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“Scribe”

by Kellan Meig'h

Chapter Twenty-Nine

“Situational Awareness”

The House Tal-Hassanai appointed Arbiter sipped his steaming morning brew, carefully sat the cup down and examined the documents delivered to him again, at length this time. After a few *Munar* had elapsed, he dismissed the courier who had delivered the communication and pondered the situation. Needing to feel this one out, he made a video call to the lawyer responsible for this piece of work in front of him.

“Sallan Fenn'lan,” the light gray male bid as the screen coalesced into an image.

“Sallan, we need to talk.” the smoke gray male replied.

“Arbiter Prime Tavvit'lan, I would surmise you have received my packet.” the younger male retorted.

“Yes, I have. What is this all about? Who paid for this pile of *B'Taagh* excrement you seem to have personally drafted?” After a pause, the Arbiter continued with his thoughts. “Is this a joke, penned by one of your junior staff and somehow sent to me by accident?”

“Arbiter Prime, please hear me out.” Sallan asked. “I will admit the fact I personally drafted that request. I spent over a ten-day in the archives, reading every *grakking* law book that had anything remotely to do with the subject. I did not miss a thing, as far as I am aware.”

Arbiter Al'Setman'af Tavvit'lan took his spectacles from the bridge of his nose, set them aside and looked at the screen again. “Arbiter Fenn'lan, you know I can hold this for a ten-day while I do my due diligence. I would be ignorant not to do so before reporting this to the Senate.”

“I am well aware of that, Saar.” the gray one offered up.

“If you tell me who is behind this, I might be able to speed things up.” Setman offered.

“I can't oblige you, Saar. Client-Arbiter privilege.”

“Very well, then. I will look into this matter and we will see what comes of it.”

Once the connection was broken, Setman got up from his desk and went out onto the balcony of his office suite. Shaking his head, he had a good idea who this was intended to hurt. By

the careful wording, Sallan had done his due diligence quite thoroughly. Now it was up to him to check each fact and determine the overall validity of the claim placed before him. If it was true, this could be damaging to a number of political careers and a few private individual's interests.

It could also mean a very long jail term for a few members of House Tal-Hassanai.

Na'Krista was holding Jeff's hand while she was walking abreast of her *One Love*, headed to the docks and their morning appointment. A powerboat had been reserved for them so her new husband could water ski on *Lake Azimn*. As they arrived at the proper berth, the Captain of the craft was wiping it down, tidying it up for his next guests.

She recognized the watercraft as being of Earth manufacture, a very common tournament boat model called a "Mamba[©]" by its builder. She smiled when she spied her husband, obviously excited to try skiing again by the look on his face.

"Well, a Mamba Classic[©] Twenty-two." Jeff mused. "This is similar to the Mamba my friend Stan Galli sold to his oldest son. I skied many a mile up and down Lake Clementine behind that one."

Krista was about to make a comment when something down the dock caught her eye. Taking Jeff's hand firmly in hers, she went two berths down where a couple stood, awaiting the moment to board their craft. They turned to see Na'Krista and Jeff headed their way and they actually looked like they contemplated jumping into the water at one point to escape her possible wrath.

"Now I know who you are!" Krista hissed. "You work for my father as a senior aide in the House senate! You're Dallen Zevven'lan!"

The gray male felt very uncomfortable, being confronted by his employer's daughter that he was supposed to watch very covertly. Maybe it was time to come clean.

"I'm sorry, Na'Krista. I was supposed to stay in the shadows. You were not intended to notice me while I kept an eye on you and your *One Love*."

"Did my father put you up to this?" she asked, irritated by the thought of her parent sending someone to spy on her.

"Yes, he directed me to keep track of your movements. In fact, he's paying for our stay at the resort while we keep an eye on you."

Krista then brought her focus on the ebony femme with Dallen. "I think I've met you before. You seem very familiar to me, like we have met once before."

"I work for your father as a minor administrative assistant in the House Senate." she admitted. "My name is Sa'Vesa Homme'lan."

“Na’Krista, we meant no harm.” Dallen offered up. “Your father thinks you are the target of someone’s attempt to harm you.” After a moment, he added, “Um, I wasn’t supposed to tell you that bit of information.”

“Spill it.” Na’Krista demanded in a very stern tone of voice. If there was trouble brewing, she wanted to know about it right now.

“Um, I was told to keep watch over you and I was to call in Sub-Commander Blaine’lan and his detachment if I spotted anything that remotely looked like you might get hurt.” Dallen explained.

“Is that so?” Krista mused. “Well, you call in Marlett and his troopers. Let’s get this situation straightened out right now.”

Dallen and Sa’Vesa were in the boat with Na’Krista, watching Jeffrey water ski down the lake. He was skiing on a single ski, something unheard of at the resort. Apparently nobody knew what the second binding on some of the skis were for. Jeff had amazed the attendant crowd with his single ski deep-water start, making it look too easy. The Earther was presently slicing back and forth across the wake, cutting wide arcs in the water while throwing up tall walls of spray on each turn.

Several of the members of Orange Detachment were in the boat running a safe distance to the left of them, keeping watch for any trouble. It still seemed silly to Krista, wondering how any type of trouble could occur out on the lake. At least she was able to watch her *One Love* enjoy himself, making it look like it was very easy to ski. She thought she might give it a go before they left the water today.

Krista smiled widely when Jeff made an artfully executed beach landing, stepping out of the ski at the last moment onto the sand just above the waterline. While Jeff waded out to meet with the next skier up, an assistant to the captain pulled in the errant ski rope. She watched on from the water craft to observe Jeff giving Marlett Blaine’lan some last minute directions as they made their way to deep enough water for getting up on the skis. Their destination was the waist-deep water to facilitate take off, Jeff busy trying to compress years of experience into a few moments of time. They were probably instructions that would be forgotten in a heartbeat, once the boat began to pull the one in charge of Orange Detachment.

The boat circled near the pair in the water, throwing them two tow ropes, one for each skier. Jeff made sure Marlett was set, then he scooted a few feet over in the water. When Jeff gave the signal, the captain of the craft put the throttle to the boat, pulling the two males out of the water. Krista’s *One Love* had to work at it, coming out of the water a bit on the slow side to compensate for Marlett’s inexperience. Once they had both gotten up on their skis, Krista didn’t know which male was smiling wider. They both seemed like they were having a great time on the water.

Marlett took his turn, then it was her turn to try her skill at water skiing. She had prior experience with snow skiing back on Terra Prime but this would be quite different for the femme

Elazi. The boat backed down at her request, allowing her to jump into waist deep water where Jeffrey was waiting with a ski vest for her. The Earther assisted his bride with her ski, since Krista had decided to try a single ski at first. If that didn't work out, she would use two skis on her next attempt.

The driver waited for his signal and once it was given, he carefully applied the throttle of his watercraft. Jeff was actually helping Krista to balance with one arm while they were getting up on their skis. Mere moments later they were both up and skimming across the water, enjoying a sport that had its origins on an alien planet some multiple light years away. It was clear the new bride was having the time of her life, finding out while staying up on a single ski was hard, it was very exhilarating, too.

She really wanted to look over and see the expression on her husband's face but she was afraid to relinquish her attention to the matter at hand. She had moved outside the boat's wake where the water was smoother and in doing so, it required her to keep an eye out for small waves that might foul her up.

Several times she almost fell but Na'Krista managed to recover her balance each time. And the femme Elazi knew the next time she might try two skis to see if they were easier to manage. She had roller skated in Roseville, when she was assigned to her old squadron. What would they think of her now, water skiing with her Human *One Love*? Oh well, their loss, she thought. Any one of the eligible males from her squad could have taken an interest in her but they didn't. Whatever reason they had, it didn't stop Jeffrey from winning her affections. Krista was very glad of that.

When the boat brought them back by the beach, she cut for the shore and let go of the ski rope, hoping to make at least some semblance of a clean landing. Na'Krista knew she had miscalculated when Jeff went by her, right before she sank into waist deep water. After her husband made a clean beach landing, he waded back out to meet her. The boat idled up to them so they passed the skis back to the assistant in the boat, then turned in their ski jackets.

Everyone met back up near the dock so after Na'Krista had her communicator in hand, she looked at Dallen, Sa'Vesa and Marlett. "If you're supposed to keep watch over me, all of you need to be nearby, not just a few." She poked at the screen for a moment or two to confirm some information, then she made a call and put it on speaker for all to hear.

"Krista! It's good to hear from you!" her father offered up from wherever he was.

"We're having a good time here at the lake." she offered up, making small talk as a lead-in to other things.

"I do hope everything is all right." her parent put forth.

"It is." she replied. "Um, your aides, Dallen and Sa'Vesa, along with part of Orange Detachment are here, too." she put on the table.

"I . . . Erm . . ." Kamram seemed to be a bit speechless at the moment.

“If they're supposed to keep watch over us, I see a need for Marlett and his troopers to be here at the resort. I'm sure you will agree with me.”

“Erm, I see your point and it is well taken.” her father concurred.

Na'Krista smiled ever so slightly as the noose was cinched. “Then you will have no problems when I have the resort bill you for Marlett Blane'lan and his troopers to stay in a group cabin?”

There was silence for a *Munar* or two before he answered. “I think you set me up, daughter. Yes, I'll pick up the bill for their stay.”

“And dinner tonight? Just at the informal group and family dining hall. I'm sure they would like some real food after having been camped out in the rough.”

“Yes, daughter. I will accept the bill on that, too.” Kam agreed.

“Thank you, father!” she said cheerily. “I'll have the front desk contact you direct.” After she broke the connection with her parent, she pointed at Marlett. “You, you're with me.”

As Na'Krista strode off toward the front desk, Marlett just shrugged his left shoulder at Jeff and went off to catch up to the buff-colored femme that had just outsmarted his employer.

Argess and Arrissa Wrraal made their way back to Retten's flat, stepping off the elevator at the twentieth floor as if they belonged there. The couple casually made their way to the deceased agents' apartment, making sure they were not noticed. The male *Fask-aal* put his hand against the scanner plate as a ruse, giving Arrissa time to try to electronically jimmy the lock. The door slid open for them on his touch, just as if it were their domicile.

After a moments' delay, they slowly entered to find Retten, sitting on his couch. He was looking rather rough and he was bandaged up where he had taken the two projectiles. The gray one motioned to them to enter with his good arm.

“It took you long enough to come back to my humble abode.” he offered up calmly. “I was becoming concerned and I was contemplating an attempt to contact one of you.”

Arrissa gasped. “You, you were . . .” Retten put up his hand, stopping her from continuing.

“I had been hit with a pellet that contained a chemical mixture in it to make me appear to be dead.” he retorted. He then looked over at the male *Fask-aal* and added, “Argess, my associate Varten Tallev'lan would ask you not to drop him to the floor like you did, should the opportunity ever arise. He was still just cognizant enough to know you were carrying him back to the safe house.”

“How about the doctor and our Bil mercenary Chalmka?” the male leonid asked.

"I'm sorry to say they really are dead." Retten replied. "They were shot by an assailant that followed Varten, my Second in command. Varten didn't know we were not being held captive by you. He had pegged me with a pellet and he was going to peg the assailant when you showed up at his hiding spot unannounced. He accidentally shot himself when you started to struggle with him. His plan was for you to think I was dead and then retrieve me."

"Well, I blew that plan to pieces." Argess mused. "There is something, though. Varten carried a *'Knife of Bends'* and a *Tah-Ganh* signet. Would you care to enlighten me?"

Retten carefully extracted himself from his chair and went to pour himself some *Sarraun* Brandy. He offered some to his 'guests' and after they declined to partake, he sat on the arm of the couch and sighed.

"Varten is *Tah-Ganh*. My Second, to be exact. You see, my father, Verren Trent'lan, was possibly the last of the original *Tah-Ganh*." Retten explained. "He was at odds with his family members over this affiliation and some would say with no hesitation, his own brother Dissan turned him in to the Law-Keepers. I actually prescribe to that notion, to tell the truth."

Retten sipped his drink, then continued. "I knew the families of the *Tah'Ganh* well, since they would come to my father's station to discuss business. I played games and sports with their children so we were not strangers. One day, Varten visited me. He was the least son of a *Tah'Ganh* associate. He came to me with this insane notion of reactivating the *Tah'Ganh Order*. When I started to dismiss his idea, he gave me a list of names, over two hundred that agreed with him."

Argess had to know, now that his curiosity was piqued. "If I might ask, who is the de facto *Grand Zanh* of the Order?"

"That would be me. I act as *The First Operative* and *Grand Zanh*." Retten replied calmly. "Varten had come to ask me to lead them, since I had substantial training and experience as an arbiter. In a detached way, I agreed with him. Of all the names, I have the most experience in my resume. We all met a few times before we agreed on the original *Tah'Ganh* doctrines. Particularly, peace over war, principle over self-agenda. I have helped many statesmen and ambassadors to obtain an office that befits their abilities. Those abilities held by the chosen beings have always done well to improve our lives, I might add."

"We still have a problem." Arrissa offered up. "Na'Krista is still in danger of being murdered." the femme leonid put on the table.

"Yes, that is a problem." Retten agreed. "I have operatives that can watch out for her and I can use my affiliation with the *Tah'Nash* to gather what intelligence there is. I fear, however that might not be enough."

The Wrraals had left Retten's flat so Retten decided to make contact with the one that was the newly assigned intermediary between him and the one that wanted Na'Krista dead. He inputted the number string into his terminal, a connection was made but it was not who he expected to answer his call.

“Hello Retten,” Na'Misi Callen'lan, the housekeeper offered in greeting.

“Na'Misi, is something wrong?” he asked.

“Zalmet Cern'lan was murdered in his office at the House Tal-Hassanai complex.” After a moment, she continued. “I was instructed by Zal to send you a file off of his storage disc if something should happen to him.”

“Do you know how he was murdered?” Retten asked.

“I was told it may have been a poisoning. He had a puncture wound on his neck and the skin around the wound was badly discolored. That is all I know.”

She took a few moments to find what she was looking for, then Na'Misi sent the file before disconnecting from Retten's terminal. He started the video and waited patiently for his terminal to authenticate it. Momentarily, Zalmet's face appeared on the screen, the video obviously recorded in his office.

“Retten, if you're watching this, I most likely have been murdered. The one that directs our movements concerning Na'Krista grows very unstable in his mental capacity and I fear he will try to strike out against both of us. You need to go . . .” Zalmet looked up from his terminal, seeming to be puzzled. “What are you doing here?” he asked the unknown individual.

He left his seat and walked out of the view of the camera, then two beings struggling could be heard. Zalmet and possibly whoever he was struggling with impacted the desk, causing the monitor to move slightly askew. The room became quiet, then the door was heard closing. The video ran on for roughly nineteen more *Munar* before ending, the standard length for an encrypted audio or video file.

Retten sat back and looked at the time stamp on the video, noting this had been recorded just two days ago. That meant whoever had killed his contact would still be on the internal surveillance drives at the House complex. Carefully hacking his way in with some faked identification, he found the video feeds that would tell him who had done this.

Sorting through the recordings, he found the feed from the hallway outside Zalmet's offices. What he observed surprised him since it was not what Retten had expected. The being responsible was using some kind of cloaking material, making the feed fail to record them fully. Their location was only known by the fact a monotone gray figure moved down the hall from the lifts, went to Zal's offices, entered, then exited. Even a series of filters were unable to reveal this intruder's identity.

Retten knew Na'Krista was in real danger now.

Jeff put the comm set back on standby for incoming calls and sat back in the recliner, making himself at home in the lounge. He had just had a talk with his brother and Harvey had

conveyed the news they had accepted the offer and they were now Flank Commanders in the Elazi Reserve Forces, Ground Division. Jeff was happy for Harvey and Susan, since they would be nearby for him to visit with when the urge struck.

The Earther looked over at his bride, smiling at her obvious determination to plow through some paperwork that had been delivered to her earlier. He knew she just wanted to get the project out of the way, a request to choose her replacement as instructor. Krista had made a few calls and talked with the candidates at length. Most of them seemed willing but there was one that really wanted the position. That male would be her replacement, one of the soldiers that had been to Earth with the second wave of Troopers.

She had conversed with the instructor candidate for almost a *Heth*, making notes as she went. In the end, she was sure he would be competent to do the teaching required. This male seemed to know the video and still cameras inside and out, being aware of the apparent flaws and idiosyncrasies of each device. The trooper in question also possessed a very good command of the English language, since that was the tongue Na'Krista chose to hold the interview in.

This made Jeff think about his own linguistic skills in the Elazi language. His conversational acuity had improved by leaps and bounds over that first night using a speech learning program but he still sometimes found himself at a loss for words. Maybe he could teach English or Spanish in some capacity. In a pinch, he could teach French albeit in a French-Canadian dialect learned from his mother.

At any rate, he looked forward to beginning a new military career in the Trans-Atmospheric Forces, Ground Division.

Kamram sat back down at his desk, having taken a break from his work with the government. It had been a very long day, starting before first light and it was now mid-afternoon. He thumbed through a law text, searching out the section that would show the precedence on the item he was tasked with performing the due diligence on. That small snippet of law would either make or break a deal with a firm trying to bring a new factory to the general area of Kas'Madelle. Just as he reached out for his cup of coffee, the intercom chirped.

“Saar, there is a Fleet Commander Keth'lan waiting to see you.” his secretary offered up.

This particular occurrence was not something he thought would happen for some time to come and it caught the ambassador off guard momentarily.

“Send in the Commander,” he replied, taking a quick moment to straighten his desk and his clothing. In less than a few *munar*, in walked Fleet Commander Al'Talram'an Keth'lan.

“My brother! It is good to see you after all these years!” the rust-red male put forth, walking up to his sibling and hugging him tightly.

“Talram! It is good to see you again!” Kam replied. “What brings you to Elazia, my eldest brother? Are you being transferred to another duty station?” he wanted to know.

“No, Kam. I am retiring.” Talram explained. “I think it is time this old warrior stepped aside for the younger ones to take command.” After he sat down on the settee, he continued. “I have a combined sixty cycles of service to The Trans-Atmospheric Forces, my least Brother. That is a long time to be away from Elazia and Kas'Madelle.”

Kam nodded in agreement. “I will side with you on that point, my brother. That is a long time. Do you have any plans for your retirement?”

“I do,” the rust-orange one replied. “I will be purchasing the Kavven'lan Station. Saar Mevret Kavven'lan is ready to retire himself, since his offspring decided to become educators. They have no time for farming, it would seem.”

“I had wondered,” Kam mused. “It was rumored Mevret was interested in selling his station.”

Tal cleared his throat to get Kam's attention. “I hear you have grown your family. Tell me about this Jeffrey Sakaar Andrews'lan. An Earther, I was told?”

“He is an Earther.” the younger Keth'lan confirmed. “A warrior and a doctor. His heart is strong but caring. I could not stop Krista from joining with him.”

“True, she is headstrong.” Talram agreed.

Kamram offered his elder brother a glass of *White Fire* and continued. “She is now a Sub-Commander, Junior Grade. Na'Krista will be in charge of video training in less than three ten-days.”

Talram mused on the situation. “So, how does the “Warrior Doctor” fit in to the equation?”

“He is going to instruct our troops in the Earther French language and general customs from what has been mentioned in passing with the upper echelon. His brother and his sister through joining are going to be doing the same service but with different Earther languages.”

“I had heard Jeffrey had several relatives here on Elazia.” Tal offered up.

“They were a surprise for Jeffrey and Krista. His younger brother and his sister through joining. I wanted to make sure there was a properly related being to serve as his second for the joining ceremony. I have some video and still images of their wedding.” Kam replied.

Talram took his time to peruse the images and the video footage, smiling and occasionally wiping a tear from his face. After he finished looking at the images and video, he turned to face his brother.

“Now I wish I had been here for her joining. It would seem I missed what will be a very prosperous addition to your house.” the elder sibling offered up. “I was tasked to stand as a replacement should the current Fleet Commander of the combined forces in the Terran system

decide not to renew his commission. Now that Fleet Commander Kevlam Satten'lan has renewed, I placed my request to retire my commission."

"I see." Kam pondered. "With your cycles of service, you should draw more Crown than you did as an Officer."

"Quite a bit more." Tal retorted. "About two thousand Crown more each sub-rotation as a retiree. Not too bad, in my estimation. Thirty thousand Crown on top of what would be my regular remuneration is more than enough to live on very easily."

"I should ask you," Kam began, "Are you going to be staying in Kas'Madelle for a bit? It would be grand if you could meet my new *son through joining*. I'm sure you would enjoy chatting with him."

"Jeffrey speaks Elazi? Ah, he probably used a learning system." Tal offered up.

"Yes, he was a very quick study from what I have deduced. He also speaks a smattering of the Earth German dialect. Apparently it is not far off from Comeri so he was at one point mistaken for Comeri while they were on Pharrpoint."

"Interesting." Tal stated offhand. "You know, I have always said we did not evolve here by accident. I still believe there is a master race that seeded the stars after *The Beginning*. Why create something as mind-boggling as the Universe and not put creatures on the planets that would support life?"

"I think I agree with you, my brother." Kam replied. "We have met too many races for sentient life to be an accident." After a moment's pause, he continued. "So, I understand the Reformed Earth Army has developed a kinetic rifle. What can you tell me about it?"

"They have indeed developed a prototype weapon of sorts." Talram offered up. "It uses the same ammunition as our squad-served rifle. They have not developed a power source that is somewhat portable so they tend to have a mostly stationary power source. It is usually in the back of one of their heavier trucks but they have not overcome the issue with the energy backfeed upon discharge. The capacitor banks go critical after several shots, then the equipment is destroyed or at the very least, rendered useless. There are maybe a handful of functioning rifles left after the first batch was created."

"Do you think they will perfect the power system?" Kam mused.

"Highly doubtful." his brother replied. "We have Gavanite and Omnesium for the battery packs we use to power our kinetic weapons. The Earthers do not have these minerals in their soil so they cannot recreate the light weight battery arrays we use." After a moment, he added, "The dark side of their moon has several large impact zones that are ripe with these minerals, along with tungsten, gold, silver and platinum."

"So what is your overall assessment of their capabilities?" Kam had to know.

"We are safe for now." the elder Keth'lan conferred. "If they ever return to their moon to continue exploration, they may well discover these minerals. At that point, we really would be in trouble."