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“Scribe”

by Kellan Meig'h

Chapter Forty

“Running Amok”

Tegram Keth'lan and his older brother Talram were flying Northwest to locate Al'Janess Kett'van, the one arbiter that might be able to shed some light on this problem concerning Na'Krista and Jeffrey. While Teg didn't mind a road trip to do work for his family, he had some aversion for the mode of transportation they were using. Talram had brought back to life a very old propeller driven heavier than air craft from Elazia's military past. From what he could remember of his duty on Earth, this craft wasn't much different from the North American Rockwell OV-10 Bronco used by the United States Air Force.

It was a twin turbine-driven prop design, two wing-mounted engine nacelles that swept back to turn into vertical stabilizers. One horizontal stabilizer bridged the very end of the booms, providing stable flight. The main wing was high mounted to the fuselage, between the nacelles. While it was a very stable craft, it was noisy and compared to a skimmer, it was slow. Very slow.

“Tell me, Tal. How was this craft such a good idea to get to where we're going?” Tegram asked.

“I sense you're not enjoying the flight.” his brother retorted. “When was the last time you took a flight in a Stella Mark Eight?”

“When I flew them to the recycle facility for the military.” was the dry reply. “How many *Heth* are showing on this airframe, anyway?” Tegram had to admit, the skin on this craft was in very nice condition with no obvious patches when he had helped with the preflight.

“Airframe hours would be hard to estimate.” the eldest Keth'lan put on the table. “I built this ship from about twelve recovered airframes. The only new parts are the propellers and the reduction boxes for them.” That got the gray one's attention.

“Talram, *how* many airframes are we talking about?”

“Teg, I said about twelve. Might have been thirteen, now that I think about it. I selected the best parts from every airframe so I actually have enough parts to build one more Stella minus the props and gearboxes.”

“So, this is a rebuild we're flying? Doesn't that bother you?” It did bother Teg to no end.

“Tegram, you are so nervous. We flew many rebuilt and spliced together *Fast lighters* and interdiction ships during the Varpor wars.”

“Yes Tal, and we were younger, not as sharp upstairs as we are now and we wanted to prove ourselves.” the middle brother offered up. “How about that *Mark Six Lestim Fast Lighter* that came apart on me and my crew during a bomber escort run? We ejected just as it came apart into very small pieces and our core slammed into the Number Seventeen furnace at South Velancer refinery! I had radiation burns from the explosion that took weeks to fade. That was made structurally from two different ships, a left and a right half cobbled together with the avionics package from a third and a salvaged core!”

“Teg, this Stella Mark Eight is built far better than the ships we flew as young Elazi. Just so you know, this ship passed certification on the first inspection with no gripes.” Talram stated. “Besides, we needed the relaxation this old ship provides. Relax, will you?”

“*Relaxation my behind.*” Teg thought to himself. He tightened his lap and shoulder harnesses and tried to meditate by closing his eyes and steeping his hands in front of him. He was interrupted in his prayer by his older brother waving something in front of his face.

“Here's something to snack on, Earth manufactured meat and cracker snacks. It's Turkey, if I remember correctly. There's some cheese in the pack to go with it, too.”

Tegram Keth'lan took the treat from his brother, opened it and took a whiff of the aroma. It was rather pleasing so he put a piece of meat and a slice of cheese on a cracker, sat another cracker on top as demonstrated by the image on the front of the pack and sampled it. The flavor was nice, a bit of smokiness from the meat and an almost nutty flavor from the cracker. Well, maybe this would keep his mind off the flight.

That morning, Na'Krista and Jeffrey's health were being reviewed by the staff medical team, following up on the injuries they received the night before. While Jeff's cut to his back seemed to be healing quite well, the scratches on Krista's neck were not doing so good. Doctor Vemma Az'Ronaan was looking at the situation, not happy with what she could see.

“Sub-Commander, I'm sorry but I need to shave your neck. The scratches you received are getting infected and at least two of them look pretty inflamed.” the small medic put forth. That seemed to upset the femme Elazi.

“If you have to, I guess.” Krista said dejectedly. “I mean, it's been a fight to keep my pelt looking proper and now this. Go ahead, I'll sit still.”

“I will be careful.” Vemma put forth.

The diminutive doctor cautiously used an electric fur clipper to bare Na'Krista's neck, blending in the trim at the collar and jawline very professionally. She had her charge lift her hair at the nape of her hairline, being careful not to make a mess of things while she removed the pelt

on the back of Krista's neck. All the while, her assistant used a vacuum to remove the clippings from the work area.

“Now I'm glad I did that.” Doctor Az'Ronaan mused as she looked the sites over carefully. “There was one more bad scratch that was not found last day and I would almost guess that male doped his claws with something. These cuts and scrapes should not be looking like this so soon.”

Krista sat still while the medic worked a gel disinfectant into the deeper gouges and it was clear this was painful to undergo. The one deep puncture being cleaned almost caused her to pass out, it was that bad. The smaller cuts and the scratches were tended, then a general disinfectant was swabbed around the entire site. Vemma finished that part by using a measuring device to hold up next to the injuries as she took images of them. They would be needed for the report she would have to make this day.

“Na'Krista, you are lucky to be alive.” the ruddy femme stated as she prepared a wrap shield to cover the wounds. “Had your attacker made that deep puncture any further forward on the left side of your neck, his claw would have been into your main artery. Hold your hair up in back, please?”

Doctor Az'Ronaan started applying a clear flexible shield to her neck, working the adhesive strips on the top and bottom edges as she went. Once she had the film positioned where she wanted it to lay, she had Krista lift her chin high. The ends of the shield were measured, trimmed and finally adhered with a final strip of adhesive added to hold the two ends closed. The doc went around her neck with a heat gun, shrinking the film down to a degree to remove the wrinkles.

“This is not comfortable.” Na'Krista put forth, trying to turn her head. Jeff could see the polymer cover tugging on her skin in protest of being stretched.

“Let it warm up to your body. It will become flexible.” As the doctor entered some information, she put forth what would happen next. “Jeffrey, your cut looks very good. Na'Krista, I need to see you tomorrow morning. We will determine what needs to be done next at that time. Also, we need to do a quick check of your eyesight.”

Na'Krista stood on the line that was about fifteen feet from the eye chart and waited while the light for the chart was turned on. Once again, she took one step at a time until the chart was quasi-visible to her.

“It is a *Deh*? Is that right?” Krista asked, now about two feet from the image. She reached out just to see how close she was. “Is this better than last day?”

“Your sight seems better today. That is a very good sign, indeed. Tomorrow I will do a full exam so I would think it's now time for both of you to go back to your cell.”

Back in their room, Na'Krista was trying to get comfortable on the bed, now having to deal with that covering on her neck. Now that her injuries had been cleaned and treated, they seemed

to be irritated and sore to her. The worst part was that poly film around her neck, covering the injuries. She had to lay with her head just so to prevent the film from pulling at the skin.

“Is that better?” Jeff asked after helping to adjust the pillows under her head.

“As good as it's going to get.” she replied. “Once this film warms up, it should become more pliable. Also, an honest opinion. Just how bad were the injuries to my neck?”

“They looked far worse than any scratch you've given me. That deep one on the left side of your neck looks particularly bad. What skin that I can see that doesn't have dye on it looks a really angry red. My professional opinion is it's certainly infected.”

“You would know.” she agreed. “I'm sure that antibiotic gel she used on me is military grade. It still stings to a degree.”

“And an infected site can sting, too. We need to keep an eye on your wounds.”

Jeff rolled up a spare blanket and put it under her knees, just to help with making her comfortable. Once he had that roll placed to her liking, he turned on the news to see what occurred in the area overnight.

Their plight was worthy news for yet another day, this time the reporter was shedding light on the arbiters that were currently locked out of the law library by House senate order. One representative from the library pointed out the close proximity of the repository in *Tefal*. His contention was if a need was there, they could just go to *Tefal* to satisfy that need. He also offered up that the library was used as a club of sorts by many of the arbiters, trying to make it a place to hang out and visit.

Eventually, they moved on to other news. The crash at the spaceport involving privately owned skimmers ended in two fatalities, the operators of the two craft in question. There was a vote to realign the new super roadway to include the four Sweptland cities and some local official was announcing his bid for reelection to House Tal-Rimestai. Weather this day would be Ninety-seven *Decit*, cooling to Eighty *Decit* at night. No appreciable rain was predicted for the next few days, so that would be good for the harvest. Something kept bugging Jeff so he thought he would ask Krista.

“Kitten, what race is Doctor Az'Ronaan? Short and kind of like an Earth fox in a way.”

“That sounds like she is a Tunn from the planet Tunnis. Her accent would be right for a Tunn. Their planet is about eighty-something light years from here.” she explained. “Her race contacted us some thirty cycles ago, wanting to set up trade agreements with us. They have '*Faster Than Light*' technology that makes ours look pretty sad. They call it a '*Jump Drive*' if I remember right. How about getting to Earth in less than a *Heth*?”

“Why don't we have that technology?” Jeff asked.

“Part of the trade agreement. Kind of an odd agreement at that.” Krista mused. “We have to trade for a certain number of cycles with a certain Crown amount each cycle before they open the

books, as you would say, on that technology. We are getting close, maybe in the next two cycles we will satisfy our part of the agreement. They love Kebra fruit and it won't grow on their planet for some reason so we're their main supplier of the fruit."

"So, we could go to Earth for the weekend with that 'Jump Drive' technology?" the Earther mused.

"Yes, that would be possible." she agreed. "There is a commercial route from Elazi out to Tunn. Takes about one and one-half *Heth*. There is some time needed to clear the gravity well of a planet before you engage the FTL drives. Also, the jump has to end a ways from the destination planet's gravity well."

"So, how long is the actual jump itself to Tunn?" he asked for his edification.

"Almost imperceptible." she replied. "You feel a big thump in your body, your head spins for a moment, then you realize you've jumped. Pretty wild technology."

"I'll say." Jeff quipped. He started to ask another question but they were interrupted by that female guard.

"I need both of you ready to move, right now." she stated before she leaned out of the cell's doorway and looked down the hall momentarily before turning her attention back to her charges. "You have a visitor, an Ambassador Na'Kesta Keth'lan. I will warn you, she is mad and she seems like she might not be thinking rationally at the moment."

Sa'Zarren looked over at her *One Love*, napping on the informal living area couch. The doctor that had examined Dassan prescribed a new regimen of medications, ones that had more of an effect on his ability to stay awake. At least he was dozing quietly and hopefully getting some much needed rest.

Their physician had confirmed Dassan was getting worse, the Phasic Disease was now beyond what his old medication could handle. That was the cause of his unusual behavior, according to the doctor. Zarren hoped this was true because she did not relish the idea of having to follow him around, constantly keeping her mate in line.

Turning her attention back to the tally spreadsheets, she finished her input and made a preliminary total of the current harvest. By the numbers, they had actually turned a small profit on the first harvest. Because Dassan had paid for both passes through the orchards in advance, anything they made on the second pass was pure profit. At least Dassan hadn't done much to greatly diminish the harvests from what was once his father's land and Dassan's land combined.

The map on the wall by her was one put there by his father, almost ninety cycles ago. A large topographical sheet so that small details could be observed, it showed the original Trent'lan lands as they existed in the days of Rallen Trent'lan, her late father-in-law. Twenty-five hundred, nine and one half units of land to farm, covered in Kebra fruit and some four hundred units of

Orlemberries that Dassan had planted, tearing out perfectly good Kebra trees to do so. Considering the prices for Kebra at the present, she wished they had those units of trees back.

At one time the Bil had developed an infatuation with Orlemberries, letting them ferment for a while before making jams and preserves with them. The remnants were then used to make an alcoholic beverage that had a nasty taste in her opinion. Das had decided to capitalize on that, planting a hard to grow strain of berry that would sell well in his opinion. Well, the fruit did not sell like he thought and now it sold for far less than Kebra fruit, making them less profitable. The thought crossed Zarren's mind to replant those units with Kebra fruit once Dassan was gone.

What would life be for her without Dassan? Quieter for sure, since she didn't have to go around putting out his fires. The two of them hadn't been close the last twenty cycles, most likely due to his failing mental health. That could be the only reason he paid little attention to his *One Love*. Dassan spent way too much time in his orchards, time that could have been spent with her. They had hired a manager to do these things, just to free up time for them. Her *One Love* seemed to just ignore that, doing everything himself.

What she really wanted was some quality time together, just the two of them, away from the station. She honestly didn't think that was asking for too much. Just some time while they could still enjoy life before he passed away.

She suspected *that* would never happen.

NaKrista and Jeff were escorted to that small conference room where her mother was waiting to see them, once again with locked cuffs. When they entered the space, it was clear her parent was fit to be tied. Na'Kesta sat still while they were seated, glaring at the guard as she quickly seated her charges and left the room. Once the door closed, the gray femme was on her feet and around the table, taking her daughter in her arms, sobbing.

"I just found out about the attack on the two of you!" she blurted out. "I swear on my ancestors' graves, I will kill whoever is behind this!"

"Mother, please calm down?" Krista asked softly. "Getting angry about this serves no purpose. We need to stay focused."

"I am focused." her mother replied as she tried to gather up her composure. "I sent Tegram to find Al'Janess Kett'van. You know he would be the one to help straighten this out." Na'Kesta looked at her daughter's injuries, shaking her head at what she observed. "Those scratches look infected." she pointed out.

"We know, Mother. The doctor seems to think the attacker might have doped his claws."

"It looks that way." her parent agreed. "This one on the left side of your neck looks really bad. Jeffrey, you will need to keep an eye on the healing progress."

"I will, Mother Na'Kesta." he agreed.

“Mother, why are you calling in Al'Janess?” Krista asked. “He must be almost two hundred cycles old by now. How can he help?” This confused Na'Krista to no end.

“Al'Janess was an arbiter with the House Tal-Hassanai, during the era when this so-called law was enacted.” Na'Kesta put forth. “He would know the particulars and he may have copies of the paperwork in his possession. Paperwork that could prove this law a fraud.”

“That seems to be the word on the street, this law actually doesn't exist according to the news outlets.” Jeffrey offered up. “That, and the arbiters are mad they're locked out of the Law Library. Um, did you have something to do with that by chance?”

“You can bet I did.” Na'Kesta said with a smile. “Temmer voiced his concerns to me surrounding the documents being misplaced on purpose to slow them down. In response, I pushed the House to lock down the library. I've caught a bit of backlash but I don't care. The Communications Secretary for the Global Senate called me, asking me to rescind my request for the lock down. I told him I would not because family was involved and it was critical we had control of the documents. Whatever it takes, we will get the both of you back at your station in no time.”

Security Specialist Grade Two Sa'Venna Vallen'lan was standing outside the conference room door, looking at her timepiece again. She had informed Ambassador Keth'lan that she was only allowed ten *Munar* of visitation, no more. When the response was “Really?” from her Esteemed one, that was a sign the time limit was not going to be observed. That was twenty *Munar* ago. Looking up to see who was walking in the hallway, her supervisor was heading her way and he seemed upset.

“Specialist Vallen'lan, is this room still in use?” he asked.

“Yes, Commandant.” she replied smartly. “Ambassador Keth'lan and the Andrews'lans are still in discussions concerning their court case.”

“How much time do they have left?” he wanted to know. Rules were rules, after all.

“They have went past time by ten *Munar*.” she reported.

“Are you going to tell them time is up?”

“Saar, I am not stupid. I will not get caught up in the cross fire. That is some dangerous ground I would be treading on, Saar.”

“You listen to me, Specialist . . .” She wasted no time in interrupting him.

“No, Saar. I have sent a complaint to my Division Steward concerning this whole situation. If you feel brave enough, you just go right on in and try to put her out of that room. Me? I'm not

stupid. The Ambassador can have my badge pulled before the end of my shift if she so desires. I like my job here so no, I'm not going in there. Not on a dare. Not on a double dare.”

Commandant Willit'lan stood there, looking at the floor while he decided on a plan of action. This was going to be difficult, due to the power a diplomat wielded. Even if nothing came of it, he could end up on the carpet, answering questions for a very long time if he crossed Her Esteemed Ambassador Keth'lan.

“I'll be right back, Specialist.” he put forth. “I'll find someone that's brave enough to deal with this issue.”

Specialist Vallen'lan watched her supervisor head off in the general direction of the break room, probably deciding how much Crown he would offer to a volunteer. She was sure no volunteer would be found that was either brave enough or stupid enough to accept the challenge. About five *Munar* later, her commander came back down the hall toward her, looking pissed.

“Specialist, would you at least go in there and ask her politely to wrap things up? Please?” That made the femme security officer smile. “Don't smirk at me like that Specialist, just get her out of there somehow? Please?”

“What's in it for me?” she questioned. “It's a very difficult assignment, in my eyes . . .”

“Alright. I'll put you in for an upgrade in rank to Grade Three.”

“Thank you, Saar.” She then turned and quietly slipped into the room. Once she had Na'Kesta's attention, she spoke up. “I'm sorry to have to ask this of you, Ambassador but you need to wrap things up shortly. You've been in here twenty-five *Munar*. That's a little over the allotted time.”

“We can do that for you.” the ambassador begrudgingly replied. “Krista, Jeffrey, I will come to see you again tomorrow.” She hugged her daughter, then her son-in-law before following the jailer out of the room. Once the gray femme and her Orange Detachment escort was out of earshot, Specialist Vallen'lan spoke up.

“Saar, when will I be eligible to put on my new rank?” she asked her supervisor, who seemed a bit perturbed by this turn of events.

“I think I was played.” he replied, shaking his head. “I will get your paperwork pushed through just as fast as I can.” He stood there, pondering the situation while his employee moved the Andrews'lans back to their cell. Yeah, he was played, alright. Oh well, what other options did he have?

“Carren'al Community Flight Control this is a Stella Mark Eight, *Sonnd Vaand* Six Seven Six. Request permission to land on runway Four *Zed*.” Talram announced while he went through his landing checklist.

“*Sonnd Vaand* Six Seven Six, this is Community control. Are you really flying a Stella Mark Eight?” the controller asked, seeming to be surprised. “No joke! I can see you with my scope-glasses. That really *is* a Stella.” After a moment he continued. “Six Seven Six, you are cleared for runway Four *Zed*. Crosswinds from two-thirty-three Magnetic at five *Hasecan* per *Heth*. Local altimeter is four hundred twenty seven quatre from sea level.”

Talram reduced power, then adjusted the propeller pitch to bring the prop speed back up to spec. The runway landing beacon helped him to align himself on what was a grass runway where some plantings of white flowers delineated the end of the strip. Once past the fence, he sat the Stella down on the ground gently, using reverse pitch to slow them down once the wheels were on grass. As they slowed down to a taxi speed, he guided then over to a home off of the runway that was attached to a huge hanger.

Standing in front of the doors to that oversize structure was an Elazi male of rust-red coloration. As they grew closer, he indicated a pad off to the left of the hanger doors. While they finished with parking the craft on that pad and shutting it down, that male had joined them. Talram exited the craft, walked up to him and gave him a big hug.

“Al’Janess! It is so good to see you after all these cycles!” he blurted out, obviously happy to see this person.

“I knew you were coming.” the elder one replied. “And you must be Tegram.” he offered as he hugged the middle brother warmly. “A femme with a very odd accent named Traci MacDonald called earlier, warning me the two of you were on the way and she gave me a primer on the situation. Am I correct in assuming we need to prove this law false?”

“That was our plan, to show this was not a true fact.” Talram put forth.

“Very well, we need to go to *Tefal*, then to *Kas’Madelle*. There are documents we need to prove the vote was false and those are the locations of those documents. Let’s have a mid-meal, then we can use my craft to fly back to our destination.”

“Erm, how will I get my Stella back to *Kas’Madelle*?” Tal asked.

“Well, I’ll show you.” They all walked over to the hanger and entered through a personnel door on the side. Al’Janess turned on the lights to illuminate several craft in the hanger. There were two skimmers of recent design that were dwarfed by the largest piece in the center. It was a fully restored Dartha Industries *Vaand* Eleven heavy bomber, a leftover from the Syndicate Wars.

“Janess, where did you find this?” Tegram offered up, looking at ninety-five thousand *Zet* of flying destruction. “No, I should ask, how did you convince the Flight Board to allow you to fly it?”

“I don’t fly it often.” he proffered up. “I need at least a right seater to fly and it’s easier with a third flight deck personnel, a flight engineer to assist with the engines and propellers.”

They walked around the plane, taking in the ruggedness of the design. It was equipped with four engines, the original petro-burning piston engines now replaced with turbine powerplants.

The low mounted main wing mounted to the sleek fuselage was swept back at fifteen degrees as was the horizontal flying stabilizer on top of the vertical rudder. Along the sides, the remnants of the defensive turrets could be observed by the doors that now covered the openings. At the front of the craft, on the left hand side of the fuselage, was the name of the ship, 'Jarek's Revenge' in bold white lettering on the polished aluminum skin.

“Interesting name for a craft.” Tegram put forth. That made Janess smile back at him.

“I'll explain over mid-meal.”

The three males were finishing up their mid-meal, one prepared for them by Demarria, Janess' *One Love*. Teg had been kind of surprised to see the arbiter was joined with a Bil, a very pretty silver scaled femme with long black hair and blue-gray eyes. She had put together a filling meal for them, mostly fruits and vegetables with a small amount of grilled *targ* for the males.

“Tegram, as you can see, I'm joined to a Bil and we were joined on this planet,” Janess began, “So if there was such a law, we would have been subject to it seventy-nine cycles ago. Yet, here we are, peacefully biding our time. I know this law is false, I just need to put the pieces of the puzzle together for all to see.”

“Janess, can you tell us about the name of your Dartha?” Talram asked.

“I agreed that I would.” he stated. “Well, you know I'm a Kett'van, and with that name, it meant I came from the Sweptlands. When I came to *Tefal*, there was some conjecture that I was Jarek the Red because of my coloration. I can tell you for a fact, I was not Jarek the Red but I know who he was. His name was Al'Jarek Sakaar Kett'van. Well, to avoid being scrutinized, he changed his name to Al'Juress Sakaar Kett'van. Does that name sound familiar?” That got Tegram's attention.

“Did he change his name one more time?” the gray one asked carefully.

“Yes, he did.” Jan agreed. “He became A'Juress Sakaar Keth'lan when he migrated to *Kas'Madelle*. I'm sure you know who he was.”

“He was our ancestor.” Talram offered up. “I had always suspected he was Jarek the Red.” After a moment, he continued with a thought. “So, you are a Kett'van and you knew about our ancestor. Are you related to us?”

“We are Om-Brothers. Jarek was my father's older brother. My father's name was Al'Garret Velaar Kett'van.”

“Why haven't I known about this before now?” Tegram asked.

“I was never really into lineage.” Janess put on the table. “When I was joined to Demarria, she wanted to chart her lineage. We did some digging and found more than one thousand family members. She has quite a family tree. Just recently I began to try to figure out my past and I was

soon to find out I had quite a few family members in this area. I was planning on contacting Kamram and arrange a meeting with as many as would be able to attend.”

“You would have a real day at our family compound. It is not far from Jasset's home.” Teg put forth.

“So, not to change the subject Saars, but I need to know something. Talram, are you finally retiring?” Janess asked. “It would be about time you settled down. Word through the back channels says you're buying a station. Any truth to that?”

“I purchased the Kavven'lan station.” the elder Keth'lan replied. “Mervet was wanting to retire and none of his children were interested in Kebra fruit production. It is almost seven hundred units of good land planted twenty cycles ago with the Devven'lan variety of Kebra.”

“Good choice of crops.” Jan stated with a smile. “I previously owned the Treet'lan station on the north side of your station. I had the Coastal variety that grew well. A bit smaller than Devven'lan, but quite a bit juicier. I sold my crops to juice producers. Don't get me wrong, I like it here in Carren'al but I can't do much with only fifty units of land.” The two brothers looked out the windows that faced the back of Jan's property, finding maybe ten or so Kebra trees, a few Orlemberry bushes that had been trained into a tree form and some Asmath nut trees.

“You seem to have a good orchard going.” Tal mused.

“It's a perfect size for a retiree to care for. It's not a station but it keeps me busy and to be truthful, I do not see myself running a station at my age. And looking at the chrono on the wall, I think we should prepare to leave soon if we are to go to *Tef'al* and *Kas'Madelle*.”

The trio went out to the hanger where Janess towed the old craft forward until the nose wheel was just outside the hanger, on a spot painted on the ground. He then went to the left main gear wheel well and held down one button while he pressed a second one. Slowly, the bomb bay doors opened wide to reveal a cavernous bomb bay. Releasing the buttons, he then held in a third, causing two lifting strap arrangements to lower down to the floor. Talram looked up into the bay, putting the pieces of the puzzle together.

“So, if I folded the wings on my Stella, we can bring it up into the bay?” he mused.

“That is correct.” Jan agreed. “Once we have your craft up in the bay, the closed doors make a smooth platform to tie your craft down to. I modified the bay to hold a full sized skimmer or a roller. When I go to the antique air shows, I have transportation when I get there.”

“You're sure it will fit?” Talram asked. The bay didn't seem that large to him.

“The bomb and missile racks that came out of here were almost fifty quatre tall. At one time the Trans-Atmospheric forces, back when they were still the Sky Protectorate, played around with this very idea after the Syndicate wars. Someone thought it a good idea, using the bomber to move another craft or two from base to base. Your Stella will fit. Snug, but it will fit.”

They pushed Tal's craft into the hanger by way of the back doors, aligning it on a line painted through the center of the hanger. Janess lowered the hanger floor under his craft a few feet for extra clearance while the brothers folded the outer portions of the Stella's wings back and once done with that, pivoting them to ninety degrees from normal with the leading edges facing down.

The Stella was pushed into place, strapping secured and smoothly winched into the bay above it. They ascended the crew ladder just forward of the bomb bays and closed the doors from inside. Tal's small craft fit snugly and it took just a few *Munar* to properly tie it down on its wheels. Janess then locked the Dartha's bay doors closed, preventing any possibilities of an accidental discharge of the small craft in its belly.

They climbed up the stairs to the flight deck and Janess had Tal take the right seat while Tegram was put in the Engineer's position behind his brother, facing several very intricate instrument panels with all the powerplant and systems controls on them. Jan took the left seat, gave Talram a checklist and made sure Tegram knew where his was at. While they were doing all of this, Demarria was towing them clear of the hanger. They all had their headsets on when her voice came through them.

"Jan, you're ready for powerplant rotation." she offered up. They could see her out the left cockpit windows, standing just off the large pad in front of the bay.

"Teg, spin up the Auxiliary Power Unit, please?" the pilot asked.

"Aux Power Plant starting, spooling up, um . . . , now showing full primary and secondary buss voltages, full hydraulic pressure at one hundred percent turbine speed."

"Power good from my seat. Tegram, how about fuel pumps on?" Jan asked.

"Fuel pumps on, pressure is nominal. Per checklist, pumps to takeoff pressure."

"Propellers to zero pitch, please."

"Propellers to zero, instrument check and visual check both good." They all looked out the windows just to make sure the props had zeroed out.

"Power to number two, please."

"Power on, check." the gray one agreed.

"Rotation on two, please."

"Starter engaged." Teg replied. "We have powerplant spool up, disengaging starter at thirty percent, now up to full idle, showing fifty-five percent. I amazed myself just now that I just pulled that off without making a mistake."

They performed the same procedures with the remaining three powerplants and went through flight surface checks. After Jan's *One Love* gave them the 'hand up' all-clear signal, all fingers

extended or in her case, all four fingers and two thumbs extended, the pilot for this flight contacted the tower.

“Carren'al Tower, this is the Jarek's Revenge, a Dartha Heavy Bomber. Request departure vector One Six Five magnetic on runway Four *Zed*. Destination is *Tef'al* regional spaceport.”

“Jarek's Revenge, this is the tower. Cleared One Six Five magnetic. Please use flight level ten to *Tef'al*. Your cross winds are from Two Four Zero magnetic, six *Hazecan* per *Heth* with gusts to Fifteen *Hazecan* per *Heth*. Nothing that old Dartha can't handle. Have a safe flight.” After clearance was confirmed, Demarria spoke up through the intercom.

“Jan, I'm on board, ladder up, hatch closed. I'll meet you on the flight deck in a *Munar*.” Just as she had put forth, momentarily she slipped into the navigator's position behind Janess and strapped in.

“Okay, Tegram, you're up.” Janess stated through the cabin comm circuits. “Give me about fifty percent pitch and once we're rolling, pull it back to ten percent.”

They began to taxi, headed to the northern end of the runway. Once there, they turned around and lined up on the centerline of the strip, the part where the grass was worn the most. Janess applied the brakes and spoke to his engineer again.

“Okay, powerplants to eighty-five percent.” Watching the gauges on his panel, his indicators were showing him what Teg could see on his console. Once the turbines were at speed, he continued. “Very good. Oil pressure good all four turbines and gearboxes. Pitch to one hundred percent, please.”

Al'Janess released the brakes once the pitch was at the right setting and that old bomber started rolling smartly down the grass runway, taking the sod surface in stride. He was watching the airspeed indicator but Talram was counting it off, just like a right seater should.

“One hundred, one thirty, one fifty-five, one sixty-five! Rotate!” the ruddy toned Keth'lan announced.

“Rotate!” Janess echoed, pulling back on the yoke smoothly. With almost no protest, the big craft rose smoothly off the runway and became airborne. At five hundred quatre off the deck, the pilot raised the landing gear while Talram cleaned up the flaps.

“Janess, you need to turn left twenty-one degrees for *Tef'al*.” his mate offered up. Once he was headed the proper direction she acknowledged the heading. “Heading is true now.”

“Well, here we go.” Janess offered up as they were climbing to Flight Level Ten. “Tegram, pitch to ninety percent, adjust turbine speed to give us five hundred *Hazecan* per *Heth* once we reach altitude, please.”

Talram looked out the windows at the scenery, enjoying the bright blue sky and the green lands below. In the corner of the mirror over his side of the canopy, he could see his brother giving the instruments his full attention. Somehow, he wished the military had not decommissioned

these old aircraft. He knew if they still flew them when he had enlisted, this would have been his calling. Taking a moment to take care of some business, he called ahead for a rental roller in *Tefal*. And in his heart, he really hoped all of this would pay off.