

The characters Jeffrey Alan Sakaar Andrews, Na'Krista Nahala Keth'lan, Kamram Keth'lan, Na'Kesta Keth'lan, Tegram Keth'lan, Traci McDonald, Bosteg Haas'lan, Kestam Ramn'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'Jemma 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.

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“Scribe”

by Kellan Meig'h

Chapter Twenty-Six

“Making Commitments For Life”

~Part 1~

Na'Krista kissed Jeffrey on the cheek softly and slipped out of the bedroom just as quietly as she could. It was not quite full light outside but it was the moment that she would go with the femmes and be prepared for her joining. Her clothing and accessories had already been placed in her mother's roller so it was now time to leave. As they left, the males that were gathered on the patio all smiled and waved as the small retinue drove off down the driveway.

Kamram looked over at Kalram, seeming to be concerned. “Na'Mara made me promise we would not make a mess in her kitchen.”

“I will be neat.” Kal replied. Looking to everyone in turn to see if they were ready, he held open the door to the main hall as the retinue quietly entered. Once inside, they all waited in the gathering area while a lone figure went to wake Jeff. That person stood in the doorway to the bedroom, smiling at the sleeping figure on the bed. Padding softly over to the napping Earther, he shook the Groom's shoulder gently to wake him.

“Jeff, wake up.” he bid, shaking the sleeping person again before making a second attempt. “Jeff, you need to get up. Breakfast is being made for you.”

“Uuuughhh,” was the reply as Jeff rolled over on his back, shielding his eyes from the morning light with his arm.

“Come on buddy, wake up. You're wasting daylight.” the figure bid again.

“Yeah, I'm up. Gimme a minute here . . .” Jeff thought for a moment; who would be waking him up that would speak clear, unaccented English? Opening his eyes, he observed his younger brother, standing by his bed. “Harv? What are you doing here? No, forget that. Let's go with how did you get here?” he wanted to know.

The younger Andrews brother smiled at his sibling. “Your future father-in-law had his people find Susan and myself so we could be here. It's a surprise gift from her family to you and your bride.” was the explanation. “Um, you do need to get up, though. Kalram is making breakfast for your Groom's Detachment. You are expected to eat with us.”

Harvey guided Jeff to the shower and stood by with a towel so his older brother could get dried off and somewhat dressed for first meal. When the elder Andrews was dried off sufficiently, Harvey gave him a pair of lounging shorts and a t-shirt to wear. Once the elder brother was clad in his morning wear, Harv ushered Jeffrey to the kitchen.

“Good morning!” everyone bid when he walked into the food preparation area. Jessett, Kamram, Tegram, Jagram, Kalram and Hammet were present, along with one more male, an Elazi male that while he bore a resemblance to all of the Keth'lan males, he wore a rust-red pelt. That male approached Jeffrey and extended his right hand in greeting, Earth-style.

“I am Merrett Vakaar Keth'lan, Jessett's elder brother. I was told of a very important joining within the family so I knew I had to be here. It is good to meet you, Jeffrey Andrews'lan.” the male put forth.

“I am honored to meet you, Saar.” Jeff replied. “How did you hear of my impending joining?”

“You may thank Na'Cira Cern'lan for that.” Merrett offered up. “She is a distant relative and a pilot for Kamram. Na'Cira heard of the joining so she ran the FTL drives on *The Phantom* at full power to Bil-Cmela and back. Once she arrived there, it was not hard for her to locate me since I'm somewhat of a legend or maybe a myth on the Bil homeworld, I've been there for so long. I just made it dirt-side a few *Heth* ago.”

“I'm glad you're here, Saar.” Jeff offered.

“Please call me Merrett.” the ruddy one requested. “I see first meal is ready for us. Let us eat, then we will perform the pre-joining rituals and prayers.” The men all took up seats at the small table and bowed their heads in prayer which Jessett enunciated;

“We pray to *Od'Tra the Wise* and to the God Of Abraham, asking for blessings to this joining. We will perform the rituals and prepare Jeffrey Alan Sakaar Andrews'lan for his part of the life-long commitments he will make to his mate. We pray that our gods will keep us all safe and free from harm on this day.”

Sustenance was passed around and ice-cold water was provided along with fresh coffee which Merrett had to have a second cup of. While they ate, Jeff looked at all of the people that he would soon call family and lastly at his brother, glad that they were all present for this very important day.

Na'Mara was preparing a first meal for the assembled femmes, making sure they had the sustenance needed to get through the ceremony. This was necessary since there would be no time for eating until after the services were completed. She was glad Na'Kimsa was there to help, since this was her kitchen and she knew exactly where everything was located.

Sa'Densa went through the eldest Keth'lan's home, gathering the females that would be Na'Krista's entourage for the joining. She was glad Traci McDonald and Susan Andrews were there, since they would help with Krista's clothing. Na'Kayla was in attendance, a little worse for

wear but she had some meds to take that would get her through the day. Jo-Linn Farnissen had made her way to the elder Keth'lan's home, eager to help Krista to be joined this day.

Na'Kesta seemed rather frazzled, checking and rechecking the items on her list. Kalram's *One Love* Sa'Kimsa was busy trying to assist her mother-in-law in any way possible. Jagram's mate Na'Karra was setting the table while Merrett's Significant Other, Loria was styling Na'Krista's hair for her. What was very unusual was the fact Loria was a native born Bil with light green scales that were polished for the occasion. To add to her appearance for the day, her dark brown hair had been done up in curls.

"I am almost done." Loria Setsan-Keth'lan put forth, using some spray to set the curls she had just worked into Krista's hair.

Na'Krista looked at the results in a hand mirror. "You have done my hair to perfection. I am very thankful Merrett brought you to the joining."

"My *Bonded Other* insisted I travel with him." the scaled one offered up. "Merrett has wanted to show me around the Keth'lan holdings for some time now. He also wants to take me to the family vacation home at Lake Zevri. He has said I will enjoy swimming in the high mountain lake."

They all gathered around the table and bowed their heads while Na'Kimsa offered a prayer;

"We pray this morning to *Od'Tra the Wise, Chu Din, the Abrahamic God* and the Bil Deity *Stremfla Ze'edri* for guidance and protection on this important day. We ask that you always watch over Na'Krista and Jeffrey, keeping them safe and healthy."

Na'Krista started her last meal as a single femme by passing the first of many dishes around the table, glad to have such a nice group of family and friends to help her through this day. All that was left that she needed to do was to get dressed and touch up her makeup. The traditional Keth'lan intertwined joining striping in white, orange and black had been done by Na'Kesta, using great care to place them just so. The markings were applied to her left arm and leg, her shoulders, lower torso and the left side of her face in what could be called a tribal style on Earth. The stripes were the last pre-nuptual things to attend to that would be done outside the Keth'lan compound. Everything else would be done at the gathering hall.

Now all she wished for was for her mother to calm down just a bit before everyone else got jumpy.

Sub-Commander Senior Grade Marlett Blane'lan was walking down the line of soldiers that made up Orange Detachment, checking each member's uniform for any flaws that might have existed. He was granted the title of the provisional leader of the Detachment, now that Hallett Trasc'lan was preparing to retire. The former commander of the group stood to the side, ready to give any assistance that might have been needed.

It still seemed odd to the former commander that Na'Kesta had sent a text message for the squad to be in attendance and it was further confusing that she requested them to wear body armor

under their dress uniforms and to be armed as well. As odd as it seemed, who were they to question *Her Esteemed Ambassador?* There must have been an ulterior motive for this action.

After Marlett had the small division fall out, they all stood around the front doors to the Keth'lan retreat gathering hall and checked their weapons carefully, since Hallett had suspected an attempt on Na'Krista's life might happen this day. It did make sense to the squad, once that thought had been shared with them.

Orange Detachment had their newest member with them today, Trooper Grade Nine Sa'Vesi Derrel'lan. She was the first femme that had ever served with them and at the moment, in an unusual position as the highest ranking Non-Commissioned Officer. She was also the tallest femme any of them had ever met. Even as tall as Hallett was, he had to look up to her. Since they had not met before today, he decided to talk to her while they awaited the arrival of the joining party.

“Trooper Derrel'lan, I am Sub-Commander Hallett Trasc'lan, the previous leader of Orange Detachment. It is good to meet you.”

“I am pleased to meet you, Sub-Commander.” she replied. “I have heard nothing but praise for your leadership. I am sad to see you leave The Trans-Atmospheric Forces and Orange Detachment but it has afforded me this unique opportunity.”

“A unique opportunity, indeed.” Hallett retorted. “As ranking Non-Com, you are provisionally in position as Sub-Commander Blane'lan's *Number One*. That is, as long as no other member of Orange Detachment challenges you for the position. Taking into account your service record and your size, I think no male will be that foolish.” After a moment, he continued with his thoughts. “Being as you're a femme, I really see no challenge happening. There is no honor in a male challenging a higher ranking femme for position. On Earth they would say; “Chivalry is not dead”.”

“And that is the unique opportunity.” Sa'Vesi offered up. “I do not have to challenge for the position of *Number One*.”

Hallett nodded politely when she excused herself to mingle with the others, just to get to know them better. He watched Trooper Derrel'lan walk over to their communications specialist and straighten his tie for him while she conversed, just as a mother would do for her young one. He wondered how this solid black femme could be the same Trooper Derrel'lan that helped lead the ground assault on the enemy-held capitol of Varpor and later served with the orbital attack fleet, acting as the forward bombardment coordinator aboard the *Heavy Gunship Torkere*.

Sub-Commander Trasc'lan mused about his own service record; three tours dirt-side on Varpor Prime, two tours of the Varpor mining and smelting factories on the Northern hemisphere of Varpor's second moon and one extended tour of the Goodrin-Finn asteroid belt, ferreting out pirates. Add to that three tours with Orange Detachment, the longest time with one squadron. He had spent forty-two cycles of his life in service to his planet, forty-two orbits away from his family and friends. Some of them were gone now, passing through the mist to start the next great adventure that lay in store for them.

Looking about at the group of males that were his comrades during his tenure, he knew that he probably knew more about them than their family did. They had spent so much time living in close quarters, he knew he could write a book about each one of them, citing dates and words spoken. It was fact that his former Detachment members could probably do the same for him. Now that would be highly embarrassing should they do so.

Sevran Varren'lan walked through his home to his small office and opened the display case that held his favorite hunting weapons. Selecting a particular one, he sat down on his couch and began to break it down for a quick cleaning. While he went about this chore, he gave thought to Dassan's offer. While it was true that he could be quite wealthy for the rest of his life, he still felt uneasy about how Dassan was so indifferent to Na'Krista's murder. She *was* related to him, after all.

Using a borescope, the pale gray male looked at the condition of the bore, particularly the lands and grooves. It was interesting that the bore was close enough to an Earth size that he could load the rounds using Earth-manufactured point-three-oh-eight bullets. Sevran appreciated the skill required to make a long distance kill on game that would fill a cooler unit with food. No stabilized scope, no gyro-assisted aiming. Nothing but a rifle, a hunter and a beast that would feed that hunter for a long time.

While the part-time mercenary reassembled the weapon in his possession, he remembered back to his days in the military, serving alongside Na'Krista near Merced, California. Musing about her warm smile and infectious laugh, Sev was sure he was making the right choice in this matter. He carefully wiped down his rifle and put it back in the cabinet. Dassan could go and do his own damned dirty work. Something felt very wrong about this so Sev decided to just stay out of it for now. Making a silent prayer to *Od'Tra the Wise*, he wished her a fruitful joining and a long life with her *One Love*.

As he turned to leave the room, another thought crossed his mind. He opened his cabinet once more and extracted another rifle, a close quarters carbine with a laser augmented optical sighting system. The drawer under the cabinet held several magazines that he loaded with armor defeating rounds, rounds that would pierce any body armor on this planet. If Dassan was so indifferent about Na'Krista's life, what's to say he didn't hire a backup plan, should the pale gray one fail? Sevran intended to be there and protect his former Soldier-In-Arms, should there actually be a backup plan in effect. That damned Dassan Trent'lan could just go spend the rest of time burning in *The Eternal Fires*, as far as Sevran was concerned.

The femmes had arrived at the Keth'lan family retreat at last, so while the others attended to the minutiae of Na'Krista's final preparations, Na'Kesta decided to find out why Orange Detachment was present. She had made no request and she was sure Kam had decided on no guards for the day. This just didn't feel right to her.

“Hallett, why is Orange Detachment here?” she queried of the tall, black-furred male.

“You requested our presence, Ambassador.” he replied, seeming to be puzzled by her question.

“Hal, I did not make a request.” she replied carefully.

“Mere Ambassador, I received a request from your personal communicator. No other device could have cloned your relay challenge code that my communicator authenticated. I might suggest that someone has used your personal device, no matter how far-fetched that may seem.” the trooper offered up. It was a possibility that her communicator had been tampered with but not likely. He knew Na'Kesta slept with it on her wrist.

Na'Kesta seemed bothered by this. “Since you are already here, keep watch over us but more importantly, try to keep to the shadows. Do this for Na'Krista. Do not spoil her day.”

“We will do so. I will relay this request to Sub-Commander Blane'lan. He is now in charge of the detachment and I am sure he will protect you as well as I have.”

Na'Kesta smiled at her former bodyguard. “Yes, he will protect Kam and myself as well as you have.” she agreed. She also knew Hallett had no idea Marlett was *Tah'Nash*. As her former detachment commander turned and headed over to meet with his successor, she smiled a wistful smile. She would miss him greatly.

Jeff's Groom's Detachment had arrived at the Keth'lan gathering compound, about one-half *Heth* from Jessett and Na'Kimsa's home. The compound was large, as evidenced by the low stone fencing that they had been driving past for about five *Munar* before they had made the gate to the driveway. Once inside the gate, the large oval driveway had small cottages situated to the outside and a large grassy area in the middle. This was the first large expanse of grass that Jeff had observed since landing on Elazia and it actually seemed out of place to the Earther.

The large almost-Spanish style building at the end of the drive seemed to be their destination, since there were several rollers and a large armored troop transporter parked nearby in an orderly fashion. Orange Detachment was present too, trying not to be too conspicuous. The small retinue exited the vehicles once they were parked, so Hallett motioned for them to go around to the right side of the building to what would be his dressing area. As they were preparing to dress Jeff, Harral Deen'lan made his appearance, seeming to be out of breath from hurrying.

Several of the males had brought in Jeff's clothing articles so he began to get dressed. His black kilt socks and traditional sock garters in red were first, then an undershirt came next. While it was convenient, he put on his ghillie brouge kilt shoes, carefully lacing them up before tying them in a big bow.

His dress shirt, cuff links and studs came next followed by his black bow tie. Checking his shirt in the mirror, he could see it had been pressed to perfection by his brother. Jeff wrapped his County Tipperary kilt around his waist and buckled the three straps, carefully straightening the front apron's tartan to align with his shirt's gig line.

Jeff would forgo the waistcoat that went with his Brian Boru jacket, the Irish equivalent of a Prince Charlie waistcoat and jacket. Merrett, as the oldest Keth'lan, helped the Earther put on the ceremonial armor, making sure it was fastened correctly. He then helped Jeff with the sporran, the Sgian Dubh that was made by Harvey and then with Harvey's help, they equipped Jeff with an Officer's sword. Once the Groom's coat had been donned, the other males hurriedly dressed in their clothing, whether it be a military uniform or the traditional loincloth and vest. Those that wore the latter also donned gloss black leather leggings and a white shirt under the vest. Harvey, of course wore a matching kilt and Brian Boru as he was the Best Man.

Jessett passed around a bottle of *White Fire*, one that was distilled just for special ceremonies such as this. There were botanicals and herbs added that gave the drink a very exotic taste. It was also bottled at a much lower proof than normal so the wedding party wouldn't be three sheets to the wind by the time the ceremony would begin. As the bottle made its way around the room, Jeff was glad he had all of them here for the event. He was also very glad Kamram had made a way for Harvey and Susan to be in attendance. They were his only close family on Earth and it would have been a shame for them to miss this very important circumstance.

Na'Krista had her traditional undergarments on and they had finally gotten the sheer white hosiery onto her legs without too much trouble. The garter belt came next, followed by a white leather underbust corset. With Traci and Susan's help, Krista donned her white strapless wedding dress and stood still while it was zipped and hooked for her.

"Hold still," Kesta admonished, "I need to clip your rank tabs to your dress," she stated, adding the small Sub-Commander, Junior Grade insignias to the corners of the top of her dress. "There, you at least somewhat follow military tradition."

"Thank you, Mother." she replied, standing still while Na'Kayla put her necklace on for her and straightened it out. She already had on the matching earrings that went with the set. While this was going on, Sa'Jenna Deen'lan made her appearance, glad that she was here to see Jeff's house grow with the impending joining.

Sa'Densa helped her put on her shoes, white high heeled pumps from Earth and then with Traci's assistance, the veil was pinned on her head with bobbie pins. Once the bride's makeup was touched up, the front of the veil was put into place. The last things were her white half-finger gloves that would allow for a certain part of the proceedings. The timing was very good, since her father had made his appearance to do his part of this ceremony, one that mixed Earth and Elazi cultures.

Na'Krista, I have one issue that I must rectify before we start." her father informed her. "I will be right back."

Orange Detachment stood its ground against the assembled news-reporters while Hallett acted as the spokesman for the group. "I am sorry, you are not invited to this private ceremony. You will have to place a request with Saar or Mere Andrews'lan for an interview." he stated levelly.

“Gah, my manager expects pictures and video of the event! This is prime news, a mixed joining!” the front man for the news reporters retorted. “Just allow one drone, in the back of the hall. I'll make sure it's a quiet one, too. We really need the video of this!” he added, looking back at his contemporaries for support.

“I am sorry.” Hallett offered up. “I have been told edited video might be available through the House Tal-Hassanai official channels tomorrow, depending on Saar and Mere Andrews'lan's approval. For now, I ask that you leave before we take action.”

As they walked away, feeling defeated, one reporter nudged another. “Listen, a few of you go start a scuffle over by the rollers. When Orange Detachment is distracted, I'll sneak in through the side door and get us some video.”

Marlett walked over to two of his troopers and quietly got their attention. “Go around back and keep an eye out for trouble. These reporters are up to something.”

The troopers silently nodded back and casually slipped off to take care of orders.

The males entered the main gathering hall that had been decorated for the wedding in an Earth style with flowers and banners placed to give the room a bright, happy feeling. The aroma from the flowers in the room was almost intoxicating to Jeff, they were that strong. A raised area was set up with a large arch where the priest was waiting, going over his script for the day. Harvey had went ahead of Jeff and took up his mark a just outside the right side of the arch, opposite Na'Kayla's point on the left.

Looking around at the room, it surprised Jeff at the number of beings that were present for the affair, at least one hundred or more and about one-third of them were wearing uniforms. Two more femmes in dress uniforms came from the back of the room and took up a position by Na'Kayla while Kalram and Merrett mirrored them on Jeff's side. The priest then motioned for Jeff to take his place on the stage.

Before Jeff could become fidgety, he spied his future father-in-law coming from the back of the house, headed his way. Kam looked rather determined, too in his full dress uniform with Division Commander's tabs on his collar tips. This might be bad by the looks of it. Once he was face to face with Jeff, he smiled widely and chuckled at his future son-in-law's expression.

“Jeffrey, I have something I must do,” he began, trying hard to keep a straight face, “It would seem that some odd regulation has been brought to my attention. I have waited until now to take care of that issue, for good reason; I did not want your refusal in the matter. It seems a femme officer cannot join to a male officer unless that male is at least her rank or higher. As such, you are now a Flank Commander in The Elazi Trans-Atmospheric Forces Reserves, Ground Division. Congratulations, Commander.”

Before Jeff could protest, Harvey assisted Kam in attaching the rank tabs to the collar of his Brian Boru jacket.

“Saar?” Jeff began to protest but Kam held up a hand to stop him.

“I shall return with your bride.” He then pointed to someone over in the corner that was controlling the music. Once Kamram had went back through the door at the back of the house, the bridal march began to play.

Kamram took a deep breath to calm down and stated once more; “Daughter, it is time. We must go,” he repeated, hoping she would pull herself together soon.

“Father!” she blurted out, trying somewhat unsuccessfully to get her emotions under control. “Father, I’m not sure I can do this!” she retorted, trying not to hyperventilate on the spot. Krista's nerves had been wearing on her all morning and it was quickly coming to a head.

“Krista, do you love him?” her father asked as he gripped her shoulders, making her look at him.

“Yes, I do love him! It's just . . .” Her father interrupted her train of thought.

“If you love him, *show him* you love him!” Kam urged, guiding her toward the door to the gathering hall. “Just take my arm, I will be right there for you. Now come with me, Jeff is waiting.”

The door was opened, Krista took her father's arm for the last time as a single femme and began her walk to the altar.

Trooper Kevvit'lan had the reporter by the shirt collar and the seat of his pants, *Targ*-marching him back around the building to the front of the hall for further disposition. The soldier had found great joy in stomping the expensive drone in the reporter's possession to pieces, in full view of the unlucky male. Now to see what Marlett would do with him as a lesson to the others.

Jeffrey looked up from straightening his sporrán to see Na'Krista, wearing the most beautiful white strapless wedding dress, being escorted up the aisle by his future father-in-law. She wore multi-color markings that really seemed to stand out, somehow making her more than beautiful in his eyes. He also wondered how far down those markings went on her body. There would be time later to find out.

The entire room was quiet while the music played, interrupted by the occasional 'click' of an Elazi still camera. Jeff could see the tears in her eyes and he knew she could see he was getting misty-eyed, too. They had waited all this time and now the fairy tale was coming true. They would

be the first mixed species marriage on Elazia. Krista and her father stopped at the foot of the altar, awaiting the words of the priest.

“Who gives this femme's hand in matrimony?” the gray male asked. The parts of the modified ceremony in English had been translated into Elazi for him and they had made sure he understood the flow of the ceremony well.

“I, Kamram Sanaar Keth'lan, do give her hand.” the father of the bride replied. He then helped Krista up onto the altar. The priest nodded to Kam and continued the ceremony.

“Dear loved ones, we are gathered today to see the joining between Jeffrey Alan Sakaar Andrews'lan and Na'Krista Nahala Christina Keth'lan. If there are no objections, we will not entertain objections after this time and the proceedings will begin. The couple have written their own words to affirm their love for one another. Jeffrey, please begin.”

Jeff cleared his throat and took his bride's hands in his as he began his oratory; “I, Jeffrey Alan Sakaar Andrews'lan, do hereby offer my heart and soul to you, to belong to you for all time. I will have you and hold you, love you and protect you, in sickness and in health, through good times and bad, even after death should take us. These things I profess with all of my heart.”

Jeff smiled at her as his bride pulled herself together for her part. “I, Na'Krista Nahala Christina Keth'lan, do hereby offer up all of my love for you, to be yours for all time. I will have you and hold you, give of my love freely and support you, through prosperous and lean times, even after death takes us. These things I say with conviction and profess them to be the truth.”

The priest spoke up; “Jeffrey, do you take Na'Krista as your lawfully wedded wife?”

“I do.”

The priest smiled at the bride; “Na'Krista, do you take Jeffrey as your lawfully wedded husband?”

“I do!” she blurted out.

Jeffrey took the narrow gold ring from Harvey, carefully slipped it onto Na'Krista's left ring finger and spoke the words, “With this ring, I thee wed.”

Na'Krista took the matching ring from her sister, who had to fumble through a few pockets of her dress uniform to find it. Once in the bride's possession, she slipped it onto Jeff's left ring finger as she said, “With this ring, I thee wed.”

Harvey then handed Jeff the traditional Elazi polished silver band which the groom snapped closed around Krista's right wrist. “With this band, I join with you for all time.”

Na'Kayla made sure Krista had Jeff's band firmly in hand before she let go of it, not wishing for it to hit the ground. That would have been bad luck. The bride then snapped it closed around Jeff's right wrist. She had to get her composure back before she continued with her part. “With this band, I join with you for all time.”

The priest then clasped hands with the new couple before continuing.

“By the power vested in me by *Od'Tra the Wise*, House Tal-Hassanai and The State of California, United States, The Planet Earth, The Sol System, I pronounce Jeff and Na'Krista, husband and wife. They are now joined! I present to you, Saar and Mere Andrews'Ian!”

While everyone shouted and cheered, Jeffrey lifted the veil and kissed his new bride, the one that would be with him for all time, just like he had promised her at the cabin some time ago. When they were urged to leave the gathering room so the family could quickly convert it to a reception hall, they turned to walk down the aisle only to find something going on at the front doors.

They were being greeted by everyone as they made their way to the portal but Jeff was sure something was up. A number of the uniforms had made a hasty exit for some reason. Maybe they had to return to base or something. Once at the doors, Jeffrey gave his bride one more kiss, then they stepped through only to find out where all of the uniforms had went. They had created an archway of more than forty highly polished *Bantra'saa'laas*, crossed in the air with outer tines locked. At the head of the arch was Harvey, grinning like a fool.

Jeffrey took his bride by her right arm in his left, holding her hand tightly, and escorted her through the arch slowly while he saluted the soldiers, allowing their photographers to get all the shots they needed. At the end, as they cleared the last arch of weapons, the last trooper on the right swatted Jeff on the rear with his *Bantra'saa'laa*.

“Welcome to the Trans-Atmospheric Forces, Saar!” that soldier blurted out in English, trying to keep a straight face. Well, only one person could have told them about that custom. It must have been Harvey.

Sevrان watched the wedding party gather in the grassy area in front of the meeting hall, glad he had brought his high resolution spotting glasses with him. This perch in the low hills across the road from the compound afforded him a wide vista and that was good, since he didn't actually have a formal invite to the party. This would have to do.

He looked down at the hairy . . . *thing* . . . at his feet, wondering where it had evolved. He had never observed a being like this but it might be a created life form. It was scruffy, smelly, spoke terrible Elazi with a raspy growl of sorts and was stupid enough to forgo armor this day when it tried to eliminate Sevrان. Whatever it was, it looked like an experiment gone wrong and it was decomposing fast. Too fast to be a naturally evolved creature, in fact. It was worth a moment to drag it some ways away where it wouldn't offend Sevrان's sense of smell so heavily.

As he settled down to watch the proceedings further, the communicator that the dead one had worn chirped. It was a text, asking if the deed had been done yet.

“Go burn in *The Eternal Fires*, you *Fracking B'Taagh!*” seemed like a proper response.

The two family-approved photographers were taking advantage of the beautiful weather and the setting to take outdoors pictures of the wedding party. Sa'Densa was assisting them by rounding up the needed people and herding them to the designated spot under a massive Sedrim tree. Jeff had just finished his round of images with his brother and his male family members when Krista pulled him to the side and touched his rank tabs.

“Jeff, Sweetheart, why are you wearing these? You are now a Flank Commander?”

“Um, your father said I had to have at least the same rank or higher than you to marry you. Some military regulation.” the Earther replied. “We need to talk to him about this.”

Before they could head out to find Kamram, they were joined by a smoke gray male in a dress uniform who was smiling at them. He was older, as evidenced by his pelt being shot through with white hairs. The new couple, realizing he outranked either of them, quickly saluted the officer.

“As you were,” he retorted to their salute. “This is a civilian function so no need for military protocol.”

“Thank you, Commander.” Jeff offered with a polite bow.

“I am High Commander Dangris Fellen'lan, Commander of *Post Fontaneauz*. I will be meeting with you, Flank Commander Andrews'lan, sometime in the coming ten-day after your acquainting time with your new *One Love* has passed.”

“Saar, what will we be discussing, might I ask?” Jeff put forth.

“I have had some talks with the House Tal-Hassanai Senate members.” Dangris replied. “I think, given this opportunity, you might be of great value to our military. We might learn tactics that are not known to us at this time, we might also learn more about human physiology and the finer points of the English language. I feel we will be trading partners with Earth for some time to come so these things would be of use to our troops.”

“That does not explain my new rank, though.” Jeff was still very curious about this new turn of events.

“I was told you were a Major in the United States Marine Corps, is that right?” Dangris questioned. “At any rate, Flank Commander is our equivalent rank. As a reserve officer, you would be in a teaching setting, far from any front line operation that might crop up.

“There are perks, as you call them. One thousand Crown per rotationary sub-unit or Fifteen thousand Crown per rotation reserve officer pay at your grade. This also affords you free use of cabin space aboard any military cruiser. I'm sure that will be useful to you. You will also have privileges at the . . . um . . . commissary and the base exchange, I think you would call them on Earth.”

“Thank you, Saar.” Jeff bid, happy to know more about his situation.

“Now, you two go mingle with your guests.” the base commander suggested. “I wish both of you a long and prosperous life together.”

Before they could mingle, however they were confronted by Na'Kayla, being helped along by her *One Love* Hammet and one of the photographers. Krista's sister seemed to be worse for wear at the moment, too.

“I want a picture with my sister. Just the two of us.” she said in a slightly slurred voice. Na'Kayla's eyes seemed glassy, too from whatever meds she took right after the ceremony was completed. They stood where the photographer wanted them and it was clear the elder Keth'lan sister was in no shape to be standing at the moment.

“Hold me up, sister. I feel like I'm falling.” Kayla said softly as she tried to keep her balance and not look too loaded on meds when she smiled for the camera.

“Okay, I'll try.” Na'Krista put her arm around her sibling's waist and held her tightly while the photographer did his magic. Once the pictures were took, the photographer and Hammet swooped in to support the sick femme. With a lopsided smile, Kayla allowed them to lead her over to a mobility chair and help her sit down in it before she fell down on her own.

There was one last thing to do outdoors; the bouquet. The femmes were gathered, Na'Krista took the bouquet of *Minnza* flowers, turned her back to the females gathered and let it fly over her shoulder. There was quite a bit of commotion in the group when the incoming object made contact, followed by an azure-hued arm holding the bunch of flowers up in the air. It was Sa'Densa that had scored the catch.

Jeff smiled as he took Na'Krista's hands in his. “Well, maybe our House is going to grow some more, now.”

“I hope so.” Krista agreed. “Our House will grow, sooner or later.”