

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-Three

“Preparation For Battle”

Jeff sipped some strong coffee and tried to settle his nerves while Na'Krista made the connection to Temmer Frain'lan's terminal in downtown Kas'Madelle. First meal had not set very well with the Earther, since he was still upset by this whole issue of having to deal with a challenge. Jeff had taken a few stomach mints earlier but they failed to have an effect on his situation.

“This is Tem Frain'lan,” the male on the other end answered, turning to face the screen. “Are you ready to choose your style of combat, Jeffrey Andrews'lan?” he asked.

“I choose *Taan'zaa* with Seconds.” Jeff replied firmly.

“I see. We will meet at the designated site with our Seconds. *Saav'Rand Square* at eight *heth* in the early day. Please be prepared to battle.”

“I will be ready.” Jeff managed to say evenly.

“As you would say on Earth, have a nice day.” Tem offered up with a smirk, right as the transmission was ended.

“Ooh, how I want to kick his sorry arse, right effing now!” Jeffrey growled, steamed up by the Elazi males' insolence.

“Don't let him get to you.” Krista offered up. “You need to change into some exercise togs and go through the ritual forms of stretching, before Jagram gets here. Jag wants to take you over to *Saav'Rand Square* so you can get used to the surface you'll be fighting on.”

“And what will you be doing today?” he asked of the young Elazi femme facing him.

“I have to begin my video technician training class today. I need to leave soon, if I'm going to be on time to instruct the class.”

They retired to the master bedroom and while Jeff put on his loose training clothes, Na'Krista had to put on what would have almost passed for the old United States Air Force 1505 uniform; tan blouse and pants, an olive green belt and her khaki garrison cap. Her black boots were highly polished for the occasion, as were her brass appointments.

“You look very official today.” Jeffrey offered up while Krista did her hair up in a bun in the mirror.

“Thank you.” she replied with a smile. “Walk with me out to my roller, please?”

As they walked out to her transportation, Jeff gave thought to the matter. It was imperative that he win this challenge if he were to stay with the love of his life. If he lost, he felt like he would be failing Krista. He would leave for Earth and he knew she would go with him. While they would be together, he didn't want to see her lose her home, deeded to her by her late Grandmother.

He opened the door to her vehicle and closed it for her once she was seated. After giving her a kiss through the window, he stood and watched as she drove off to her first official day as an instructor. It was at that moment that he finally realized what she meant to him; Na'Krista meant two worlds to him. He knew now that he had to win this challenge by any means possible.

Once Na'Krista was out of sight, Jeff returned to the patio and began to go through his prescribed stretching moves, preparing himself for his morning workout with Jagram Keth'lan. Since his designated Second was taller and more heavily muscled than he, Jeff knew he would be put through his paces.

Clearing his mind of distractions and shaking out his muscles at the same time, Jeff began the first of eighteen routines. It would not be long before Jag would arrive to meet with him.

Argess and Arrissa made their way up to the twentieth floor of the apartment flats, careful that nobody would pay them no nevermind. They were dressed casually for the day with their needed 'tools of the trade' tucked into her market bag. The elevator opened, they stepped out and turned to the right, headed toward the correct flat.

“Is he still on the balcony?” the femme *Fask-aal* asked.

“He is still busy with his padd, whatever it is on it that he's preoccupied by.” was the reply after the male *Fask-aal* looked at his communicator display.

It took Argess only moments to hack the electronic lock on the door, allowing them access to the living quarters and their quarry. According to the video feed, the smoky gray male was sitting on the patio, engrossed in something on his padd. Just as the *Fask-aal* male closed the entry door behind them, he heard a bolt click into place, preventing their exit. That's when he noticed that familiar, cloying scent in the air, tickling his nostrils.

“Argess? What is that aroma in the air?” Arrissa asked as the room began to spin around her. Clearly, this was a toxin of some type being sprayed into the space. Turning to her mate, she observed him trying to open the door the hard way. Her husband by using his fist on the control panel to force the issue while trying to hold his breath for what proved to be not long enough. She dropped to her knees, not wishing to fall down and hurt herself while the gas took effect on her. As she finally fell to the floor, the last thing she observed before losing consciousness was Argess, toppling over against the door, obviously out for the count.

Retten Trent'lan looked at the document that was sent to him at his request, a dossier on the two beings resting on his couch. It had taken a while for the Trinn Gas to dissipate, forcing him to use a respirator while he bound his 'guests' and moved them to his divan. At least his people had been kind enough to send this document through a courier and not over the network.

He opened a small case and removed a sealed tube from it. Checking to see that it was still good and not expired, he tipped Arrissa's head back. Retten opened the container and shook it open end down until a rolled up black film and two small white pads fell from the tube. He sat the pads over her closed eyes and turned his attention to the flimsy material on his lap.

Working with that material, he eventually unrolled that black film that was shaped to cover her eyes and some of her face at the same time. After he stripped the backing from the film, he carefully covered her eyes, making sure the plastic was adhered firmly to her pelt. Another object, a nasal aerosol canister was removed from the case and two shots of an antidote were administered up each of Argess' nostrils.

“Ergh, what in *The Eternal Blazes* happened to us?” the huge male asked, once he was somewhat coherent and able to speak without slurring his words.

“You learned an important lesson in intruder management.” Retten replied.

“Oh Blast!” he blurted out, once it was clear to him that he had been immobilized. His wrists were cuffed to the top of a short bar and his ankles were attached to the other end. The bar was short enough that his hands were in between his knees. It was clear he was not going anywhere at the moment, even if he could stand. Looking over at his wife, he observed her situation. “What did you do to Arrissa?”

“I just made sure she's not leaving anytime soon.”

“What's that on her face?”

Retten shrugged his left shoulder. “It's just some blinder film, nothing more. It can easily be removed.” After a moment, he continued. “So, would you care to explain to me why you're wearing that Adjudicator's Pendant *and*, tell me the reason why you were so rudely breaking into my home?”

“Maybe you should just guess why.” Argess replied. “I am a diplomat, The Adjudicator for *Fask-aal*. I have diplomatic immunity on this planet.”

“You make a pretty far-fetched claim, Adjudicator. That is, if you really are an Adjudicator. By the way, there is no immunity in my home for those that would see fit to break in and enter. Let's see what your mate has to say about the matter.”

Retten brought Arrissa back from her forced sleep, making sure she had no adverse reactions to the antidote. Once awake, it was clear she was not a happy camper at the moment.

“What the . . . what in *The Eternal Fires* is over my eyes?” she growled. “No, let me guess. I would have to say, blinder film, since I can feel the pads against my eyelids. Alright, who is the responsible party?”

“That person or persons responsible for your situation would be your mark, my dear mercenary. I am An'Retten'af Trent'lan, at your service. Since Argess only tells me that he has diplomatic immunity, what say you in the matter?”

“He *has* diplomatic immunity, Retten.” she shot back. “He is the new Adjudicator, taking office after his father was killed.”

“Well, I thought the senior Wrraal to be quite invincible. How terrible to hear.” the Elazi male offered up. “I still have not heard you say why you were in my home as an unwelcome guest.”

“Gah! Argess, we had better come forth with the truth.” she directed to her mate.

“Alright.” he agreed with a sigh. He knew they no longer held the upper hand in this matter. “We were asked to find you and deliver you to the Keth'lan family compound. Her Esteemed Ambassador wished to have a discussion of sorts concerning attacks on her least daughters' life.”

“How interesting.” Retten offered up. “Since I have you both at a disadvantage, I will offer up that I do know who is behind all of this. However, since I am acting as an intermediary, I can keep things at bay for the moment.”

“But you have ordered attempts on her life?” Arrissa asked.

“I have ordered a select group to do so, not my first elites, but I have always had a detail follow them to make sure no lasting harm comes to her or her intended human mate.” Retten explained. “You are aware that I am related to her through blood lineage? Could I harm a blood relative? You know what the scriptures say about that little transgression.

“I will admit that her intended might have gotten roughed up a bit too much by accident but that was not in my plans. I wanted her to be scared enough to give up her rights to her land, that's all. I did not mean for her to be gravely injured, ever.”

“You have certainly scared her.” Argess offered up.

“That was my intent, to give her a . . .” Retten stopped when he observed Argess' *Tah'Nash* ring on a chain when it fell into view from inside his vest. “You are *Tah'Nash*?”

“If you're referring to my ring, I will admit I am an operative.” the huge male offered up. “What of my association with them?”

Retten removed his gloves. “As you can see, we seem to work for the same people.” he pointed out, showing Argess his matching ring. “Now I feel bad about this,” he pointed out as he released his guests from their bondage.

Once Argess was free of his bonds, he helped to release his mate from hers. While he worked on his mate's bonds, there was something rattling around his mind that his fellow operative needed to

know. “Retten, you should be made aware that her Esteemed Ambassador is also an operative, a rather high-level regional officer. I believe it would be for the best if we went to meet with her. You need to share what you know about this situation with her.” Argess pointed out.

“This is a rather sticky issue I seemed to have run up against.” Retten mused. “If I go to see her, she must know who and what I am in advance. I also ask for immunity. As a *Tah’Nash* member, you must assist in this request.”

“I will grant you diplomatic asylum, Retten. You are under my protection for the moment.” Argess thought about the situation for a moment, then he continued. “Is the person you’re protecting *Tah’Nash*?”

“He is not. I was influenced by the massive amount of Crown he offered for his dirty work.”

“Then you should not keep his identity a secret.” Arrissa put forth.

Retten shook his head. “I cannot divulge his ident . . .” His train of thought was derailed by a loud crash from the shattered glass patio door, right as Retten fell to the floor, holding his thigh. “Gah! I’m hit!”

Following standard operating procedures for attack from unknown sources by ducking low to avoid the projectile arms fire, Argess pushed his wife to an interior wall behind a rather large bookcase, dragging Retten behind him. All the while they were being showered with small arms fire from an assailant or assailants unknown.

As the senior officer, it was up to him to get them to safety in anyway possible. Once they were under the impromptu protective cover, some being or beings in the building across the way continued to pepper the flat with rifle rounds. After Arrissa finished peeling the blinder film from her face, she began to assist Retten with his injury.

“Small bore rifle is my guess,” the male Elazi offered up through gritted teeth, examining the diminutive hole in his pants. “There is a medikit in the hall closet, by the front door. Bottom of the closet, on the floor. The shooter doesn’t have enough angle to hit you from his vantage point.”

Arrissa got down on her elbows and knees and made her way to the door in question. When she opened the Saak-wood door, the top of the tough hardwood structure began to be splintered by continued small arms fire, sounding very much like two shooters now. The bag was retrieved and she made her way back to the others.

While Arrissa worked on Retten’s wound, Argess put together a break-down rifle that was in his wife’s market bag. The stubby barrel snapped into the receiver, then a stock was added. The videoscope was attached, then a magazine was inserted. He charged the weapon and sat it on top of the bookcase so he could use his watch display as the video receiver. Finding one of the shooters on a balcony across from them, a Bil male, he carefully squeezed off a round, making the shooter take cover.

Once Arrissa was finished with her work, she asked that all-important question;

“Argess, are we screwed?”

“Don't think so.” he replied as he carefully chased the second shooter into cover with well-placed shots. “Let's go out the front way. We can go down to the garage . . . Now what!?” His thoughts were cut short by someone in the common hall, forcibly trying to make entry. “Retten? Friends of yours?”

“Um, no. Especially since I'm the one they shot.” he retorted. “No, we are not in a good place right now.”

Arrissa had other ideas, though. “Don't count us out yet.” she offered up as she gave the two males a fold-up gas mask apiece. “Put them on and whatever you do, don't take them off until I tell you to!”

The men obliged her request while she donned a mask of her own. Moments later, she was pulling the pin on a small gas bomb and tossing it by the portal just as the front door gave way. Two Bil males in full blackout combat gear stepped into the inner entry hallway and just as quickly fell down, rendered unconscious by the Ravek gas. Out in the hall, more bodies were heard hitting the deck due to the power of the odorless mixture. Arrissa followed up by tossing another gas cartridge into the common hall before helping Retten to his feet.

They made their way into the commons, where the female *Fask-aal* dropped a gas cannister down the open portion of the stairwell, allowing it to flood the whole zone. They carefully made their way down to the street level, then one more level down to the garage. Every unconscious antagonist they passed was a Bil, with no exceptions.

At the bottom of the stairs they found one last Bil, knocked out like the rest. What was odd about this one was the gear he possessed. It was apparent he was in charge, since he had a conventional hand-held radio to keep track of the situation. His garb seemed to be of a higher quality, too. This gave Argess an idea.

“This one is coming with us.” he suggested. He helped Retten over to their escape vehicle, then he returned for the Bil antagonist.

Once at their roller, an older Taфра Express Van, they climbed in quickly and shut the doors. As soon as Argess had their unconscious passenger secured in the back, Arrissa fired up the compression ignition powerplant and rapidly exited the underground parking, making a right to merge with the early-day traffic. They waited for a block or so to allow the gas that had gotten into the vehicle to be neutralized by the proper chemical before removing the masks.

“Arrissa, I'm still bleeding.” Retten put forth after examining his wound. The seat he was sitting on was getting sticky with his blood.

“Just hold pressure on the wound. I'm taking you to a doctor that's *Tah'Nash*. He'll fix you up with no questions asked.” she replied. “Once we have you patched up, we'll sort this out.”

Retten was still bothered by all of this. “What I want to know is, why were those Bil that were after me? I mean, I didn't think I was a target of interest.”

“Maybe we should lay low for a few days.” Arrissa suggested. “At least long enough for us to figure out who those soldiers belonged to. I’m sure our Bil friend we brought with us can help us with that.”

“That sounds like a plan.” Agress commented. “I’ll get one of my contacts to ask around. One Bil mercenary, let alone a contingent, is so out of place on this planet.” After a moment, he continued with his thoughts. “Arrissa, what else is in your market bag?”

She just turned and smiled widely at him.

Jeff stepped from Jagram's Tafra coupe and surveyed what was called *Saav'Rand Square*. It was more of a park crossed with a minor league baseball diamond. There were trees, picnic tables and what would be the arena he would be fighting in.

The fighting square was just that, a roughly fifty foot on a side square arena covered in that ground cork-type material. There were alternating color rings from the center out with a small square area in each corner. The seating was bleacher-style on three sides with the fourth side reserved for the combatants. The surface was still being groomed and rolled by several workers when they arrived, making sure the surface was just so.

“This is it.” Jag offered up as they walked to the center of the combat field. “When you are fighting, you must have at least one foot in a different colored ring from Temmer. If he steps back, making you both occupy the same color, you may only lock shafts. Use that to push him far enough into another ring to resume combat. The corners may be used to get a tenth of a *munar* rest. It is not much but it could be the difference between winning and losing.”

The tall Elazi male took Jeff through a number of challenges, helping him to develop a feel for the ring and the added intricacy of the rules of engagement. If the two men were in the proper rings, the *Taan'zaa* had enough reach to strike the opposing combatant with vigor. The inner rings were easier to work but as they gravitated to the outer segments, reach was king. That was proven by Jagram making an easy twenty points on Jeffrey.

“Let us rest for a bit,” Jag put forth, motioning to the benches near their drink cooler. While they rested, Jeff used the oxygen mask to help his recovery. It was clear to Jeff, he had not fully acclimated to Elazia's higher gravity and atmospheric pressure. Leaning back against the table top that was part of the bench, Jeff thought about this pending combat. He had been told that Temmer was not a soldier when he served his compulsory service and had never fought off-world. Jeff wondered if this would work to his advantage. His musing was interrupted by Jag, standing and motioning for him to stand.

“Jeffrey, I have been holding back so far. Now, I will come at you with everything I have. I want you to do the same. Just think of Na'Krista, watching you leave to return to Earth, tears in her eyes. Think of her in Temmer's arms.”

Those thoughts stirred something deep in Jeff's soul, bringing to life a war-machine that would rival any Elazi martial arts practitioner. He used his military training and his knowledge of Jujitsu to go after his trainer with a fire that burned brightly. Jagram was forced into a defensive role

while Jeff quickly piled up the points, making the taller male have to retreat from his attacker's fury.

“Jeff! Stop!” Jagram shouted, breaking his aggressor’s concentration. Once Jeff had ceased, Jag continued. “Where did that come from?” he queried, surprised by the intensity of the challenge brought forth by the Earther. “That is how I want you to fight Temmer. You were up seventeen points on me.”

“I was?” Jeff questioned.

“I was waiting for you to use a finishing blow on me.” the tall one replied. “To tell you the truth, I would not wish to fight you, knowing you have a firestorm in your soul.”

Now Jeff was confused. “A firestorm?”

“Yes, a firestorm.” his mentor confirmed. “I could see it in your eyes. You were scary.”

“Well, you gave me those thoughts.” the human offered up. “You are right; I was fired up by the thought of another man holding my *One Love*. I went feral on you. I'm sorry if I hurt you.”

“No, don't be sorry, Jeffrey. I want you to keep those thoughts in your mind and be that unstoppable warrior, that soldier full of fire. That is who you need to be. How people will perceive your house will hinge on this match.”

“I thought as much.” Jeff mused.

“Jeffrey, I must admit, the first time I observed you in the *Tal-Hassanai* House chambers, I misjudged you.” Jag put forth. “I thought, you would prove to be no match for me. Then you made that statement, that you would challenge to gain admittance to our House. I was not concerned until you said that next statement in rebuttal to having to fight me, concerning size and how hard I would fall. That made me gain a new appreciation for your Human race.”

“Jagram, I'll confess now.” Jeff retorted. “I was really scared, standing there in front of those elders. When they said I would have to fight you if I challenged, I knew I might have only a slim change of coming out on top. After training with Kalram and you, I have gained a new-found appreciation for the Elazi customs.”

Jagram nodded. “Really, it is all about customs and rituals. We may be a highly civilized race but the old ways still guide us. We cannot let go, as you would say. We have held on to the old rituals and customs with a death grip. I do not see it as being detrimental to our race but I think it is what fits us best.”

After a moment, he continued; “You will win this match, one way or another. That will make Elazia look at you in a new light. A House, led by an Earther, joined to an Elazi female. A House that has survived what will be two challenges. You will be seen in our eyes as a strong, young House. House Andrews'lan will be talked about in a good way. Your name will be known far and wide.”

Na'Kayla had been waiting for this moment for what seemed like an eternity, well, since early this morning. Before being allowed to leave the *Troop Transporter Hyannis*, she had to submit to having a regenerative stimulator fitted to her torso. She knew this would not be pleasant at all from what had been said by the medics that had been tending to her. Steeling herself, she knew she could not stall the technicians that were patiently waiting any longer.

The gray femme had been measured for her medical device the day before so she knew this could not be put off any longer. Nodding in agreement, she allowed the technicians to begin their task.

The two specialists began by carefully sliding the back sections of the stimulator under her, getting them placed in the proper location. The side pieces were added followed by the front segments. A strip regenerative pod was placed over her incision, then the whole stimulator was tightened up to keep it in proper alignment. It's side function was to act as a brace, keeping her from bending over and opening the incision again.

“This might feel odd to you at first,” the lead technician offered up as he turned on the unit and set the parameters to her physician's specifications. “This regenerator will cycle on one *heth* and off one *heth*.”

Na'Kayla groaned when the device began to do its work, forcing her body to heal at a somewhat accelerated pace. The 'tingling', as she had been told about, was not comfortable. Not at all.

“Can you turn it down, please?” she asked through gritted teeth. “This is making me nauseous.”

“We expected that.” the technician told her. “I will give you something to counteract your discomfort.”

The technicians administered an injection that made her feel quite numb all over but it sure beat being sick to her stomach. While she waited for things to settle down, she gave thought to the situation at hand. They had heard of the challenge that Jeffrey had to accept and just like her *One Love* Hammet, Na'Kayla hoped he would be victorious over Temmer Frain'lan.

The gray femme also hoped she would be sufficiently recovered to be in her sister's joining assembly. Customs dictated that she be the one that would hold Jeffrey's joining band until her sister asked for it. Since Jeff had no family on Elazia, he would need to ask someone in the party to be the holder for Na'Krista's band. Maybe Kalram could take that honor for him.

Her medical aides helped her to get situated in a sitting position on the edge of the bed and ultimately, into a wheel chair for her trip to the landing bay. She knew whatever ship she would go dirt-side in was not far from the access ways of the transport. Kayla hoped they would get there soon, as she was getting nauseous again from being jostled around. When the door to the landing bay opened, she was glad to see her father waiting for her.

“Na'Kayla, I came to take you dirt-side.” Kamram offered up. “Hammet is on his way right now so we should be underway as soon as we can get you situated.”

“Thank you, Father,” she replied, feeling very relieved. She knew her father's shuttle would give her a smooth ride to the surface. She remembered just how light her parent's hands were on the controls, making it seem so easy to fly a shuttle back into the atmosphere.

One of the seating areas in the aft section of the shuttle had been converted into a bed situated inside a soft sided pressure capsule for her. The medi-techs put a sheet in the bottom of it, carefully moved her onto her bunk and put a blanket over her. Her father helped by placing a pillow under her head, just as Hammet arrived.

“I made it here as fast as I could.” the smoke gray male stated. “Our possessions are to be sent to our home and I arranged a week at home for Kayla and myself. We will get settled in and hopefully, Kayla will get some rest before she has to start her physical therapy.”

“Gah! Physical therapy! Don't remind me!” she spat out. “What I need right now is some further meds for my nausea.”

The lead tech administered a small amount of medication to the ailing femme and gave Hammet two more doses that had been put into syringes. Once he had been briefed as to when she could have more meds, they exited the craft and closed the hatch behind them.

“Here we go,” Hammet said as he put a breathing mask over her face and adjusted the strapping for her. Ensuring the air flow was good, he pulled the flexible top of the capsule over her and zipped it closed with the air-tight zip. The life support pod under her bunk was activated, pressurizing the clear envelope around her. That would protect her, should the hull become breached by some accident. While her father took them out into open space, her *One Love* put on his helmet and took up a seat where he could watch over her.

“Na'Kayla, can you hear me?” her father asked through the comm system.

“Loud and clear.” she replied.

“We should be at your home in seven hours or so.” her parent offered up. “Why don't you try to rest? It would do you some good.”

The gray femme took her father's advice and tried to make herself comfortable for the long ride home. Just the thought of being home would make the trip seem shorter.

Na'Krista was just about finished with her mid-meal when the Base Training Commander entered, making everyone in the hall quickly stand at attention. The pale tan, almost white male motioned for everyone to sit down again as he located the target of his search. Surprising Na'Krista, he sat down opposite her, cup of coffee in hand.

“Commander Vansar'lan,” Krista acknowledged him, offering to freshen his cup from the carafe near her.

“Thank you, Technician Keth'lan.” he replied, allowing her to refill his drinking vessel. When she had finished with her chore, he continued. “I came here because there has been some concern

from higher staff. They are afraid that you might be making a poor choice in joining to this Earther. I have been tasked with speaking to you. Not as superior to subordinate, you see, but as one friend to another.”

“I see, Commander.” she mused.

“Call me by my given name Jerret, please.”

“As you wish, Jerret. What do you want to ask of me?” Krista wanted to know.

“You know your father and I are very close friends. I have to be honest, Na’Krista. I too am concerned. By joining to this Earther . . .”

“His name is Jeffrey Andrews’lan.” Krista blurted out.

“Yes, Jeffrey. Sorry, I didn't know his name,” Jerret continued, “By joining with Jeffrey, he gains half of your station by right. Are you prepared to give that in joining?”

“I am.” she agreed. “I will also gain half of Jeffrey's holdings on Earth. He has a very large, sturdy cabin in the mountains of Northern California and what is about eighty units of land. He also has a military retirement to draw and he works part-time, too.”

“Ah,” Jerret mused. “He is military, then.”

“He is a former Marine doctor, an officer, trained in field medicine.”

“So, he is a warrior and a doctor?” Jerret questioned.

“He is retired from the Marines but I wouldn't count him out in a firefight. He handles a railgun like a seasoned trooper.”

Jerret was quiet in thought for a moment, then he smiled at her. “Maybe I have misjudged Jeffrey. Like your father, you have that inner feeling about a being.”

“Thank you, Jerret.”

“And I have one other duty to take care of,” he continued, “It has come to my attention that you are still just a Technician, Class Five. I want you to take your rank tabs off and replace them with your new rank.” He took a small case from his shirt pocket and placed it on the table, turning it to open the lid toward her. “Due to your service off-planet in a war zone, you are now promoted to the rank of Sub-Commander. I think a congratulations is in order, Commander.”

While she held the case and fought back the tears, all of the room erupted in cheers for her promotion. She was so taken by this news, Commander Vansar’lan performed the honors of changing out her rank since her hands were shaking too badly to do it herself. Afterward, she stood tall and saluted him, failing at keeping a big smile off of her face.

“Sub-Commander Keth'lan, now that you have made command grade, I have a proposal for you. We will be losing my Sub-Commander in charge of video training in less than thirty days. I would be pleased if you would accept the posting in his place.”

“Um, how many cycles would this posting be?” she asked.

“Two cycles, but you could extend that by one cycle increments.”

Na'Krista thought for a moment before she spoke up. “Commander, may I talk with Jeffrey first? I would like his input before I commit to such a posting.”

“I thought you would.” Jerret observed. He looked at the clock, then made an astute observation; “You need to get back to your class.”

“Yes, Saar!” she replied with gusto.

That evening, Na'Krista couldn't get home quick enough to suit her. When she finally made it to her home, she literally ran into the house, looking for Jeffrey. After a short search, she found him in the library, reading a middle school textbook on geography. She took the text from him and sat down in his lap.

“Good Evening,” she stated with a kiss to his cheek afterward.

“You're in a good mood.” Jeff retorted.

“I received some good news.” she countered. “I have been asked to accept a new posting as Commander in charge of Video Training.”

“Commander in charge . . .?” This confused Jeff, just until he noticed her new rank tabs. “You received a promotion?”

“I am now a Sub-Commander!” Krista blurted out.

“I see.” Jeff agreed, giving the tab closest to him some scrutiny. “So, do we need to celebrate this good fortune?”

“We will.” Krista kissed him again, then she relinquished her perch in his lap. “Let's get changed and go out to dinner. I know this place not far away that makes an Earth-style pizza.”

“As you wish, Sub-Commander.” Jeff replied, smiling widely. He could see how this had really lifted Krista's spirits. He wasn't too sure about a pizza made on Elazia but he would give it a go. It would mean a lot to Krista.