you're doing something wrong or dangerous.”

Jeff gulped, then began to move the mech across the hanger to what was the first station, a grip-testing and spatial orientation analysis setup. Thanks to a look-down camera to see the mech's feet, he stopped it on the marks placed on the floor. Utilizing grips that surrounded his hands, he carefully brought the left arm up and reached out to grab a bar that was about eye level. It was a rough engagement, but he grasped it fully with the mechanical hand when he closed his own hand inside the grip.

“Very good.” Na'Krista commented. “My father didn't do that good on his first try. Continue,” she ordered, gesturing to the next position of the setup with her right hand. She smiled again at his ability to control the mech with the skill of someone who had previous experience. Out of twenty-four test stations, he had rough engagements on only three. Jeff then moved the mech to the area to their right by Krista's request. The next station was the welding test station.

“Okay, how do I do this?” he asked, looking at his controls to see what might be the button or switch for that function. His limited knowledge of the Elazi written language was making this one tough, for sure.

“There are some goggles to your left,” she pointed out while she was putting her goggles on. “Put them on, press the button on the left side, then look at the main instrument screen. A white crosshair will appear. Look directly at it so it can calibrate your glasses.”

He put on the goggles, noting they had what appeared to be clear polarized lenses. He pressed the button and looked at the screen just like he was instructed to do. A white crosshair appeared, then it flashed a few times and turned blue after a few moments. The text on the screen changed, seeming to indicate he was now ready to weld.

“There is a button under that cover,” she indicated, pointing at an orange safety lockout. Jeff lifted the safety, then engaged the switch. A welding torch articulated out of the right forearm to become another 'finger' on that side. “Now, put the stinger near the metal, look where you want the weld to begin under the stinger, then press both thumb buttons.”

Jeff had some welding skills from converting his trucks to diesel power, so this seemed like it might be easy. He brought up the left hand to cradle and steady the right arm and torch, readied

himself, then he pressed the switches. His goggles darkened instantly, allowing him a good view of his work. He welded a bead of steel about a foot long, then stopped.

“That was very good. I cannot create that nice of a fusion.” she commented. “Now, try the vertical weld.” Her future husband nodded, moved the torch to a new position and began a second pass on the plates.

Jeff found this to be very satisfying, to control a unit that weighed some twenty-one Earth tons, making it literally dance under his control. He had tried climbing a vertical wall with the mag-lok function and he had made an attempt to *Moon Walk* in it, too. Krista had put him through his paces and the more he operated this mech, the more he felt at home with it. His time with the training mech came to an end all too soon when Krista looked at the chronometer. He walked it back to its parking slot and carefully shuffled it back into position, using a rear-facing camera to assist him.

“I enjoyed that,” Jeff commented as he waited to extricate himself from the machine.

“You operated the mech quite well,” Krista countered from her foot-step just outside the cockpit once she was on the outside of the twenty foot tall piece of equipment, giving her future husband a kiss to reinforce her statement. “Now, we should turn in the control card for this mech and go have mid-meal.”

Na'Krista, Jeff and Sa'Densa were enjoying a mid-meal at the new Six Guys Burgers[®] on deck Three Starboard of the Promenade. It was popular, forcing them to wait in line for one quarter of an Elazi hour to order. Even so, they had their food in their hands in less than ten minutes.

Jeff was smiling at the look of near-rapture on Sa'Densa's face, savoring the bite of food in her mouth once they had sat down to consume their meal. If there was one thing that seemed universal, the love of a properly cooked hamburger must have been it. He was trying a *Targ* burger, something that was not found on Earth. It seemed to be just as tasty to him, with that unique flavor it possessed, sort of like bison.

The Earther thought back to earlier in the day, running that mech around the bay. It had been a real fun experience for him and he hoped that some day, he could try an armored battle mech. Jeff wondered what the recoil would be like, launching rail gun rounds that were nearly six inches in diameter. Then he gave thought about a battle fought between mechs; what carnage that must be, multi-ton machines slugging it out with major power weapons. Thinking back to the destruction that happened just down the road from his home on Earth, it was obvious the battle between the Elazi and the RUSA was very one-sided due to the Elazi possessing superior fire power.

Jeff had polished off his burger and it was his intent to take on the remainder of his fries, made from a strain of Elazi tuber, when Sa'Densa's communicator chirped. The blue femme looked at the display, then gave it to Krista.

“Hello Mother!” she answered the call cheerily. The smile faded from her face and she nodded to whatever it was that was being said on the other end. After a few moments, she just calmly ended the conversation and gave the comm back to her aide.

“We need to go see about my father,” she said stiffly. “Apparently he passed out and hurt himself by falling down on the deck. He had just received the news that my sister has become a prisoner of war.”

All around them, the silence became deafening.

Commander Haas stood at the dais at the front of the room, looking at what was left of the squadron commanded by Sub-commander Na'Kayla Craine'lan. Out of twenty-four soldiers and specialists, all that remained were five. Nine were known to be POW at this time and the other ten were presumed dead. The commander cleared his throat, looked at his notes and began speaking.

“Trooper First Sandren'lan, your report spoke of a new weapon the RUSA used. Please elaborate.”

The solid black trooper slowly rose to his feet, hampered by severe injuries sustained in the fight.

“Yes, Commander. It seems to be a type of kinetic energy weapon. It was powered by a nearby truck mounted compression-ignition engine, turning a dynamo to charge what looked to be capacitor banks. I could not get a closer look at it through my rifle scope.”

“Is that all?” Bosteg questioned.

“The rifle proper was tethered by its power cables so they had a limited range of movement with it. The projectiles it fired were decimating to our soldiers and equipment. They must have been some form of depleted heavy metal in a polymer carrier. We found bits of the polymer here and there. The weapon was having issues towards the end of the engagement, then it seemed to have a catastrophic overcharge. The weapon and its dynamo were destroyed beyond salvage, and its operators were charred by the intense electrical burns they received. We could not help them when their own people left them behind.”

Commander Haas looked back at his notes. “The report you gave indicated they used helicopters to evacuate. Why did you not shoot them down or disable them?”

“We had lost our primary squad-served impulse rifles and heavy rail guns early on. Those were the first things they targeted. Once we had retreated when it looked like we had lost the engagement, they were evacuating from an area away from their original location. We could only bring down one helo. The others left the area with minor damage inflicted on them.”

“Which direction did most of your troops observe them leaving in?”

“Granite Bay seemed to be the consensus,” Trooper Sandren'lan elaborated.

“Alright, then.” Bosteg said to no one in particular. “Trooper First Sandren'lan, I hereby field promote you to Sub-Commander. I will put together a squad for you and tomorrow, you will go find Na'Kayla and her people. Is that understood?”

“Yes, Commander!” the ebony Elazi blurted out.

“All of you, get some rest. Tomorrow will be a busy day.”

“Yes, Commander! As you order!” was the response for the small group of soldiers.

As the group of soldiers broke up, Sub-Commander Sandren'lan approached his commander, saluting him properly and then waiting to be acknowledged.

“Sub-Commander.” Bosteg stated, giving his junior a nod to continue.

“Commander, I do not wish to seem forward, but it appears you have had a rough engagement somewhere.” the younger soldier offered up.

“Yes, I have.”

“Sir, you seem like you need someone to speak to. Something weighs heavily on your soul.”

Bosteg looked up at his newest commander. “Yes, if you have time. Please sit with me.” He then gestured to a bench in front of his makeshift office in the abandoned car dealership.

They sat down, then Bosteg began to speak. “I am troubled by recent events.” he offered up. “First, the arrest of General Calhoun has not slowed the RUSA. They still seem bent on killing every last one of us. Second, they have begun to design better weapons to fight with, as you well have experienced first-hand. Thirdly, and most disturbingly, they breached the perimeter of our outpost this morning. I was out back, inspecting the ready state of our craft when more than a dozen RUSA stormed our back gate. Before we stopped them, they had destroyed three armored troop transporters, killed all but one of my vehicle technicians and they almost killed me.” He tapped his dented armor for emphasis.

“Sanmet Krol'lan was right, wasn't he? We should have left and not returned?” Rellen Sandren'lan asked. He knew in his heart, Sanmet was right; leave this rock and mark it off limits before more lives were lost.

“Sanmet was right.” Bosteg agreed. “However, we are too embroiled in this police action to walk away, as the Earthers would say. That is why I will tell you this before tomorrow. I have requested one thousand troops to be sent here. I want you to find Na'Kayla and what remains of her squad. This order is between you and I but just so you know, it came directly from Her Esteemed Ambassador Na'Kesta Keth'lan. Do not repeat it to anyone except your squad. Leave no human holding her alive. Destroy their facilities. Burn it to the ground. Bomb it if you have to. Leave the site fit for no useful purpose. We will become *The Death Storm Bringers*.”

“Commander? Are you sure?” the dark Elazi asked. He knew this meant they were to take no prisoners. All living beings that were not Trans-Atmospheric Forces were to lose their lives.

“Sub-Commander, those are your orders. I trust, based on your background, you will carry out those orders to the letter. The squad that will be provided to you will be our finest. They will not be afraid to do your bidding.” After a moment to see that his statements were understood, he continued. “You will promote your four Trooper Seconds to First rank.”

“Understood, Commander Haas.”

“Each squad will have two Battle Mechs with large bore rail guns to run point. You will also have an air to ground heavy assault craft at your disposal. Ambassador Keth'lan arranged them for you.”

“Thank you Commander. I will give the RUSA a taste of destruction that they will not soon forget.”

The two warriors stood, faced one another, then clasped each other's right forearm. They then saluted after which the newly-minted Sub-Commander turned smartly on his heel and headed to his quarters.

After the younger warrior was out of sight, Bosteg sat down on the bench, shook his head and quietly muttered his thoughts;

“Have I just started *The War*, the one that will be our undoing?”