

The characters Jeffrey Alan Sakaar Andrews, Na'Krista Nahala Christina (nee Keth'lan) Keth'lan, Jessett Sakaar Keth'lan, Sa'Kayla Mira (nee Trent'lan) Keth'lan, Kamram Keth'lan, Na'Kesta (nee Cern'lan) Keth'lan, Tegram Keth'lan, Traci McDonald, Talram Keth'lan, Bosteg Haas'lan, Kestam Ramm'lan, Treman Baze'lan, Merret Treet'lan, Tascal Hone'lan, Hallett Trasc'lan, Hammet & Na'Kayla Nahala (nee Keth'lan) Craine'lan, Gillat Deen'lan, Marlett Blane'lan, Sa'Densa Nasia (nee Deen'lan) Andrews'lan, Argess & Arrissa Wrraal, Rellen Sandren'lan, Sa'Jenna Nasia Deen'lan along with the characters Torvald and Victoria Svensen are the properties of Kellan Meig'h and may not be used without express written permission.

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“Scribe”

by Kellan Meig'h

Chapter Forty-Three

“Welcome To The Unknown”

“Kayla, I know exactly who she is.”

Those were the words spoken by Kamram several rotations earlier when Dassan Trent'lan lost his life to this mystery femme while making an attempt to end Na'Krista's life. He was saying them again as his older daughter was looking down at the graying buff-toned femme laying in a hospital bed, still unconscious from her injuries received in the altercation.

“She seems familiar to me.” the younger gray femme offered up.

“She should,” her father retorted, offering her a picture of Talram, Tegram, Jessett, the femme in question and himself. It was an old picture but it made the point. “That is your Grandmother Sa'Kayla Mira Keth'lan. She was Dassan's sister.” That information only served to make things more confusing.

“Um, until two rotations ago, I thought Grandmother was dead. Now here she is, which shouldn't be possible.” Kayla offered.

“She died in Na'Krista's home, almost exactly where Dassan met his end. I have to honest, daughter. I am just as confused as you are.” Kam put forth. “I was at the family crypt yesterday eve. Her body is not there nor is there any evidence she was ever interred in the first place.”

“But that means . . .” Kamram interrupted his daughter.

“I know you're not very religious so you wouldn't have read our Holy Teachings as extensively as I have. The passages that teach us not to kill family members for gain, talk of how the one that takes lives will give theirs up in very unexpected ways.” The elder Keth'lan waited for that to register, then he continued. “Dassan took the lives of his father and sister for gain. I don't know but maybe this is the unexpected way he gave up his life by giving life back to his sister.”

“But Grandmother Sa'Kayla was there in the flesh, fighting her brother for Na'Krista's life. I watched the struggle with my own eyes! How was that even possible?”

“It is possible.” her father replied. “We have met recently, face-to-face in my home if just for a few moments before she faded out of sight. She told me to watch out for Dassan, that he might

do something very rash. I tried to keep an eye out for trouble but when Dassan drew that Disruptor in the middle of that party and began taking us down, I was not ready for that. I should have been prepared just like she had warned me to be.”

“What do we do now, Father?”

“That’s up to your Grandmother. She may only be with us for a few rotations, who knows? I know I have been praying for some sign as to what to do. At least Jessett has offered for her to stay at his home. Na’Kimsa said my Mother and her would probably do nothing but talk to each other for many ten-days on end. You know they were . . . I believe the saying is, “As thick as thieves” on the planet Earth.”

“I know they were like sisters. I heard Om-Mother Na’Kimsa was so distraught when Grandmother Sa’Kayla . . . passed . . .” She looked up at her father and continued with her thoughts. “That sounds so wrong now. All I really know is the fact I need to get this straight in my mind.”

With her father’s help, she got back to her feet and with the help of a cane, made her way to the elevator. Once she was back on the main floor of the hospital, she made her way to the chapel for the Bech’tan religion, her father’s religious choice and the oldest on the planet. Finding a pew that was unoccupied, she sat down and began to pray for a sign of any kind.

Her soul searching found her exploring many thoughts concerning her ancestor’s return to the living. Using one of the Holy Scriptures that were usually found in a chapel, she did some reading pertaining to the passages her father spoke of. Using the concordance in the back of the scriptures, she found several occurrences of beings returned to the living for various reasons. As a young femme, she had dismissed such writings as fables, nothing more. Well, maybe it was time to start believing in them.

Na’Krista relaxed back into the examination chair, blinking her eyes to dissipate the drops that had been administered to perform a close exam of her corneas and lenses. This had been a tough thirty *Munar*, trying her best to be a cooperative patient while the doctor shined various lights in her eyes. At least she could see quite a bit better than yesterday.

“Sub-commander, your sight seems to be returning quickly, now that your prescription dosage is at a proper level.” the elderly Bil male put forth. “I’m going to have you continue your regimen for the next ten-day. That should be sufficient to dissipate the buildup on your lenses. Your corneas look fine, no damage that I can detect.”

“When do you need to see me again, Doctor Franttsen?” she asked. Better to get this on the schedule now and not later where it could cause a conflict of some sort.

“I would like to see you back in twelve rotations.” he replied as he jotted some notes in her file using a touch tablet and stylus. This male was somewhat “Old School” in his ways, preferring the tactile feel of a stylus on a solid surface. He had been with *Post Fontaneauz* for a long time, longer than Krista could remember. The gold-scaled ophthalmologist put the date and time on a

digital card that he sent to her, then he helped her to stand. “Hopefully, you should be fine when you return to see me again.”

“Thank you,” she bid as she was assisted to the reception room and her waiting husband.

“Well, how did it go?” Jeff asked as he carefully guided her out to their skimmer.

“I’m getting better.” she offered up as she took the co-pilot seat of their craft. “I need to be back in twelve days for a checkup.”

“It’s good that your eyesight is better than it has been.” the Earther offered as he spun up the drive on their transportation. “By the way, did my piloting skills scare you earlier?” he wanted to know.

“No, you fly very smoothly but then again, you’re not a ‘Rook’ at this, either. I know you have a number of *Heth* behind a control stick. We should have gotten you a pilots license early on, don’t you think?”

“Rook?” he questioned. “Is that an Earth slang word that’s been adopted for a newbie like on Earth?”

“I heard that term being used on Earth.” she admitted. “It has sort of made its way into Elazi pilot usage, though. Funny slang off-worlder words do work their way into our language.”

“Any others?” he wanted to know.

“The British “Shite” and the American “Shit” are used by craft maintainers quite a bit as a blunt expletive. “Skipper” is becoming common on the carriers for the one you would call the ‘Captain’ of the ship. ‘XO’ had been popular as of late for the one we would normally call the Secondary Commander of the ship.”

“I see.” Jeff mused. “Um, what about the situation with what must be your grandmother,” he put forth, “What are your thoughts?” The Earther was busy readying the craft for takeoff so he waited until she answered to continue his checklist.

“I don’t know.” she put on the table. “Father claims she is who they think her to be. The big thing for me is the ‘how’ in the matter. How is she back from the dead? I mean, Dassan died in almost the same spot she supposedly died in, a very long time ago. I could see where the wood flooring had been replaced when I originally moved in and that spot *is* the spot.”

“Na’Kayla says she’s sure they have met somewhere. She’s quite positive of that.” Jeff stated.

“That’s the issue. We weren’t very old, I was just starting school when she was murdered. I don’t remember ever being around her, and just so you know I never went to the family crypt to visit her remains. I kind of stayed away because that place gave me the creeps. I really, really don’t like being around dead bodies. I went one time with Father when I was about eight Elazi years old. That was also the last time I was ever there. I didn’t go inside the tomb, I just stood outside and waited for Father to come back out.”

“Are you going to Dassan’s funeral? I mean, he is family to you.”

“I’m going only because Sa’Zarren asked me to. That way, there are eight of us to carry his coffin into the crypt. I think I can keep it together for fifteen *Munar* while we carry out the resting of the coffin ceremony.” After a moment, she pulled out her communicator and used the ‘Voice’ function to place a call.

“Hello, Na’Krista.” the femme voice offered up.

“Hello, Sa’Zarren. How are you doing?” Jeff’s *One Love* asked.

“I’m doing as best as I can.” she replied in a tired voice. “It’s been tough the last two rotations. I actually cannot believe Dassan was trying to kill you.”

“It is hard for me to believe, too.” Krista agreed. “I wanted to know, are we doing dress uniforms or armor for the ceremony? I need to know which set to get ready.”

“It will be armor.” the dark hued femme replied. “It was his wishes to be carried to his rest that way. If you will bring your armor to my home after mid-meal, I have an armorer bringing out his portable shop to polish everyone’s armor for them.”

“I will bring my armor out after mid-meal.”

“I’m looking forward to seeing you.” Sa’Zarren put forth. “See you soon.”

“See you soon.” Na’Krista then closed the connection. She then looked over at her husband. “How about we stop at that new Six Guys® Restaurant on the way home and grab some burgers to go?”

“Sounds good. Make sure your seatbelt is fastened.” Jeff offered up as he gained permission from the control tower to take off and vector toward East Kas’madelle.

Jessett stood up and went to stand by the head of the bed when Sa’Kayla began to stir, readying himself to comfort her if needed. He wanted a face familiar to her to be present when she came to, just so she wouldn’t be frightened of the situation. He just didn’t know how this would play out so he made a silent prayer to the gods as she regained awareness.

“Jess?” she questioned as she worked the cobwebs out of her mind. “Jess, is that you? My sight is a bit blurry right now.” The buff colored femme was trying her best to clear out her vision so she could see better.

“I’m here, Kayla.” he replied softly. “How do you feel?” he asked.

“I have a splitting headache and I hurt all over, like I have fell down on a hard surface.” she replied. As her vision cleared, she asked a very important question; “Jess, where am I? Uh, I

remember you left for the fields to see about a harvester that was giving grief. My brother Dassan entered our home a bit later and for some reason, I want to say . . . this seems like crazy talk. I think he shot me.”

“Yes, he did.” the male offered up. “But, I’m not sure you’re ready for the rest of the explanation as to what happened afterward.”

“Why would you say . . .” Sa’Kayla stopped talking when Na’Krista and Jeff came into the room. She watched carefully as her descendant went to stand on the other side of the bed from her *One Love*. Looking straight at Krista, she made her feelings known; “For some reason, I think I should know you. You seem very familiar to me, like you’re a relative of mine.”

“Om-father Jessett, you haven’t told her yet?” Na’Krista asked, looking at her ancestor for confirmation.

“I was working on that thought when you walked in.” her grandfather confirmed. “Kayla, Dassan did shoot you that day and, well, you died. What do you remember after that, if anything?”

“Um, nothing other than I was shot, and now I am apparently in a hospital and I have a splitting headache.” As she thought about it, that was all she could remember. “There is more, from the way you were talking. You say I died that day? Would you care to elaborate for my edification, since I seem to be alive?”

“You probably have noticed, you have no apparent gunshot wounds.” her only *One Love* suggested.

“Yes, it’s obvious I’m only hurting from what must have been a hard fall.” That’s when Jessett nodded at Jeffrey to continue.

“I knocked you to the floor, causing your head and body injuries.” the Earther admitted. “It was not one of my best performances, I can guarantee you. I apologize for hurting you like that. It wasn’t intentional, I can assure you.”

“And you are . . .?” Sa’Kayla was very confused now. Who was this Comeri male with the young femme?

“I am Flank Commander Jeffrey Alan Sakaar Andrews’lan, at your service.” he replied with a bow.

“Andrews’lan . . . Andrews’lan.” She mulled that name over in her mind for a moment. “I am sure that is not an Elazi name but Sakaar certainly is. That is Jessett’s decendary name. Are you Comeri or A’Pari?” she wanted to know.

“I am from the Sol system, the planet Earth. Third rock from the Sun. Somewhere around fourteen light years from here, further out in this arm of the Milky Way galaxy.”

“Earth . . . I remember some talk of a planet we were monitoring named that.” Sa’Kayla offered up. She then looked at Na’Krista. “Are you his *One Love*?”

“Sub-Commander Junior Grade Na’Krista Nahala Christina Andrews’lan, also at your service. I am Elazi, born here in this hospital, in fact.” she replied. That gave Kayla something to mull over in her mind.

“I see. Nahala . . . You know, Kamram was joined to a femme and I’m sure her birth name was Na’Kesta . . . Na’Kesta Nahala Cern’lan. They met in college.” the bedridden femme mused. “Are you related to her?”

“She is my mother.” Krista put forth. “And, before you ask, Kamram is my father.”

Sa’Kayla thought about what had just been conveyed to her; This femme was her granddaughter by Kam and Kesta? How long had she been here, unconscious? Had she somehow lost track of time while walking the sleep-world? There was obviously a huge blank spot in her recollections that needed to be filled.

“Jessett, could you have all of my children please come visit me? I would prefer if they were all here at once and I would like it if you were here, too. I need what seems like a mountain of answers to my questions.” she requested.

“I will do that.” he agreed. I’m sure they can be here this evening. Would that be good?”

“That time frame would be good with me.” Sa’Kayla confirmed. “Jessett, please return later, with our children. In the meantime, I wish to get to know my granddaughter.” She then turned to Krista. “Please pull up a chair, both you and your *One Love*. We have a much to talk about.”

Several days later, Jeffrey was checking his appearance in the mirror before joining his family for first meal. The last few days had been hectic but it seemed to be settling down now. Pulling on a lightweight undershirt and some lounging pants, he made his way to the eating nook in the kitchen.

“Good morning Om-Mother Sa’Kayla, Kitten. I hope everyone slept well last night.” he bid as he sat down and began to pour his first cup of coffee from a vacuum carafe.

“Good morning, Jeffrey.” the elder femme put forth. “I slept well, thank you.” after a moment, she reached up and checked Jeff’s forehead carefully. “That bump on your head doesn’t seem to be diminishing.”

“It will probably be around for a few more rotations.” he offered up in explanation. “Earthers seem to carry a bump or bruise for longer than an Elazi.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.” she stated. “I want to share something with the two of you. I had a dream last night where I was somewhere very peaceful. With me were my father, my brother and *Od’tra The Wise*. *Od’tra* asked if I wanted to stay on the living plane of existence. I thought it odd,

for him to ask such a thing, just as my father told me it would be okay for me to do so. Dassan then said he was sorry and he wanted me to live my life as it should have been.”

Jeff pondered that thought for a bit before he commented on it. There were definitely some strange things going on but he had no explanation to give.

“Well, there seems to have been something going on that’s far above our pay grades.” Jeff put forth. He sipped his coffee, then continued. “I can certify you were not around us like a normal ‘*In The Flesh*’ person until the other night, when I knocked you to the ground. Your whole family says you have been gone for a number of cycles but for whatever reason unknown to all of us, you’re back.”

He waited for her to take that in, then he added this snippet; “I will say this; About one ten-days ago, I got up in the middle of the night to get a snack. When I turned on the kitchen lighting, you were standing by the cooking unit with a short statured male, looking shocked. Before I could say a word, both of you vanished. No trace left behind. I thought for a while that I was certainly hallucinating that but now, maybe I wasn’t.”

“A male was with me?” Sa’Kayla asked.

“Yes, he was short, solid white and he seemed like he might have been slightly disabled or might have had some birth defects. He held his hands up as if to show me he was unarmed and I noticed his hands were kind of stumpy, as if they were deformed. The iris of his his eyes were white, too. Both of you were wearing green, your robes were a medium green whereas his was a very dark green. Also, his pupils were vertically slit, not round.”

“Al’Merrit’an Temmer’lan.” Sa’Kayla said softly. “He is the only one that could fit that description. He was a great holy person from long ago. This is all so confusing.”

“Well, welcome to my world.” Jeff mused. “Not to change the subject, but I have an examination for my trans-atmospheric pilots license certification this morning, in about three *Heth* or so. I’m still not sure I can pass it, even with the coaching Krista has given me.”

“I remember you told me you held a pilots license on your home planet. I would think you would be able to get a Class Four-*Ahn* license with no troubles.” the elder femme stated as she then looked over at her descendant. “I should ask, is your sight getting better? I felt sorrow for you last eve, when you had to sit with that hood over your head, breathing that nasty-smelling gas mix.”

“It is better, Om-Mother.” Na’Krista confirmed. “My sight is still a bit blurry but I can finally make out who someone is at a distance, if I know them personally. Still can’t read the screen on my communicator, though. As far as that smell, after a few *Munar*, I really don’t notice the aroma.”

“You will heal from this.” Sa’Kayla offered. “I remember Na’Kimsa had this problem but not as bad as yours, Na’Krista. She had to have surgery for war injuries after an engagement on Varpor’s largest moon, so they had her out for a few *Heth*. It took her several days to be able to see clearly again.”

“Well, maybe I will recover sufficiently in a few rotations so that I will be able to teach again.” Krista put on the table. “I know my supervisor is getting nervous concerning my taking over supervisory duties of that training section. Can’t do that if I can’t see clearly.”

“Not to change subjects for a second time, but there is something that’s been rattling around my mind.” Kayla stated. “For some reason, I feel like I’ve seen you wearing a Bil restraint harness. I know this is kind of forward, but do you actually own one?”

“I do, Om-Mother.” Na’Krista replied. “But, you would have to had seen me before you went to the hospital and the living room was dark that night. I removed my harness and put on regular clothes before I accompanied you and my *One Love* to the emergency medical response room at Kas’Madelle.”

“Things like this bother me.” Sa’Kayla stated. “And, I think I remember seeing you for some reason, right over there, struggling to get away from my late brother.” The elder Keth’lan pointed to the spot where Dassan died. “Things that I know for reasons I don’t know. How would I know you had a Bil harness and you have been colored Chattel Number Five at one time?”

“Um, I know I never mentioned the coloration.” the younger femme put forth. “This is all confusing to me, too. Up until a few rotations ago, I only knew you through pictures and videos. Now here you sit in my . . . um, our dining room, in the flesh? And that; is this still my home or is it yours now? It was deeded to me when you were . . . Gah! When you died! But you’re not dead! Gah!”

Na’Krista got up from the table and went to the floor to ceiling windows that overlooked the patio, resting her forehead against the glass while she tried to find a peaceful spot in her soul. Her Om-Mother came up behind her and wrapped her arms around her Om-Daughter, trying to sooth her mind.

“Na’Krista, I would never evict you from a home you have settled into. That would be unfair for everyone.” the graying buff colored femme put forth. “You have a lifetime to spend together with Jeffrey so you need a home for the stability it offers. Besides, I had meant for you to have this home once I was through the gates of *Oskad M’tra*. Jessett and Na’Kimsa have offered for me to live with them and Sa’Zarren has suggested the Trent’lan station might revert back to me, now that my brother is gone.”

“Would you take over the Trent’lan station?” Krista asked.

“By what she told me earlier, I think Sa’Zarren might like that.” Kayla replied. “She has pointed out the home has two owners suites so I could take the unused one. She suggested we share in running the station and share in the profits.”

“Would you like that?” Na’Krista asked.

“I think I might. Sa’Zarren seems like a very nice being and I think we might get along just fine.” They were interrupted by Jeffrey, hugging both of them at once.

“I hate to interrupt,” Jeff stated, “but I need to get going so I can get my gear on before launch. Don’t want to miss this check flight so I can get my Trans-Atmospheric certification.”

The Keth’lan brothers were standing in the family crypt, carefully examining the spot where their mother had been put to rest a number of cycles ago. By all indications, a body had never been there at any time since the sepulcher had been constructed. They all knew this had happened, since they were in the detail that carried her body to its final resting place.

“Kam, I’m ready for any explanation you might offer.” the eldest put forth. “I know she was here, my brother.”

“Tal, I have no explanation, either.” the youngest replied. “I will say this; I was face-to-face with her just recently. She warned me to be vigilant around Dassan right before she just vanished, right before my eyes.”

“A walking dream?” Tegram suggested.

“Hardly. I touched her and she was of substance. Na’Kesta saw her too from a different angle that day in our home. She was there, just as she is present in the mortal form right now.”

“I will point this out,” Tegram stated, “On Earth, a holy man was brought back to life by his God. He walked their world for several days before their God called him home. Maybe our mother has some mission to complete, something important.”

“That might be possible.” Kam agreed. “Or, because she was murdered by Dassan for gain, by him dying at her hands she was given back her life. You know, when Jeffrey tackled her, she fell on the floor in almost the exact place where she fell when Dassan shot her. I should know, I was the one that found her dead.” That made Tal speak up.

“All I know about this is the fact it defies all known conventions. She should not be here but she is walking the ground with us in the flesh. The doctors confirmed her DNA when she was in the hospital. She is our mother.”

“I think I’ll just throw out all I thought I knew about life and death.” Tegram offered up. “By her request, I applied for her death certificate to be rescinded. Since she now lives, this was needed to get her military pension restarted.” He waited a moment then continued his thoughts. “Father has sent her armor to be polished for Dassan’s interment ceremony. It would seem he had made the requirement of her presence in his *Directives After Death*. Mother has been tasked to be in charge of the detail that will rest his casket. He decided to have one of those clear caskets that were the rage back in those times.” Kamram brought up something related to that information.

“I remember Saar AfKalmit’af Dannen’lan was interred in a clear coffin. That was unsettling to my nerves but I guess if those were your wishes, they should be followed.”

Na'Mari Dannen'lan and Marinna Rreal were once again headed North to the *Harb'ness'al* shipyards, this time to make a final inspection and test flight of the now-repaired *Dosh'vann'zang*. According to the femme in charge of the repairs, the ship was now worthy of flight. All that was left was a check flight by a certified pilot and some signatures on the documents concerning the refit work.

As they were landing, they could see Marinna's ship on the ramp, ready for its maiden voyage after the major repair work. The left side looked as if nothing had ever happened to her ship in the first place and that was a good sign. What was quite glaring was the absence of the dorsal and ventral armament turrets. That made the femme leonid make a comment.

"She looks bare, doesn't she? No visible fangs for fighting." she commented.

"Well, there are the other weapons still in place, right?" Na'Mari replied. "I understand Mevelia had her ship de-fanged at the Lestim Northern repair depot. They charged her over one-hundred thousand Crown for the "de-conversion," as she described it."

Marinna offered her thoughts; "It's not like there is not a civilian version of her ship and she was possibly overcharged for the work completed. The point is, there is no civilian version of my warship so all the panels and structure to replace the turrets had to be fabricated. That's what delayed the repairs by a rotation."

They had borrowed Sa'Densa's skimmer for this trip so Na'Mari carefully landed it in a designated parking place and once she had it shut down, the two femmes went into the office, in search of Devren Hadressen. It was only a few *Munar* wait for her to join them in the reception area.

"How good to see you again!" Dev offered as she hugged both femmes in turn. "We just finished servicing the cooling system, the required tinal fill and purging of air from the system. Everything looks good for a certification flight and I have a pilot available right now."

"Will we be doing that right away?" Marinna asked.

"Right now." Dev confirmed. "Our pilot is probably in the ship already, wondering where we are. If you want to change into a pressure suit, we can get this taken care of and get you back in your ship."

Na'Mari and Marinna changed into their suits, Marinna using a *Fask'aal* soft suit whereas Na'Mari was wearing a Elazi hard armor suit with the required air-tight undersuit. Once dressed, they were met at the *Dosh'vann'zang* by Dev and a blue-scaled Bil femme, their pilot. That female extended her hand in an Earth-fashion to Mere Rreal and introduced herself;

"I am Shanna Velmonta, your check pilot. Just so you know, I worked at the *Garranet* factory as a test pilot when we were still building these *Valang* series ships. I think I know how they should feel, even with the upgrades that have been done. I'm sorry about the loss of your defensive turrets but I think you'll find she flies better in the atmosphere without them."

The four females boarded the craft and with no gripes apparent as they went through the checklist, they had the ship readied for flight in short order. Shanna was in the pilots seat, Marinna was acting as copilot, Na'Mari was their communications officer and Dev was the navigation technician. With full blue boards, Shanna made her call;

“Kas'Madelle flight control, this is a *Valang* Scout ship *The Dosh'vann'zang*, call sign *Vaand Six Ahn Niner Fife*. Request takeoff clearance from the *Harb'ness'aal* shipyards, Two Seven Zero magnetic and Plus Six Zero inclination for orbital insertion.” After a few moments, she received her reply.

“*Ahn Niner five*, Cleared to Flight Level Four Zero Zero *Hazecan*, hand off to Orbital Control at Flight Level Two Five Zero *Hazecan* on channel *Zed Four* for orbital insertion.”

The blue-scaled femme gently lifted the craft off of the pad and began a climb-out at a high angle. The *Valang* series were meant to dive into and climb out of a gravity well in a hurry during combat but today, she was only using forty percent power and maybe that was a bit of overkill. That new reactor was turning out to be a very serious upgrade that was worth the effort. Shanna smiled when the craft surpassed Three Point Zero Sonic, even after she had throttled back to thirty-five percent power.

“I have blue boards,” Marinna put forth, carefully checking her all-glass display for something that might be amiss. So far, things seemed to be going well in her opinion. She honestly hoped that Shanna had that same opinion of how her craft was performing. Noting the altitude, she was waiting for their call to Orbital Control. Right at two hundred and fifty *Hazecan*, Mere Velmonta made her contact with the controllers.

“Orbital Control, this is a Bil *Valang* class ship, call sign *Vaand Six Ahn Niner Fife*. Request orbital insertion, current flight level Two Fife One *Hazecan*, requesting Flight Level Three Niner Zero *Hazecan*, destination The All Trades Station.”

“*Vaand Six Ahn Niner Fife*, Cleared to Flight Level Three Nine Zero *Hazecan*. Contact Station Traffic Control on channel *Zed Eleven* when you're within Fife *Hazecan*.”

“Thank you Orbital Control.” she replied, then made a comment on the ships intercom. “Things look good to me, so far. We need to do a docking maneuver on the repaired Port side docking ring, then I think we can say all repairs are complete. And, I'm buying mid-meal at the main cafeteria on the station. They have some Earth fare called ‘Tacos’ on the menu. I'm told they are quite good.”

Jeffrey was piloting a very old Block Three *Lestim* Mk Nineteen for his Pilot certification check flight, a certification that gave him trans-atmospheric rights. He was not, however particularly impressed by the condition of the craft that was chosen for this excursion. Just the fact it had taken almost a *Heth* to get the boards clear for takeoff due to numerous gripes from the system computers was enough to bother him. It had began with a “Master Buss” warning for low voltage on both the left and right Primary power buss and there were other little gripes that the instructor seemed non-plussed by them as he cleared the panels.

Takeoff itself had been nothing outstanding, other than the constant unnerving shuddering through the airframe from atmospheric turbulence that Jeff had never felt in any other *Lestim Fast Lighter*. As they crossed through one hundred and twenty *Hazecan*, the shuddering began to lighten up as the atmosphere thinned out. Earlier, for just a few *Munar*, the ‘Hatch Integrity’ warning had gone off at ninety *Hazecan* but it cleared itself when he used the Self Check feature to do a quick seal diagnostic.

“All Trades Station, this is a *Lestim Fast Lighter*, Call Sign Echo Tango Six Eight One.” Jeffrey stated on the proper frequency, since they were now within five *Hazecan* from the station.

“*Lestim Fast Lighter* on frequency *Zed Eleven*, repeat your craft designators in Elazi, please.” the controller requested.

“I’m sorry, Control. Craft call sign is *Erd Tah Six Eight One*. Request docking rights at the general use docking bays.” Jeff asked.

“Thank you, Six Eight One, use mid-ring docking bay *Deh Seven*.”

“Control, confirming mid-ring bay *Deh Seven*.” Jeffrey repeated back for confirmation. The mid-ring was the center of five rings connected to a central core hub of the construction.

“Six Eight One, that is correct. Beacon is on One Two Two Point Fife.”

“That went smoothly,” Jeff commented to his check ride inspector, Flank Commander Tammatt Fenn’lan. “So I’ll put that frequency into the nav computer . . .” The entire craft shuddered, the glass displays went dark for a moment, Then the craft shuddered several more times and key portions of the displays pertaining to flight went dark again.

“**OH FRACK!**” the gray Elazi blurted out as his fingers danced over the virtual controls that were left functioning. The Earther almost didn’t hear him over the myriad of warning tones invading his helmet. “Jeffrey, call an in-flight emergency, if your comm systems are still up. As you would say on Earth, “Houston, we have a problem.” A very big problem.”

“I’m on it.” Jeff replied as he called up the comm system onto what was left of his main display. Finding the right frequencies, he made his communique. “This is Flank Commander Andrews’lan, aboard a *Lestim Fast Lighter*, call sign *Erd Tah Six Eight One*. I am calling a Trans-Atmospheric Emergency. We have lost the main reactor to a safety lock down and we are taking what must be micro-meteorite strikes. I’m showing hull breaches along my starboard side and our shielding generator has gone off-line. Coordinates are One Nine Seven Point Four by Three Three eight Point Seven Zero Two at Three Nine Two *Hazecan* altitude from sea level.”

“Six eight One, this is Orbital Control. Do you copy?” a scratchy voice asked over the emergency mid-band.

“Orbital Control, Six eight One. I copy clear but you are faint.”

“Six eight One, confirm reactor is in lockdown.”

“Control, reactor is in lockdown, no output, no reset. We are on batteries only. Repeat, batteries only. Our breathing oxygen is good but the cabin has been depressurized. Diagnostics showing eleven punctures, no navigational control available. We are slow drifting toward the station upper ring, estimate contact with the station in one point seven *Heth*.”

“Six Eight One, we have a recovery craft coming back up from dirtside. It will be tight on timing, be prepared to use your escape systems if the recovery craft does not make it in time.” Orbital Control informed them. “We will be working on a backup plan to at least stop your imminent collision.”

Jeff turned to his contemporary and asked what seemed like a very important question; “Is there any troubleshooting we can do to at least get the thrusters working again?”

“I have the hard manual right here.” the gray one replied. “Let us begin with the three panels to your right. I can see a hole in one panel from a meteorite strike. Maybe it’s just a damaged power buss that we can jump out.”

The pair went over to the appropriate area to begin dissecting the craft in search of the issue at hand. Once the panels were opened up, it appeared to be a few holes in that area but a serious amount of damage to the wiring was evident.

“Tammat, do we have a kit to repair this mess?” Jeff asked. This didn’t look good in his estimation. He was pretty good with vehicle or house wiring but a space ship was on a whole new level for him.

“There is an emergency maintenance kit in the Engineering room.” That seemed to settle his nerves a bit. Not much, but some small amount.

“Tammat, this seems odd to ask; do we have an escape pod?”

“Jeffrey, we have an inflatable life raft but the odds of surviving a meteorite strike in it are next to nothing. We would be better off staying with the ship.”

Looking out the front view screen on the way to acquire that kit, Jeffrey thought for some reason that station looked larger than it was just a few minutes ago . . .