

The characters Jeffrey Andrews, Na'Krista Nahala Keth'lan, Kamram Keth'lan, Na'Kesta Keth'lan, Tegram Keth'lan, Traci McDonald, Bosteg Haas'lan, Kestam Ramm'lan, Treman Baze'lan, Merret Treet'lan, Tascal Hone'lan, Hallett Trasc'lan, Hammet & Na'Kayla Nahala (nee Keth) Craine'lan, Gillat Deen'lan, Marlett Blane'lan, Sa'Densa Nasia Andrews'lan (nee Deen'lan), Argess & Arrissa Wrraal, Rellen Sandren'lan, Sa'Jenna Nasia Deen'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 - 2016 Kellan Meig'h All rights reserved, both USA and World.

“Scribe”

by Kellan Meig'h

Chapter Twenty-Two

“Defending Their Rights”

The room fell silent when Al'Temmer'an Frain'lan dropped this bomb on Jeff. A direct challenge to him, a challenge that had to be met. Everyone looked at the smoke hued male, then at Jeff, watching the anger grow in the human.

“*What did you just say to me?*” Jeff growled, trying to keep his temper in check. He insinuated himself into Temmer's personal space, ending up practically nose to nose. “No, you take that back, right now. Krista had to fight Sa'Densa over me and that wasn't right at all. Now, you want to fight me for her hand? I would kill you in a heartbeat for the right to join with her!”

“I expect you to properly answer my challenge.” Temmer replied calmly. He started to say something else but Na'Krista spun him around to face her and it was clear she was pissed as she launched into her former suitor.

“You ***Dirty Fracking B'Taagh!*** I should tear your throat out right here and now! Jeffrey is not familiar with any of our traditional fighting forms! You know that!!” she shouted at the challenger.

Temmer smiled at her. “Very well. I will give both of you two days to determine what fighting form he might be capable of. We will then meet at *Saav'Rand Square* in five days time to settle this. I will prevail, in any case. You will be mine through joining.”

The room watched Temmer leave, taking his sweet time as if daring anyone in the room to attack him from behind, before he was out the door. Krista looked over at Jeff, tears in her eyes. She knew how this would play out; Jeff would lose to her former suitor and she would be stuck in a love-less relationship while the true love of her life headed back to Earth.

She was going to say something but she stopped, observing the anger that was burning in her future husband's eyes. It was obvious that Temmer had lit a fire in him with this challenge. His whole body language said it all; he wanted to kill Al'Temmer'an Frain'lan with his bare hands. She knew now that she needed to calm him down before he really went after her nemesis.

“Jeff? Jeff!” she pleaded, trying to get through to him. He started to gently push her aside, his direction of travel towards the path Temmer had taken, but he snapped back to present from his rage when Na'Krista shook his arms, breaking his concentration.

“Krista, I, uh . . . Now what?” he asked, taking her in his arms and hugging her tightly, shaking off his fury.

“We will figure out what you're good at, then we will train you as best as we can.” she offered.

“Okay, we will do that.” he agreed. It was clear, he was still pissed but he now had his emotions back in check.

Kam garnered everyone's attention, then he made his announcements. “It seems we have a challenge to meet. I think now is a good time to end this get-together and make plans for what lies ahead.”

Once back at home, Jeff and Na'Krista stepped out of her roller, a late model Simmon sedan. She walked around the car to stand in front of the Earther, hugging him tightly. She did manage to hold back the tears, though.

“Jeff, we need to work this out.” she stated. “I'm not sure what forms of fighting you know but maybe one of them is close to a form we use for ritual fighting. I will not allow you to use a Bantra'saa'laa, however. You are not strong enough to use that weapon against Temmer.”

“I could have a lightweight Bantra'saa'laa made.” Jeff offered up.

“Without the weight, it would not be effective.” Krista countered. “Let's eat an early last meal and then we can decide how you will answer the challenge.”

“Okay, we can do that.” Jeff replied sullenly. He was clearly disturbed by this turn of events.

“I will make this offer,” Na'Krista said very quietly, making sure no others were in earshot, “If you should lose, we will leave here and go back to Earth. You once said you have enough of an income to support us. I could find work in Auburn after my enlistment is up, so we would should be good on funds.”

“And what would happen to your Ag Station and this beautiful home?” he questioned.

“It . . . it would be gone, returned to House Trent'lan. Dassan would get back the property he . . . wanted . . . all along,” She thought about what she had just said, letting it sink in.

“Why do I feel like Dassan Trent'lan has everything to do with this?” Jeff put forth.

“That doesn't make any sense, considering we are related to him.” Krista mused. “However, he did try to take back the property when Grandmother Keth'lan was killed.”

“I agree that it doesn't make much sense, Sweetheart,” Jeff put forth as he hugged his fiancée. “We will figure this out. One way or another, we will prevail.”

A young, dark Elazi male looked at his screen that displayed the person he was to contact, not particularly happy with the outcome this afternoon. That distaste would certainly guide what would be said.

“I have done your bidding, Saar. I do hope you are happy now because I know I am not. I do not care to be involved with this. You know what the Keth'lan family will do to me if they found out my involvement.” he put on the table.

The older male on the screen chuffed. “You were paid a small fortune for your involvement. I didn't see you turn down the Crown offered. Still, the human must lose this challenge. You know that.”

“I understand, Saar.” the younger male agreed. “And what of Na'Krista?”

“I still want her out of the way.” the elder put forth. “I don't care how it happens. Send her on an extended posting to Earth or Comeria. Get her enlistment extended and send her to Varpor Prime or the Pharrpoint Security Detail. Kill her, for all I care. She *must* be out of the picture for my plans to come to fruition.”

“Do you not think Temmer would be agreeable to join with her and follow your guidance?”

“I do not wish him to have anything to do with the station.” the older male stated firmly. “You may have to kill him, too. He knows too much.”

“I do not think so. Tem only knows what was said, that someone told him in passing they had overheard Na'Krista say she might return to him. It's a lie but it produced the desired results.” After a moment, the younger male added, “He still cares for her. I think he would be good for your plans. He understands money.”

“Whether or not he understands direction by monetary gain, I cannot have him in the mix. He must go. Not right away, but certainly before Na'Krista could join with him.”

“Understood, Saar.” the dark male stated, just as the screen went blank.

Looking out over the Northern sector of the city of Kas'Madelle from his twentieth floor suite, the smoky male wondered if this was getting out of hand. The old one was not thinking rationally but as long as the money was there, he would do the bidding asked of him.

Jeffrey hefted the pugilistic weapon, trying it's weight and balance for the second time. Earlier in the day, Tegram had dropped off some equipment for Jeff to familiarize himself with so he had tried all of them, making himself familiar with their feel. This fighting weapon seemed like it might be the one, allowing him to use his hand-to-hand training. It also did not possess any sharp edges. Na'Krista had called Teg so he was on his way back to do some test training.

“This is called a *Taan'zaa*?” he asked, trying a few jabs at an imaginary opponent with it. It was a straight wooden shaft about one and one half inches in diameter, not quite head high when

standing straight up on end. One end had a firmly padded, lightweight ball about half the size of a soccer ball on it and the other end had a hard rubber ball about the size of a baseball.

“The *Taan'zaa* was a substitute for double-hand long blades, after *The Awakening*.” Na'Krista replied. “You fight by jabbing with the small end and blocking with either the shaft or the larger end. Points are given for fair contact and points deducted for unfair contact.”

“All right, that doesn't seem too odd to me. Now, how long would I have to fight for?” he wanted to know.

“About nineteen of your Earth minutes.” she offered up. “If one of you cannot continue before the time is up, a Second would be called to continue the match. Because Temmer made the challenge, he may have his Second begin the match.”

“Well, that seems a bit one-sided.” Jeff mused as he tried a few moves shown to him by Krista.

“You or Temmer may also concede at any time, stopping the match.” Krista pointed out. “If he starts beating you too heavily, please call the match. I don't want you hurt.”

“Maybe.” Jeff stated, seeming a bit hurt at the thought of giving up. “So, how does the points system work?”

The buff-hued femme showed Jeff a better grip, then she answered his question. “You must win by twenty points, if Temmer does not concede. If you do not have twenty but you have at least ten, the match continues until one wins. That can be used to your advantage.”

“I see. If I just . . . Oh, Tegram is here and I think he brought Kalram with him.” Jeff stated, seeing them drive up in a sporty little roller.

The two males got out and approached them, Teg still wearing his robes but Kal was ready to do some training in his uncle's stead, dressed in short, loose clothing. He hugged his sister and gave Jeff a firm handshake.

“Good to see both of you again. As you well know, Tegram is not able to train right now, owing to his injuries on Earth.” Kalram offered up once he had finished his greetings. “He did request that I would train you in his stead, since he trained me well in the traditional forms.”

“I thought you just made it dirtside today?” Krista asked.

“For my sister and my brother through joining, I will take care of this.” he replied.

“Very well, Kalram. Please train me.” Jeff asked, bowing deeply.

“I will train you well, Grasshopper,” Kal returned, smiling widely. It was a bad joke but at least it made Jeff laugh.

Na'Krista and her uncle took up some seats off to the side of the courtyard and watched on as Kalram imparted his training on the Earther. Jeff was being a rather quick study, making it hard for Kal to exploit the same move more than twice. Eventually, toward the end of the training

session, Jeffrey had held off the young Keth'lan for fifteen *Munar*, which was outstanding for a first training match.

“You handled yourself well, Grasshopper.” Kal stated as he handed a cold drink to Jeff from a handy cooler. “You are a very good student.”

“Thank you , Kalram.”

“Jeffrey, I would offer a strategy to you,” Kal continued, “I think you will be able to get at least ten to twelve points up on Temmer within twenty *Munar*. The match will be stopped momentarily to ask if you wish to continue or concede. Tell the officials you wish to continue. You would then wear him down until he concedes.”

“You have great confidence in my skills.” Jeff proposed.

“He is a politician, not a fighter. If he opens with his Second, I would take a . . . I think you would call it, a cheap shot or low blow. Take out his Second with a well-placed strike to the reproductive glands, then Temmer will have to fight you.”

“That would work?” Krista asked, cringing slightly at the thought of the injury done by such a move.

“Yes, it would.” Kal agreed. “It will be assumed by all that Tegram would have trained Jeffrey in the correct form of fighting, not I. A cheap shot, taken right at the beginning of the match, would not be expected. It would be a loss of four points right off, but it would be well worth it.”

“I will keep that in mind.” Jeff stated.

Tegram garnered Jeff's attention. “I have spoken with my physician about the match. He will be sending out an oxygen bottle and a mask. Use it when you train to help your system adapt to the higher gravity.”

“I will do that.” Jeff agreed.

Teg stood and motioned for Kal to do the same. “We will be back tomorrow, after mid-meal. I will try to bring Traci and Sa'Kimsa, so Na'Krista and Sa'Densa will not be bored while we work on training.”

It was almost dark and the sun was close to slipping below the horizon while Jeffrey followed Na'Krista into the Kebra orchards closest to the house. She was being careful not to walk in the muddy areas left from the day's watering, preferring to use the dry ground. She was looking up occasionally, checking the fruit. Under a particular low limb, she kicked off her sandals, hopped up on the branch and carefully walked out towards the fruit hanging from the next branch up.

“Jeff! Catch!” she shouted, picking a fruit from a cluster and dropping it near her future mate so he could grab it. “One more coming!” she warned, letting a second fruit drop. She dropped out of the tree beside her future spouse, somehow landing lightly on the ground.

“Smells nice,” Jeff offered, sniffing the blossom end of the treat.

“I always have good early fruit in a row, right down through there,” she stated, indicating a string of trees on a diagonal that seemed to have quite a bit of fruit on them, as compared to the others. “This early fruit is just as good as Kebra picked at the normal time. I'm not sure how that is, but I don't argue. Early fruit this good sells well to the market distributors. For a premium price, too.”

Jeff had already cut the first Kebra open and gave that one to Krista so he could cut open his fruit. It had a very nice, spicy aroma and the flesh was a deep orange. The stone, not too big, was a deep brown. That indicated a perfect watering schedule. The taste, a bit like a cross between an apple and a peach, was just right. Sweet and juicy with a slight acidic tang to it.

This seemed like a nice ending to the day, enjoying fresh fruit right off the tree in an orchard that had an almost intoxicating floral scent to it. The smell of wet, rich earth added to the experience and his fiancée with him made it complete. Giving some thought to it, he knew he had to speak his mind.

“Krista, I was thinking.” Jeff put forth while they enjoyed their treats, “You know, maybe we shouldn't give up trying to defend your right to this land. I see how this place makes you smile and I don't want to see you hurt if we left for Earth, should I lose this match.”

“I don't want to leave, Jeffrey.” she admitted. “If I stayed here with Tem, it would be a loveless joining. I actually hate him now for what he's done. I can't imagine he would still want me, other than to get at my wealth, what little I have. The more I think about this, the more I believe Temmer was put up to this.”

While they walked through the orchards, Krista thought back to the first time she was brought out to the property. She was just ten summers old and the house had been closed up for more than twelve when they came out to look around. She remembered being in awe that the station was going to be hers, when she turned nineteen. That wasn't that far off at that time.

The next day, they went to hear the reading of Grandmother Sa'Kayla Keth'lan's *Directives After Death*. The details that were set upon her kind of put her off for a while. Then she understood why Grandmother wanted her to have this property. For whatever reason, it was very important to her progenitor that the property stay in the family. That was reinforced by an event that happened on the day she moved her things in.

Na'Krista had opened a closet to put her coats away, only to find a note inside, taped to the shelf. It was not an old note and it was in a handwriting she was unfamiliar with. The note said just a few words;

Do not let him have the station back. It is yours, my Granddaughter

“There's something else, Jeffrey,” She continued, knowing she had to tell her future life mate about it, “Sometimes, when I'm out here in the orchards, I am positive I'm being followed by someone, maybe a femme. I've observed footprints that weren't mine, right over the top of mine, like they were trying not to be noticed by walking right behind me.”

“Wow.” Jeff replied. “Now that is weird.”

“Jeffrey, stand still for a moment. Don't you feel that?” she suggested, having that feeling of being watched by someone or something.

“Well, I don't know, maybe.” he replied. In truth, Krista was right; he knew they were being watched. He had that gut feeling that a soldier has of being observed by someone.

“It happens to me quite often.” Krista stated. “Well, let's go back to the house. I think I would like a small glass or two of some *White Fire* to unwind with.”

As Jeff and Na'Krista walked back through the orchard to the house, a graying buff-colored femme in ceremonial robes watched their progress from a few rows over, concerned by the situation. She knew who had started all of this; her brother Dassan. As she pondered how to confer this information to Krista, the femme was joined by a short, ivory-pelted male.

“You should not interfere.” he offered, looking up at her with his soulful white eyes.

“I must.” she replied. “Let me show you something I have discovered was possible, even though it should not be.” The femme reached up and picked a fruit from the tree they were under and took a bite of it. “Is it possible for you to do this? Should it be possible for me?”

The male was puzzled. “I cannot interact with those on the other side, the living.” he replied, finding his hand went right through hers that held the fruit. “You must use this gift given to you for the good of our people.”

She shook her head. “No, I must use this gift, if it really is a gift, to protect my kin. If I have to, I will directly interfere. I think you know that already. I'm sure *Od'tra the Wise* knows what I would do.”

The male nodded. “Yes, he knows. You would be doing your assigned duty, to help those of your lineage. I think exactly what you *would* end up doing might be in a gray area, though.”

“That is what ambassadors have done throughout time,” she offered up. “We argued gray areas, so they would merge with the black and white.”

“Agreed.” the male put forth. “I have done that, too. They may have been religious gray areas, but gray nonetheless.”

“I will try to stay out of this, if it is possible to do so.” she offered. “I will only interfere if it is necessary to protect my kin.”

“As would I, Sa'Kayla. As would I.”

Jeff tried on the oxygen mask that was meant for a Bil, finding it to fit his face close enough for use. It felt good to get some oxygen back into his system, having felt winded from his latest session. Tegram had returned with Kalram after mid-meal, training Jeff in the ways of ritual *Taan'zaa* combat. This was right down his alley, once he had learned the proper points to strike and where to stay away from. They had just finished a second fifty *munar* session this day and Tegram was fairly sure his future nephew through joining would prevail.

“Your form looks good,” Kal offered up as he adjusted the flow of gas into the mask by Teg's direction.

“Thank you. I was afraid I would not do well but I seem to be catching on.” Jeff replied.

“You have the heart of a warrior.” Kalram put forth. He should know, since Jeff had been hammering on him quite mercilessly for the last few *munar*. Kal was sure Temmer was not cut from the same warrior cloth, since he had never served in the military. This might bode well for Jeff. The young Keth'lan was going to say more when his sister and her entourage returned from a trip into town, interrupting his thoughts.

“We are back!” Na'Krista announced loudly, smiling as they all came around the corner of the garage into the courtyard. Krista was wearing House Andrews'lan togs, the same as worn by Sa'Densa. She was also now devoid of the purple markings from her challenge.

“You look nice all dressed up like that.” Jeff offered up. He liked the look of his House clothing on his future wife. “And, you no longer have those nasty purple markings all over you.”

“A good fur stylist is invaluable.” she retorted as she hugged her future husband and gave him a kiss. “Especially one that knows how to match your shading correctly.”

“That, your stylist has done to perfection.” Jeff stated. She then turned to the femmes with her. “Jeffrey, this is Kalram's *One Love*, Sa'Kimsa. She is from House Kron'lan. Of course, you already know Traci.”

“Nice to meet you, Jeffrey.” the solid black femme offered up. “I have heard so much about you from the family.”

“Nice to meet you too, Sa'Kimsa.” Jeff replied, shaking an offered hand. “I would guess you're from the Far North by your coloration.”

“No, I was born near Hes'Mi'Dalla. My parents are from Dash'Win, an outpost that is the farthest North of the fully populated towns. Being that close in generations, I still have the characteristic ebony coloring. When Kal and I have a child, they may or may not have the black coloring.”

“I see.” Jeff mused.

“I have a sister that has a child.” Sa'Kimsa offered up. “Her *One Love* is pale gray but their child is ebony, like his mother.” After a moment, she continued. “Not to change subjects, but Na'Krista said you were challenged by Temmer. Have you decided on a style of combat?”

“*Taan'zaa*, I guess.” the Earther replied. “I seem to be a natural at it, according to Kalram.”

“Is that true?” she asked her mate.

“It is.” Kalram admitted. “He has been pounding on me all morning, since all of you went shopping. I can say, without reservation, he seems to be a natural.”

That evening, Kamram and Na'Kesta had made their way out to welcome Jeff to his new home properly. A dinner had been served that left all attendees stuffed and some *White Fire* had flowed. Jeff had added to the after-dinner refreshments with some moonshine that he had somewhat smuggled with him. It was explained to the port authorities that it was 'transmission fluid supplement' for his truck. Seven gallons worth, to be exact. Once everyone had settled down, Kam took the floor in the living area.

“Jeffrey, in the past, a House leader such as I, would welcome a new sub-House by making sure they were well-defended. That might have meant a small detachment of soldiers would have went to stay with the new sub-House, training their people properly.”

“Today, we do this a little differently.” Kam produced a case from behind the couch, sat it on a side table and opened it. He removed something big that was covered in a deep green cloth. Once the cloth was removed, it allowed them to observe a new, highly polished Bantra'saa'laa.

“I had this made for you, Jeffrey Andrews'lan, Patriarch of House Andrews'lan, so that you may defend House Andrews'lan against all attackers. It is made from titanium, so it should be weighted just right for you.”

Jeff stood up and went to face Kam, shocked by this offer. He took the weapon from his future Father-in-law and hefted it a few times, noting it was not as heavy as his *One Love's* fighting tool. Kam then opened a second case and removed another Bantra'saa'laa, polished but obviously very old. He held it up, angled it somewhat and urged Jeff to lock upper tines with him.

“I, Kamram Saanar Keth'lan, of House Keth'lan, of the Keth'lans of Kas'Madelle, do hereby place House Andrews'lan as my third and newest sub-House under my protection. May you always be safe and well-defended.” That prompted everyone to stand and cheer for them. It was now Na'Kesta's turn.

“The Matriarch of the House is expected to keep everyone in their House ready to do battle at any moment. With that in mind, I will give Na'Krista my gift.” Out of a market bag, the elder Keth'lan female brought out a bundle wrapped in bright paper and gave it to her daughter.

Krista unwrapped the bundle, discovering the inner wrapping was a cooking apron. Hidden inside that apron was a cookbook put together by her mother and a few family members. Opening it, the book also contained a current copy of the most common cookbook that was used in most of the Elazi homes. The recipe right on top of the family section was that *N'ga* berry cobbler. She had to fight back the tears, it touched her that much.

“Krista, your family will be well-fed from those recipes.” her mother offered up. She then patted Kam's stomach. “Be careful you do not over-feed your *One Love*. He will become sluggish and grumpy that way.”

“I am not sluggish and grumpy!” Kamram shot back, trying to be stern with his mate. It didn't work, as a smile emerged on his face. He was going to say more, but a knock at the glass patio door startled him. Na'Mara went to the portal and allowed in two individuals that acted like they felt out of place for just a moment. That was until the male spotted Teg in the common area.

“Father Tegram, I came out to the Station, as you asked.” the muscular gray Elazi offered up, holding hands with an ebony-hued femme that was at least a foot taller than him. “Na'Karra came with me, since she has never been here and she wanted to see the station.”

Tegram stood to introduce them; “For those that do not know him, this is Jagram Keth'lan, my son from my late *One Love* Na'Tarra. With him is Sa'Kerra, his *One love*. Jagram, Sa'Karra, this is Jeffrey Andrews'lan, Na'Krista's future husband, as they say on Earth. Jeffrey, Jagram will be your Second for the Challenge.”

“I'm honored to meet you.” Jeff put forth as he stood to bump fists with Jag. Looking up, it was apparent this was a taller, younger, stronger version of Tegram. Then the association was made; he was the Tal-Hassanai House champion from the Senate chambers.

“It is pleasing to meet you, too.” Jag put forth as he accepted Jeff's fist bump. “Father said we were, as you would say on your home world, “stacking the deck” for the Challenge. I knew Kalram could handle himself but Father felt we needed to ensure a win for you. He was concerned about you opening with a . . . a cheap shot and have Temmer retaliate with a return of the action.”

“Is it allowed, to have you compete as my Second?” Jeff asked out of curiosity.

“No stipulation was made at the initial challenge. He may not change the stipulations now.” Jagram replied.

“Everybody! Please!” Kamram said loudly, getting the room's attention. “There will be time enough to talk of combat later. Please sit and let's enjoy some N'ga berry cobbler, some *White Fire* and each others company. It has been far too long since this home has been alive with family.”

As the party continued on, the two elder Keth'lan brothers were both trying not to show their emotions while everyone warmed the home and made it feel alive again. It was true; it had been far too long since this home had felt this way.

That evening, after everyone had gone home for the night, Jeff was sitting on the patio with Na'Krista, enjoying the evening. They had the lights down low, some iced tea to enjoy and one another's company. Sometimes the simple things were the best things.

While he sipped his tea, Jeff wondered about the Challenge coming up. They had certainly stacked the deck, having Jagram as his Second. It was understood that Temmer would likely

protest but it would be pointed out, he didn't stipulate who could be his Second when the challenge was made.

Jeff just hoped he could hold up his part and make House Andrews'lan look good. Learning how this society still held onto their rituals gave him a new-found respect for their culture. Since this would most likely become his primary residence, he knew he would have to learn about the various customs on Elazia. Maybe there was a course he could take, Jeffrey mused.

while Na'Krista snuggled in closer to him, Jeff knew in his heart that he was destined to call Elazia his new home.

While Arrissa Wrraal drove them around in a rented Simmon coupe, Argess confirmed for the second time, the address of the being they were trying to locate for Na'Kesta. They were in the Northern sector of Kas'Madelle, in the high rise zone. He was still very uncomfortable with the city, since he preferred his home world of greenery and open space. This was far too confining to him.

“Turn left at the next intersection,” he instructed his wife and now Warrant Deputy, noting the last street they had drove past was one way in the wrong direction. “Why would a race devise one way streets? How inefficient.” he mused.

“It is efficient.” Arrissa retorted. “The flow of traffic is smoother. You know Saa'naa is the same way in the Capitol cities.”

“I wouldn't know. You will remember, I try not to drive on the other planets. I still have a driving citation on Comeria that needs to be addressed some day, before I return there.”

“A citation?” she questioned.

“It seems driving at full speed in downtown Frieshren, while chasing a mark is frowned upon.” he related.

“You are Adjudicator now. Make a telecommunique and have some Chaat transferred to whatever account is the correct one.” Arrissa suggested. “You know, I think being Adjudicator might be the best thing that ever happened to you.”

Argess turned to face his life mate with a questioning look. “How so?”

“It will make you use your brains for once.”

Argess sighed and went back to working with his padd, a particularly high powered one with a very illegal power rated wireless system installed on it. He was still looking for that one connection that had perplexed him for the last ten *munar*. When Arrissa made a right turn on *Zarrath Street* to head North again, he was alerted to a detection from his software package.

“Pull over and park.” he asked his *One Love*.

“Right here?” she questioned, looking for an empty parking place.

“Yes, right here. If you have to, go around the block.” he confirmed.

Arrissa found a place to park their coupe, shut off the engine and lighting, then turned to look at her husband. He was at work, tapping arguments into his padd, waiting to see if each command had a result before moving on to the next. Eventually, a blue icon in the top of the screen came to life.

“I am in.” he stated, using the built-in directional antenna to locate the source of the wireless signal transmission. It was the building across the street from them, a strong, static-free connection. Sighting along the edge of the padd, he determined the source to be coming from about the twentieth floor of the high-rise flats, some very high-standards living quarters. It would take someone well-heeled or well-connected to live here.

Argess brought up the internal camera system for that flat, flipping between each room to see what the layout was and more importantly, if the being they were in search of was at home. He could see the food preparation area, the lounging and dining rooms, two bedrooms, one set up as an office, and the hall into the bathroom zone. All the lights were out and no movement was observed on the cameras.

“He is not at home.” the huge leonid muttered sourly. “We will have to try back tomorrow, at an earlier hour.”

“Before last meal, then.” the femme replied. “Let's go get some rest. I am tired.”

A smoky gray male sat on his patio, sipping some strong herbal tea while watching the view from his high vantage point. It was a nice evening, not too cool for him. He had observed the coupe park on the street across from his building, wondering if it was his late dinner date. After a few moments, his padd on the table beeped and an alert told him that his security system was being hacked. Knowing there was no camera on the patio, he touched the virtual key for video only, allowing the intruder to see what amounted to nothing.

He tapped another virtual key, sending a worm into the intruder's padd, hoping it would take root and report the intruder's location to him as needed. If the padd was closer than five-hundred Quatre to him, he would get an alert. Right before that Simmon coupe drove off again, his padd alerted him that the hack had been disconnected and the worm was in and running.

An'Retten'af wondered who this was that was trying to hack his security. He only had one iron in the fire at this time, so who could it be? Certainly not this project. At any rate, if they actually entered his home, they were in for a rude surprise from his security system.