

A Fabled Story

# Black Heart Phantasy: Boy Meets Honoi

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ISBN:

ISBN-13: 4347865

## DEDICATION

I would like to thank all those people who have helped me to reach where I am today. I don't want to get all specific, it just sounds too mushy! But really I wish to thank you.

This work is for the people who are overlooked, looked down upon and have to work ten times as hard as the rich to get ahead in life. Don't worry; the time will come when you will have your say.

# CONTENTS

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This book; Black Heart Phantasy: Boy Meets Honoī is the first of the three books in the planned Black Heart Phantasy trilogy. Please enjoy reading!

Chapter 1: Page #9

Chapter 2: Page #26

Chapter 3: Page #39

Chapter 4: Page #52

Chapter 5: Page #63

Chapter 6: Page #75

Chapter 7: Page #94

Chapter 8: Page #105

Chapter 9: Page #115

Chapter 10: Page #124

Chapter 11: Page #140

Chapter 12: Page #153

Chapter 13: Page #172

Chapter 14: Page #189

Chapter 15: Page #215

Chapter 16: Page #245

Chapter 17: Page #256

Chapter 18: Page #276

Chapter 19: Page #297

Chapter 20: Page #306

Chapter 21: Page #316

Chapter 22: Page #330

## DEDICATION

For my loved ones, the hard working people and those who uphold world  
peace. You all have my love.

## PROLOGUE

From the dream and desire to bring about peace, births the actions that will result in wars that will haunt the people like a never-ending nightmare. Such is the tale of the roots of the first Great War of the planet Sangetsu.

A great king named Riza-bow Dranaki saw the troubles of the constant war amongst the nations of his planet. He could no longer stand and watch as the independent nations bring extinction upon themselves, and took matters into his own hands.

Dranaki started first with the smaller nations; sending his army to trample their military force and executing their rulers. After forcing the people to serve him he builds upon his army for the larger kingdoms. One by one they fell beneath the might of the Barsoon kingdom; they either surrendered or were annihilated in their resistance.

But before Dranaki made his move on the larger nations, they had all already formed an alliance in preparation for his attack. Queen Alteria of Atileten, king Farthon of Faleetia, queen Urora of Tiuma and king Ongal of Toduml, united the military forces of their countries to face Dranaki's. They gathered at the borderlands of Barsoon. There they confronted Dranaki.

The war lasted for five days; Dranaki's four million against their five. By the saving grace of their numbers, the four rulers were able to break through Dranaki's greatest defense; the four hundred stories tall and one hundred mile long wall of Nonshon, and reach into the kingdom and Dranaki's fortress.

There the four rulers confronted Dranaki face to face. They would have successfully killed Dranaki, had he not at the last minute transformed his entire body into pure energy and escaped out of his castle. But with most of his army defeated, Dranaki had lost the war. His dream of a utopia was crushed.

After the war, the four rulers were celebrated almost to the point of worship. They were given the created title by peoples of many nations of Dielengann-"the bringers of peace".

But the Dielenganns did not take their victory so lightly. They knew that Dranaki was still alive somewhere out there. He would have not destroyed his body to escape without having some idea as to how to bring it back. He would not give up on *his* dream of worldwide peace. They knew that as much as he did.

So the Dielenganns planned for his return, whenever it came. They spent the rest of their lives creating a machine that could obliterate his army, and a power source of near unlimited energy to fuel such a creation. Fifty years after the first Great War, the Dielenganns had finished growing the fruits of their labor.

They created the machine called the God-Titan Lirgaze, and the key of salvation to power it. But most importantly, their creation led to one person who he or she alone could use their power to control Lirgaze.

They made the Rakai.



## CHAPTER ONE

The tallest trees here towered to a height of nearly four hundred stories. Their trunks were a dark reddish-brown, and had six, huge main branches that branched off into smaller ones to form a dome that was six hundred meters across. These purple-leaved, monstrous plants were known as yelm trees. Their surfaces were encrusted with huge cracks and crevices that were dark and deep enough to hide a man, and indeed inside lurked critters that called it their home.

The second tallest trees were two hundred and sixty stories, with blue-green leaves, grey trunks and branches that grew to form an elongated dome. The leaves were thin, and when the sun shone through them the entire plant seem to glow blue like a colossal bulb. These were the ville trees.

There were shorter trees, like the lelams. These trees had brown trunks, long blood-red leaves and branches that grew around the trunk of the tree to form many rings. And there were the pomeg trees; with their pointed pink-rimmed leaves and fruits that were as large as a grown man.

Pomeg trees along with the lelams both grew in a greater abundance than other trees. But the monstrosity of the yelm trees could almost devour an entire forest or become one itself.

There were many other plants that grew alongside these. All had bright blue and green colored moss clinging to the surfaces of their trunks and the rocks that were scattered throughout the forest. Sometimes the moss would move, indicating that it was an animal in disguise. The forest floor was littered with fallen leaves, branches, rotting plant matter and the remains of animals that had fallen prey or died of natural causes. Huge vines as thick as an elephant's leg knotted the forest canopy almost with the intent of trapping everything in its twisted web.

A thick mist blanketed the cool atmosphere of the forest, lending some coverage for the predators that stalked the early morning. The sounds of various creatures could be heard echoing throughout the forest as the animals responded to the calls of their own species. Some animals walked on two legs, others four and six, while others took to the air with avian, bug and bat-like wings.

But no matter the number of legs or wings, all were designed for the animals here to survive.

The vast turquoise sky would have been clear had it not been for the strips of clouds and the twin purple-grey moons; known as I'us and S'us. They were two of the three moons of this planet called Sangetsu. Both were in clear view as they were in close proximity to the planet. They could even be seen in the brilliant radiance of the sun; the star called Upsinodron. It pierced the sky like an army of lance-carrying knights with its hundreds of white beams of light.

Yet, amongst the overgrowth of vegetation and the sheer wildness of the forest, there stood a structure which hinted of the existence of intelligent life living in these parts.

It was a temple. One which was constructed out of large stone bricks, joined together by mortar and finally furnished with an outer coating of brown cement. Its height was six stories, with large, circular windows going around the wall of each floor.

The temple was situated in yard decorated with cream colored stone tiles and had other smaller buildings near it. These buildings were houses; which looked like three large concrete huts put together, with circular windows and roofs made from the wood of pomeg trees. These buildings were the homes of Nycarman families.

Some of these Nycarmans were going about their day in the village. Through the village ran a stone path leading from the temple into the nearby Yuxu forest.

The Nycarmans were an alien species of humanoids. In fact, they looked just like humans, but with skin in many different shades of purple and pointed ears (which were more animal in shape). Their eyes were a dazzling bright pink and slanted down towards their noses. They had a complete absence of body and facial hair, and their skin had creases in different patterns all over their bodies which differed in pattern with each individual-like a human finger print. Their hair color was either a golden yellow or black. In rare cases was it another color, such as red.

Their facial features were diverse like the different Human races and individual Humans. For instance; those with the facial features of Caucasian Humans had very pointed ears and were called Uola Nycarmans. Those with the facial features of African Humans had oval ears and were called Outo Nycarman; but their noses were a bit flat and small. And those with the facial features of Asian humans were known as Lalu Nycarmans.

This was a temple in the ancient kingdom of Ixia, surrounded by the Yuxu forest and home to a race of Uola Nycarmans known as the Ixians.

They wore shirts and trousers similar to that of Humans. The material of their clothing was made from thinly woven plant matter which gave it a rigid feel but allowed flexibility. They were worn under a traditional robe known as a yota. It was a robe that hung just above the ankles and had only one sleeve on the right. The material of it was smoother, like silk. The Nycarmans in the temple wore dark purple yotas with a pink collar and silver trim. Some who lived in the village wore dull gray yotas with yellow collars and pink trim.

They all wore a casual ponytail hairstyle. Anything beyond this common look would be just more ponytails or braids that were at the sides of the head and went to the back of the head and tied over the hair.

It was a special morning that day for the Ixian people. Those in the temple were all gathered on the large balcony on the top floor of the temple. It was a balcony bordered on both sides by short, ornately furnished columns that were two meters in height.

They were all on the floor, seated lotus-wise with their heads bowed and their eyes closed. Both men and women wore a variety of beaded necklaces—the older generation especially.

As they sat their creases suddenly glowed with a bright blue light, and a cool air began to envelope around them. They raised their hands, opened their palms and expelled the bright blue *hono*i energy towards a glass statue of a Nycarman male with a glowing blue center inside.

The bright blue mist engulfed the statue in a huge ball. It floated up four meters into the air, bulging and compressing as if something were alive inside. The ball imploded, but the honoi energy inside did not disperse. Instead, it formed into the shape of a male Nycarman. His body steamed with honoi as he arched his back and flexed his fingers.

The man wore a full red robe with both sleeves in a lighter shade. Gold and black patterns ran down the arms of the robe and around his chest. His hair was coarse, black, and rested on top of his shoulders, but he was a Uola. He generated honoi energy beneath his bare feet into a blue cloud on which he floated.

The other Nycarmans got to their feet. The youngest of them were mesmerized by the presence of the man; the much older ones were not as in shock and awe. They gave him the traditional Ixian greeting; a head bow with the right hand across the left breast.

“Greetings, Donnowarru,” they all said.

“Greetings returned,” he said. His voice sounded hoarse, so he swallowed to clear his throat.

There were three aged Nycarmans standing three paces ahead of the group; two males with golden hair and pony tails, and a female with black hair and two pony tails tied into one. Their names were Dunit, Telkit and Murbella; the wyassies, leaders of the temple.

“Tell me,” Donnowarru spoke slowly as he stared down at them, “what is your reason for awaking me from my slumber?”

“Forgive us for disturbing you, Donnowarru,” said Murbella in a strong voice that did not seem to fit her age, “but our reason for doing so is of great importance. I can guarantee you that the reason for summoning you will not be a waste of your time.”

“And what could be so urgent as to awaken me from centuries of rest?” he said a bit roughly. There was no annoyance in his voice but he was very curious as to why.

“It is with deep concern for the lives of innocents that we tell you there is a war approaching,” Telkit said in a slow voice. “And it has the capacity to become the third Great War of Sangetsu, and also the second Solar War.”

Donnowarru could hear the grimness in Telkit’s voice. Then he thought upon what the wyassy had just spoken.

“There will be a third Great War? There was a second Great War? What is this you speak of, Ixian?” Donnowarru questioned.

“There will be another Great War,” said Dunit. “And if this war were to truly bloom then it will become the third Great War.”

Donnowarru’s mind was still stale from being asleep for so long. He had difficulty processing, yet alone believing what the Ixians spoke. “Wait a moment, then what was the second Great War, and what was its cause?”

“The second Great War was a result of our world being invaded by another race,” said Murbella.

Donnowarru was now clearly confused by this new information. This was beginning to be too much for someone who had just awakened from centuries of sleep.

“They call themselves the Orderran,” Telkit said, “a species from another planet, one that is slightly larger than ours, but in the same solar system of the ten planets. Over two hundred years ago the Orderrans broke through the clouds of our world in their giant war machines. They attacked every major city around the world, killing every woman, man and child in their sights. Our planet managed to conceive victory by using the God-Titan.”

*If the use of Lirgaze was necessary, then it must of have been an even much more devastating war than the first!* Donnowarru thought.

“But it was not just our world that was attacked,” Murbella added. “The other five habitable worlds in our solar system were also victims of the Orderrans.”

Murbella was about to speak once more, but Donnowarru silenced her by raising his left hand. This information was too much for his mind to register all at once. He closed his eyes for a brief moment to try and process what the wyassies had just told him.

*There was a second Great War?*

He finally opened his eyes and spoke, “Assuming that you Ixians have stuck to your own culture and remained in your own territory how do you all know of this?”

Murbella turned around and called upon a young woman. She immediately came forward and stood between Murbella and Dunit.

She had a round face coming down to a narrow chin. Her golden hair was tied into a single, loose pony tail, but was concealed by a metallic helmet that encased all of her head except her face. She wore a type of suit that lay over her body perfectly, managing to highlight the curves of her waist and her breasts that bulged beneath. It was a sliver-blue color; the material was very glossy and sparkled in the sunlight. A thin white stripe ran down the chest, arms and legs of the suit, and the inner of the arms and legs were black in color. Around the abdomen were six pockets zipped tightly shut, and on her waist was a utility belt containing various instruments. On her back was a more intriguing device. It was a sliver, oval-shaped atmospheric converter with six holes on the surface. Inside the suit was a tube that led from the air converter to the helmet. The suit extended to sliver gloves and boots.

The suit was designed for an individual to breath in places where the atmosphere was too dense with many gases or too little for their lungs to properly process and breathe. It worked by filtering the air of the unneeded gases and taking in only that which necessary into the suit’s helmet. It was known as an Atmospheric Converting Suit, or an *Atmos* suit for short.

But it was not her clothes that made her stand out amongst the others. Donnowarru could tell by her flat nose and full lips that she was an Outo.

“This is Lezura Hembim,” Dunit said. “She is from the northern side of the continent, and has knowledge of the outer world.”

“I see,” Donnowarru said in an emotionless voice as he stared down at the young woman. His face made into a slight scowl.

Lezura’s face showed signs of excitement and anticipation for what was taking place and what was about to come. But Donnowarru could not tell if it was from his presence or something else. Lezura smiled at him, but Donnowarru only tightened his glare. But the young woman did not feel entirely discouraged. She was told by the wyassies that Donnowarru had a slight dislike for Outo Nycarmans. She angled the green goggles around her forehead and continued to smile at the man. Though silly it might have looked she was sending a message to Donnowarru.

*Your racism will not affect me!*

History told that Donnowarru was once a soldier of the neighboring Balion kingdom-now gone. Most of his battles were against the Outo Nycarman kingdoms up north. Inevitably he was killed by the hands of an Outo. But his honoi energy was captured by the wizards of his kingdom and sealed in a statue of him. The wizards had given him their honoi energy so he could have unique abilities that could serve others long after his physical body had rotted away.

The Ixians were able to obtain the statue of Donnowarru from his old kingdom, centuries after it had been destroyed in the first Great War.

He turned his attention from Lezura to the wyassies and asked, “And how can you predict this third Great War?”

“We were told by the Dielenganns eight nights ago during the course of our Spirit Talk,” Murbella said.

“Then if the Dielenganns spoke to you? Then that would mean-”

“Correct,” Murbella knew exactly what he was going to say. “The Dielenganns have chosen their new Rakai.”

“They have chosen the key keeper,” Donnowarru said under his voice.

“Because now, these Orderrans know of the key of salvation, and want to harness its power,” Dunit said.

“How could these...Orderrans...know of the key of salvation?” Donnowarru asked.

Telkit said, “It was when our planet first used Lirgaze in the second war. We believe that the Orderrans most likely saw Lirgaze’s power and did their research on the weapon after the war. All these years after the war, Orderrans have been given some level of freedom on our world. It might have led to them having the opportunity to research on the God-Titan and the key with our planet’s archives.”

“But I fail to see why I am needed,” Donnowarru stated.

“The Rakai is not from our world,” Telkit said, “More specifically, the Rakai is not from our solar system.”

“Oh!” Donnowarru now saw the obvious, “And you require me to open the portal into the Rakai’s world and bring the Rakai here.” Then Donnowarru added, “But why would the Dielenganns choose the Rakai from a different world, why not one of their own people as they did the last time?”

The Ixians had thought upon this point themselves when they had received the revelation. But decided not question the Dielenganns’ good judgment. The most important thing was to get the Rakai and prepare him or her for what was ahead.

“That is a question only the Dielenganns can answer,” Dunit answered.

“That is not the answer I had hoped to receive,” Donnowarru replied stiffly. “And I assume that the first Rakai is no longer living. So by the cycle the key should be in your possession. Have you kept it safely as you have promised to do?”

“We have kept our promise, Donnowarru,” Murbella replied with a scowl at Donnowarru, displeased at how careless he thought of her people. “The Rakai gave it to us before her death by age.”

Dunit turned to Lezura. He took out something from inside his yota and held in his left fist. He took Lezura’s hand and placed it inside. She opened her hand and was looking at an emerald colored, sword shaped pendant with cracks across its surface and a crimson band on each side. It was tied to a necklace of black, glossy beads with red spots. She could automatically feel a surge of mysterious energy inside her hand.

*Amazing!* She thought.

“I am entrusting you with the key Lezura,” Dunit said. “I hope you will be able to safeguard it until it is in the Rakai’s hands.”

“You can trust me with this task, Dunit,” she replied. “I will not fail you or the rest of our world.”

Dunit felt assured by the tone in Lezura’s voice and the expression on her face. He smiled lightly and gave her a gentle pat on her hand.

Donnowarru was wondering why the Ixians would entrust such a valuable artifact with an Outo, but decided not to ask, as it would bring sure conflict which was not necessary at this moment.

Lezura placed the key around her neck and turned her attention to Donnowarru. He gave her the same stare as before, but Lezura continued

to smile. She still insisted that she would not allow the Nycarman above her to rain on her special day. She would be the first of her species to travel to the planet earth-if the reapers allowed it!

Donnowarru turned around and saw Lezura walk towards a type of machine he had never seen in his day. "And what is that assortment of metal you have there?" he asked, clearly intrigued by its design.

"It is called a Thwopter," she replied as she sat in the open front seat. "A machine built for flight."

Donnowarru chuckled to himself, "So, they finally built those flying machines they were blabbering about all those centuries ago."

The Thwopter was positioned near the edge of the balcony (which was large enough to accommodate it). It was black in color and with a sleek oval shape. It had a driver seat and a single passenger seat behind it, both covered in a red leathery material. At the front sides of the vehicle were wings with large antigravity orbs and at the back of the machine were two rockets. On the face of the vehicle were two headlights, and under the base of it was an assortment of added electronics.

Before Lezura could start the engine, her friend Marina came to say goodbye with a tight embrace.

"Good luck, and let the holy trinity protect you," the woman of equal age said.

"I will be alright," Lezura assured her friend.

"You better make sure," Marina replied. They both kissed each other on the cheek. Marina patted Lezura on her bottom and went back to her space in the group.

Donnowarru took the time the two women had taken to say goodbye and used it to take in the sights, sounds and smells around him.

It had been so long since he had laid eyes on Sangetsu. He savored the warmth of the sun glowing on his skin, then being cooled by the graceful winds which rustled his long hair like the branches of the trees he gazed upon.

But as his gaze drifted down upon the village, he came to realize something. This was once a great kingdom, with six temples and at least 170 houses, all located around the king's temple. But now, only one temple and thirty houses remained.

Time was running out for the Ixians.

As Lezura started the engine with the ignition key Donnowarru floated a couple meters away from the balcony.



Donnowarru channeled honoi energy into his fingers. He took a deep breath and held out his arms with his finger nails glowing brightly. He exhaled and made a violent outward ripping motion. And the most amazing thing happened.

It was as if what Lezura saw in front of her, the mountains and the sky, were nothing more than a piece of cloth that was ripped open with a sizzling and humming sound into a giant hole. It revealed a tunnel of swirling purple and blue colors.

Donnowarru had opened the portal into the dimensional tunnel.

Donnowarru held down his arms and took five deep steady breathes to regain his energy. Using his honoi energy like that took a lot out of him. After his headache had subsided he turned and spoke down to Lezura, “When we enter the tunnel stay close me. The dimension reapers might think you are trying to enter the Rakai’s world illegally.”

“Understood,” Lezura replied with a firm nod.

The Thwopter’s antigravity orbs glowed with a whitish-blue light and emitted a pulsing ring of light. Soon the vehicle lifted it into the air, sending dust flying from underneath. She leveled the vehicle with the tunnel as it hovered over the balcony.

“I am ready,” she said in a high voice so Donnowarru could hear her over the humming of the Thwopter's engines.

Donnowarru nodded at her, and flew inside the tunnel with Lezura trailing behind him.

Once they were inside the tunnel it imploded shut, leaving the Nycarmans staring at the mountains and the sky once more. They soon went inside the temple, but the wyassies were left alone on the balcony.

“Come back soon, Lezura,” Dunit said in a low tone. “Time is not a luxury we have.”

Though Lezura’s ears were very sensitive, she could not hear anything in the tunnel but the low humming of the Thwopter. Her eyes swung in all directions, but she saw nothing. Not even the dimension reapers. The silence made her feel uncomfortable. Her body was constantly tense as if she were about to engage in a fight. And not only was the silence getting on her nerves, but the fact of being in a dimension portal and the inevitable direct contact with a reaper was a bit much for any alien to handle.

The feeling inside the tunnel was almost one of weightlessness; like being in space. But yet there was breathable air and the solid wall of the tunnel. It left her with the assumption that the tunnel must be some kind of machine built to house living beings during their travel through the rift.

Donnowarru suddenly picked up the faint trace of honoi energy with his ears in the tunnel. It was honoi energy other than Lezura's and his, and it was growing stronger by the second. After a few minutes of flying in what seemed to be an endless view of purple and blue they came upon a point where the entire of the tunnel swirled into a glowing, white point.

"We have reached the end of the tunnel," Donnowarru said.

"This is the door which leads to the planet earth?" Lezura said. It was answered by a nod from Donnowarru.

*So this is the entrance to a planet using a portal?*

Lezura was tempted to take a picture of the glowing point. But she restrained herself. Her actions might provoke the wrath of the reapers if information of this kind were to be known to the public. But it already was by her. Now she wondered what would be the consequence.

Both Nycarmans began to sense the presence of honoi energy forming all around them. Gold smoke seeped through the wall of the tunnel. First there was one, then two, and finally five streams of smoke.

As the streams moved liked snakes towards the Nycarmans Donnowarru told Lezura to "Stay calm". Though she kept still, her fright and nervousness were unmistakable by the expression on her face and her twitching ears.

The individual streams formed bulging blobs, and then the blobs shaped themselves into humanoid figures.

The forms wore turquoise, close fitting suits, with pure gold armor all over. These included bracelets, a vest made from golden scales, shin pads with the face of a beast carved on it and shoulder pads with the face of some humanoid male with a gaping mouth. Their boots were gold with pointed tips and a sharp, black heel.

Topping off their suit was a black cape that reached their bottoms. But what really made a reaper's appearance was its face. Not a notable nose, mouth or eyes, the only thing you saw was just a background of space-literal *outer space!*

Whether it was just the blackness and a few stars, a planet, moon or a galaxy, any view that could be seen in space from the distance of a planet to actually outer space travel, the many sights and wonders of the vacuum

were what made their faces. And their heads were further covered by a hood.

One of the reapers; one with a slim body with the design of a male and a red nebula on his face, approached Donnowarru.

“It is you again, Donnowarru,” the reaper said in a subtle voice.

After all these years Donnowarru could still remember that voice. He knew who it was the moment the man spoke. “It is good to see you again, Terriak,” he said. But his tone did not tell of any excitement of seeing an old friend.

Lezura contemplated the name ‘Terriak.’ She was not familiar with that type of name associated with the species in her solar system. Was it a Human name?

But she also realized something else. If Donnowarru knew this reaper called Terriak, then, how long can reapers live? Are they immortal beings?

With eyes concealed behind his mask; designed for the user to see through but not for anyone else to see into, Terriak shifted his gaze upon the unknown Nycarman female. He could feel the surprise of the other reapers around him at the sight of a planetary civilian inside the rift.

He shifted his gaze back to Donnowarru, folded his arms and said, “Do you care to explain why a civilian is in the rift with you, Donnowarru? You know that it is against the laws that we made.”

“It is a matter of great importance,” Donnowarru said casually. “At this moment our world is about to enter a possible war. And by the history of our planet it is said that a person will be chosen to carry out a most important task to our people.”

Terriak chuckled and twisted his neck. He walked in the air over to another side of Donnowarru. Beneath his feet were pinkish squares that seemed to glow with each step he made. He created them by combining the energy molecules he produced into a solid object, a skill similar to how Donnowarru created his cloud.

“Let me take a wild guess,” remarked Terriak. “Does it have anything to do with the whole ‘Dranski’ problem that you all had? Then, that would mean this has something to do with the Rakai.”

He was answered with a slow nod from Donnowarru.

“But tell me something, the Rakai person that is in Nycarman history, not any other. Why do you seek to enter another world, Donnowarru?”

Terriak said it with much coolness, but he did expect a straight forward and valid answer from Donnowarru.

“It would seem that the Dielenganns have chosen their Rakai from the Earth realm,” he answered.

The reapers all looked at each other with surprised faces behind their stunning masks. Even Terriak unfolded his arms and walked towards Donnowarru.

“What?” he asked the Nycarman crisply.

“The Dielenganns want their Rakai to be Human,” Donnowarru replied with emotionless eyes staring at the beautiful nebula on Terriak’s face.

Lezura’s nerves got uneasy as she saw the possible confrontation. She absolutely didn’t wish to be between the quarrel of a reaper and a wizard.

“What are those Dielenganns thinking?” demanded Terriak. “They know very well that under no circumstances are Humans allowed to enter the rift into any world!”

“It was a decision that they made,” Donnowarru said. “I am only here to see it through.”

“Even so, Donnowarru, I still cannot allow you to bring a Human into that world, even if you can bring an alien race to your world with your jurisdiction, Donnowarru.”

“Pardon my intrusion,” Lezura said, and all attention turned to her. “But this is a matter concerning the history of an entire species and also a few religious beliefs. The Rakai is a symbol to most Nycarman, and even other species that practice Nycarman religions associated with the Rakai. And the law states that reapers *cannot* interfere in the lives of alien species on their home world or solar system unless it involves matters concerning the universal rift. This is a historical as well as a religious matter.”

Lezura swallowed a gulp of anxiety and braced herself for what was to come. For the first time in her life she has spoken to a reaper; opposing to a reaper’s rules! She was not sure if anyone else has ever done this, but she had a feeling that they lived to regret it!

Terriak paused for a moment, took his time while walking to the side of Lezura’s Thwopter and leaning against it with one white gloved hand.

He tilted his head to left and said, “Tell me, young lady, what is your name?”

“M-my-my name?” she stuttered.

“Yes, your name. You do have one, don’t you?”

“Ah...yes. My name is Lezura Hembim.”

The name rang a bell in Terriak’s old mind.

*Hembim*, he thought. *Where have I heard that name before?* But soon discarded the thought and spoke. “Anyway, Lezura Hembim, you seem like an intelligent young lady who knows much about the world around her. But let me explain something to you that we reapers don’t get to do often.

“The reaper corp. exists because we have to prevent the intelligent species in the universe from cheating time and space and entering planets by the use of the rift from anywhere on their world, even inside their kitchens and bathrooms. That’s because a race that is hell bent on planetary domination might just slip its way onto a little peaceful planet of little people. And because those little people are peaceful and don’t know how to fight and defend themselves, they would all have their asses enslaved and taken as food for the meaner species.

“So! We reapers have to be on the lookout for such things, because things like that *have* caused problems in the past for some species; like the very Humans you wish to bring into your world. And if I can recall clearly, your planet is also under a similar problem-which by the way, was the doing of your own species.” Then Terriak remembered the full detail of that particular problem. He could see that Lezura also knew as well, and she looked at him questioningly. “Though, we reapers gave you the right to do it. But that is not the point here!

“The point is that certain races we just cannot allow to enter a planet through the rift; even if the reason maybe one of religious purpose to a species. There is situation with Humans that could cause a huge problem for your planet.”

“But Terriak, this is of great importance to our planet! Lives could be in danger. Lives *will* be in danger if we do not get this task done! I understand fully the rules under which you work, but this is not a political issue. Our people are in great need of the Rakai! There is the possibility that our solar system might experience a second war against the Orderrans!”

Terriak stood up straight and looked back at the other reapers as if their response to the statement was needed.

“That is a serious issue once it involves the Orderrans,” said a reaper with a sun on its face and in a feminine voice.

“But it still is not our concern,” said a man with a thick band of stars. “As much as it affects the lives of innocent people in a deadly way, we still do not have the right to interfere in the affairs of those aliens. It is something that occurs without reference to the rift-not our call.”

“But still,” a female with distinctly firm breasts bulging beneath her armor and defined height said, “as the young lady said, the purpose of her and the wizard wanting to retrieve the Rakai from Earth is a religious and historical matter to their people. And we also have the right not to interfere in that.”

“So, what should we do then?” Terriak asked. It was clear that he was unable to make a decision by himself; even though he was the commander of this squad of reapers. “Do you think we should let them through or send them back?”

The other reapers got closer and decided upon the proper course of action regarding the matter.

The main problem they were facing was that if they were to allow the Human to enter through the rift into the Nycarman world, that problem with the Humans could become a permanent one if the said Human was to have his or her honoi energy unlocked. A monster would be walking amongst the Nycarman people.

But, the problem with the Humans was one caused by another species that had illegally used the rift without their permission. If the Human were to become a problem it would be the fault of the species that made it so with them.

The reapers called for Terriak and discussed the answer with him. After a minute or so, Terriak walked away from the others and returned to Donnowarru and Lezura.

“Alright,” he said to both of them. “We have decided that, because the required presence of the human in your world is a religious matter, we will allow you to enter Earth and retrieve the Human.”

Lezura smiled joyously and said, “Thank you so very much!”

“But!” and Terriak raised a finger. “There are a few ground rules that have to be explained as to when the Human arrives on your world. First thing you should know is that no blood samples of the Human must be taken and kept by your people or any other species. The Human must also have no desire to procreate with any of the species there; whether by natural fertilization or genre alteration. There should also be no cloning of the human; all these rules are measures to prevent any trace of the Human from remaining on your world, for the Human has not entered using fair means of space travel.

“Second; if the Human’s problem becomes full brink, then we reapers will have no other choice but to kill the Human or take him out of your world, whether he has completed the task or not. And third; once the task is

complete, whether the Human is dead or alive, he will be taken back to Earth. Do we have an understanding?"

"Loud and clear," Donnowarru replied.

Lezura nodded twice. Though the last of Terriak's statement somewhat contradicted their agreement, she thought it best not to speak anything of it.

"Good." Terriak turned to the other reapers and spoke to the large breasted woman, "Frost, open the rift."

She walked over to the white point and pointed a finger. A pinkish-purple beam of energy shot from her fingertip and struck the white point with a loud crackling sound. The point expanded, and a source of light slowly filled the tunnel, making the colors inside glow even brighter. Soon they were all looking at the blue, clear sky of the planet Earth. The winds of the alien world blew inside the tunnel with the promise of a new experience for Lezura Hembim. And with that she quickly pulled down on the top of her helmet. A mask came over her face and sealed tightly with casing around her jaw line. The mask was bordered by metal edges so as to connect with the rest of the helmet. The rest of it was a strong, fiber glass that allowed her to see her world and prevent the escape of her ventilated air.

A small, computerized screen over the left of her chest analyzed the atmosphere using sensors on the atmospheric converter. Earth's atmosphere contained oxygen which was necessary for her to breathe. But it was thirty percent less than that of her planet. It also contained ten percent more nitrogen. But it did not have the chemical "fellugen", a chemical found on Sangetsu and a few other planets in her solar system.

By itself, fellugen was harmless; in small quantities. But large doses could cause unconsciousness. But it reacted with nitrogen to produce a nasty compound called nitrous-felluxide; a chemical that caused burning and inflammation of the lungs, leading to the inability to breathe properly and death within three to four days of breathing it.

This terrible effect was recorded in other species that were not used to the chemical, but Nycarmans have evolved with the gas on their world and have developed a special lung filtration system to filter the chemical.

All the other elements in the air were on a fairly similar level with that of her planet's own atmosphere. But the problem would be that she would not be able to breathe Earth's thin oxygen level for too long. Too much pressure would be placed on her lungs. She calculated that she would not be able to breathe for more than a few hours before her lungs gave and she died

of lack of oxygen. Luckily her Atmos suit was here to help filter in more oxygen than she was able to.

The young woman's hands jittered on the steering wheel of the Thwopter, just itching to fly outside into the world of the Humans.

"There's Earth," Terriak said. "Make sure you do whatever you're doing quickly. Humans are the only species in their solar system, so they are not very friendly to other alien species that enter their world. I am also advising you all to be careful, the governments of Earth want to capture invading alien for various reasons."

"Understood," Lezura nodded.

Terriak stepped aside for Lezura to pass. With no need for her goggles she hung it by the strap around her neck, and started the machine's engine. Donnowarru went out first, and then Lezura followed.

As soon as they left the tunnel the reapers closed it behind them. If any of the two were to look back from whence they came, they would see nothing but the sky.

Lezura made the Thwopter hover in the air as she surveyed the environment. Donnowarru floated next to her trying to do the same. But it was difficult for a Nycarman to see over long distances. Their species saw fifty meters less than the average Human. Anything beyond that was a blurry mess.

Lezura however had the advantage of her electronic goggles. Equipped with range, night vision and thermal vision, her goggles offered her the luxury of many sights. For a brief moment she lifted up her mask and put on her goggles. She could not feel the strain on her lungs as yet, but she was certain that it was coming into state.

She turned a cursor at the corner of the goggles and zoomed in a bit more on the environment. She saw the impressive architecture of the Human civilization; though it was not as monumental as the architecture of the species in her own solar system.

Their colors were also not as diverse as the ones found on her world. The vehicles only made their way by ground; not a single air craft in the sky. If they did have air vehicles, she didn't see them.

But further in the distance she saw a much more interesting structure. It was a colossal statue of a Human female with her body entirely green. She held an object high in one hand and another under her arm. She wore a crown; which lead Lezura to believe that this woman must have been a very important figure in the humans' history.



Again temptation came for her to take a picture of the statue, but she fought the urge to do so. Yet, this would be good material for her research on the Human species. But then again, obtaining the Rakai, a *Human*, would be even better.

Suddenly, the key around her neck shone a bright green. It lifted off her chest and pointed straight ahead of her, tugging as if it had a mind of its own and intended to flee.

She looked to Donnowarru and asked, “What is happening, Donnowarru? What is wrong with the key?” It felt as if the object were about to pull her head off.

“It is said that the Dielenganns designed the key so that once it was close to its Rakai, it would point to whoever is to wear it,” the man said. “The key determines who wears it.”

Lezura stared at him in confusion and disbelief.

“What?” she said. “What kind of an explanation is that? It is not as if the Rakai has already made contact with the key for it to know who it is supposed to go to!” She took the key from around her aching neck and held it tightly in her left hand. Still, the object kept on tugging.

Donnowarru gave her his full attention. He didn’t like how this Outo was speaking to him as if her wealth knowledge were vaster, but he didn’t wish to speak certain secrets to this young woman. Those secrets were what made him the powerful wizard he is now and the reapers who they are.

He finally said, “Let that concern you not, child. At this moment, the key has a fix on the location of the Rakai. I wish not for a delay in the progress of our mission. We must go.”

Lezura became curious as to why he answered that way. But his point was indeed right. Time must not be wasted here; neither should the fuel of her Thwopter or her lungs on this air. She tied the beads of the key around the handle of her vehicle, and took off her goggles and placed the mask back over her face. With the key as their guide they flew down towards the city of Humans.

## CHAPTER TWO

It was 9: am on a Monday morning in New York. There were bits and pieces of clouds in the sky, but the sun still shown vibrantly down upon the city. The streets were teeming with activity as everyone rushed to get on with their daily lives in this wonderful city.

Some men and women were dressed in business suits, talking excessively on their cell phones while maneuvering through the crowd on the sidewalks. Some of the suited men and women did not waste time talking on their cell phones but moved hurriedly through the crowd. They gripped their briefcases and purses close to their bodies in fear that a goon might just run by and snatch it from their grasp. The goons were on the prowl, stalking the crowd in search for an easy and valuable target.

Other people were dressed in ordinary or fashionable clothes. They were either listening to their iPods or chatting in groups about what they saw on the TV or on the internet. The lonely ones just went by unnoticed.

On the street the traffic was congested. The frustrated drivers beeped their horns to urge the drivers up front to move up. If that did not work they yelled and cursed at them. In turn those at the front would poke their heads out the window to the ones at the back to curse them and show their middle fingers.

Those who did not like those fingers got out of their vehicles and pummeled the drivers in their cars. Those who were brave enough came to stop the fight-and got pummeled as well.

A crazed man in worn out clothes was on the street shouting to everyone about the coming of the alien Armageddon.

People who had the spare time stopped in front of the electronic billboards to watch the morning news. The news caster was discussion the topic of the aliens entering the rift. The news today was that the aliens have kidnapped a woman in San Francisco and impregnated her with one of their hideous devices. The woman was a middle-aged African-American with short hair. She was crying as she spoke about her encounter with the horrifying aliens; how they strapped her to a table and proceeded to insert a mechanical device between her legs.

It was also noticed that the news reporter was smiling and licking his lips as he listened to the sexual encounter with the beings from another world. Most likely when his bosses reviewed the story he would be out of a job.

This was the society for a young man named Joey Sadowski. He was standing on the sidewalk outside an electronics store, staring into the building at the wide display of gadgets, appliances and flat screen TVs. A few of the TVs were on and showed different programs-including the news with the perverted reporter.

He was doing his usual window shopping, and one of the items that caught his attention was a very sleek and pleasant looking computer. He went closer and pressed his face and hands against the glass window to get a more detailed look.

Then one of the clerks inside saw a dirty boy outside smudging the glass and scaring away potential customers.

Out of the corner of his eye Joey saw the man coming out through the door towards him. He immediately ran from the window and away from the store.

“Yeah, you better run!” the clerk shouted at Joey.

When the boy was a good distance away he turned and yelled at the store, “You can all kiss my ass! I didn’t even want to buy anything from your stupid store anyway!”

The disappointment and anger could be seen in his brown eyes at the fact that he could not afford anything in the store.

*One of these days I’m goanna buy everything I want,* he vowed to himself.

But for now he had to settle for having nothing. No family, friends, no food, no home-nothing!

The only clothes he wore was a thin, burgundy colored sweater and a dark grey trousers- both of which were encrusted with dirt patches and filled with little holes and a great numbers of smaller organism that were not supposed to be on a human being.

His white skin, too, was covered with dirt, and a few little sores, and his hair was like a brown bush. His face was naturally round with a square chin and short nose, but starvation made it as slim as his body. Sometimes he wondered what he would do if ever a hurricane were to come to New York. Would he stand a chance against those strong winds?

There was a sudden rumbling in his stomach, so loud that possibly if he were to cover his ears he would still here it.’

“Yeah, I’m hungry too,” he said to his stomach as he massaged his abdomen.

He looked around him to see if he could find a restaurant or a grocery store where he could scavenge a meal. There was none in sight, so he

decided to walk to another street. It was a few blocks and a right turn until he reached the restaurant he suddenly remembered.

He was not like the other homeless people in the city, who would spend their time in an alley out of the way of the public. Instead, he walked all about the streets and amongst the crowd. He didn't even beg. To some people who usually saw him, they thought he must be mad to be showing his face amongst the rest of society.

As he was walking, a business man coming from the opposite direction saw him. The man turned his face up at the sight of him, raised his briefcase up to his chest and quickly sidestepped out of the way.

"Sure! Good morning to you too," Joey lied with a scowl.

Then a group of young beautiful women saw him, they too gave him the same response.

"I wasn't gonna give you my number anyway you bitches!" he turned to them and shouted.

He continued to walk, and took a quick glance at the only clean article of clothing on his feet that would make him feel good. It was a pair of converse that was red at the top. He grinned when he remembered how he got them.

It was on a Saturday morning; just two days ago. The streets were not as crowded as on the weekdays. Either the people were at some weekend event; like the theater or a party, or they were just relaxing at home.

He was standing outside the shoes store named "FOOT FASHION", peering through the glass into the blue painted interior of the store. The individual shoes were being displayed on clear plastic shelves. Inside the store beside the front door was the store manager; seated around the white-top counter reading a newspaper. Joey was window shopping for a shoe he liked. He spotted it; a red colored converse. To him it stood amongst the rest like wolf among sheep.

Now that he had marked his target the next step was to get it. He was not proud about what he was about to do, but he figured that the way things were with his life he could justify anything he did.

He turned his attention to the store clerk. The man in the blue pants and grey and blue plaid shirt had a long, mean looking stick underneath the counter. Joey knew that the stick was not just there to swat flies.

The boy took a quick glance at his reflection in the glass and realized that there was no way he could just enter the store like any casual customer looking the way he did. But he had to try. He couldn't walk around the city in just his deteriorating socks.

He walked over to the door and pushed it open. The top of the door hit the hanged bell. The noise alerting the clerk that someone had just entered.

"Ah man!" Joey shouted with a frantic look on his face. "I can't believe this happened to me!"

The clerk quickly rose to his feet, placing a grip on the stick beneath the counter. "Can I help you sir?" he asked, looking suspiciously at the young man.

"Yeah you can," Joey replied, "I was walking home when a gang of robbers attacked me! They kicked my ass and took my money, my chain; the bastards even stole my new converse right off my feet!"

"Sorry to hear that," the man said, sympathizing with Joey. "But unless you're here to exchange some money for some shoes, I can't help you. I can call the police if you want, though."

"There's no need for that," Joey said abruptly, fretting at the thought of the police coming and foiling his plan. "But you can help," Joey said, now sounding calm. "I need you to sell me a good pair of shoes." Joey felt up his empty right pocket. "Eh, it's a miracle they didn't search my crotch and get my two grand."

"Well, I can help you with that!" the now happy clerk quickly replied, completely ignoring the fact of where the money had been hidden.

The clerk turned to a door on the left hand side of the store.

"Dane, Get your ass out here!" he shouted at his employee.

Dane pushed the door open slamming it into the wall. The blonde haired man in the black shirt and blue jeans seemed to be very grumpy in nature. He looked at his boss as if he wanted to break his neck.

"Dane, help this man find a good pair of shoes," the clerk ordered.

Dane looked at Joey with a suppressed grimace. "Show me what you want," he said almost with a snarl.

Joey pretended to limp as he moved over to the shelves.

"Man, the guys really beat you up bad," the clerk commented at how Joey moved.

"They got my ass alright," Joey lied.

"What happen to him?" Dane said.

"He got beat up by a bunch of guys," the clerk answered.

“Did they crap on him too? He smells like a hobo!” Dane said as he twisted his face upon detecting the boy’s smell.

Joey tensed for a brief moment; he thought that Dane had discovered his true identity.

He was in front of the shoe of his choice, but he deliberately looked pass it to indicate he was a customer who had not found what he was looking for as yet.

“This one, definitely,” He finally picked the shoe, which was good, as Dane was getting very impatient and seemed ready to snap.

“What size do you wear?” asked Dane as he took the shoe down and looked into it.

“Size nine,” Joey answered.

Dane placed the shoe back on the shelf and headed to the door of the store room.

Joey sat down on the metallic bench in the center of the room and waited for Dane to return. He could feel a huge lump of worry in his stomach at the thought of if his plan were to fail. Now he was thinking about how he would get the shoe out. The door was closed and by the time he would reach the handle of the door the clerk would have whacked him out cold.

But he also noticed how hot the inside of the store was. Both he and the man were sweating; the man had to fan himself with the side of the newspaper he wasn’t reading.

“Hey, sir, do you mind opening the door to let in some fresh air? I’m cooking in here.” Joey said. He fanned himself to show his displeasure.

“I was thinking about that too,” the man replied. “But I don’t want to open it and then some thief comes running in and out here with something.”

“I didn’t see much people on the street today,” the boy said. “And it looks to me like business is slow around here. I don’t think anyone’s goanna just barge in here like that.”

Then the man looked up at him and said, “Well you did.”

“Only because it was an emergency,” he quickly replied.

The clerk silently laughed.

“So how about it dude?” Joey pressed more. “I’m goanna roast in here.”

“Alright,” the clerk got up from his seat and said, “If it will stop your whining.”

The man took up the stick, opened the door and placed it in the corner of the door frame.

Dane emerged from the room with the box of shoes. He gave them to Joey and he hurriedly opened it. The smile on his face was so irritating to Dane that he thought about tossing Joey and the shoes outside. If he did, he would be surprised that the customer would be happy.

Dane gave him a clean pair of socks to try on the shoes. Joey putted on the socks and then the shoes. It fitted him perfectly. His toes wiggled in satisfaction like a prisoner finally getting a woman after twenty years.

“It’s a bit tight,” Joey lied. Then he looked up at Dane. He saw the vexation on the man’s face and tried his best not to laugh. “Do you think you could get it in a size nine and a half, or ten?”

Dane’s face wrinkled with anger as he stormed back into the room. Joey wondered how the man managed to keep the business going with an employee like Dane.

As soon as Dane went into the room and closed the door Joey sprang up, grabbed the other foot of the shoe out of the box and ran towards the door. The owner saw him and reached under the counter for the stick. But he realized where he had placed the stick, and before he could call out to Joey the boy was already out the door.

“Shit!” the man screamed. Dane came running out the room with the box in his hands.

“What is it?”

“The damn kid took off with the shoes!” the man said frantically.

“What the hell!” Dane snarled as he dropped the box and went for the stick in the corner of the door.

He went outside with the weapon clenched in his fist and looked around for Joey. He spotted him running down the sidewalk to his left and went after him. Joey was running awkwardly; his shoed foot being higher than the other. His heart was pounding with fear as if it wanted to burst through his chest and run away from its slow moving body.

Joey took a quick look behind him and saw that Dane was coming after him with full speed. He increased his speed as he turned onto a next street, but Dane was getting closer.

Out of rage Dane threw the stick over the head of the crowd. The people instinctively ducked out of the way. The stick hit Joey in the back of his head. The boy grunted as he fell to the ground.

He blanked out for three seconds. He woke up and quickly staggered to his feet, remembering that Dane was after him. Joey ran, but Dane managed to reach out and grab onto the back of his shirt. Joey spun around

and swung the shoe with all his might into Dane's head. The stinging pain caused Dane to release his grip on the boy's shirt instantly.

As Joey ran on Dane stopped to massage his throbbing head. A few people saw what happened and came to Dane's aid. He angrily shoved them away, embarrassed by what happened to him. When he looked up to find the thief he only saw him disappear around the corner.

Remembering how he hit the man in his head was enough satisfaction to make the pain in his stomach subside and for him to walk with a hopping swag. But the rumbling in his stomach came immediately back and wiped the smile of his face. This time it was a lot more painful. The gas build up in his stomach burned his insides, making him kneel and rub his abdomen. His face contorted with pain.

*Shit! Every damn day I have to deal with this!*

Suddenly he heard screams for help. Somehow the pain in his stomach subsided and he became alert. He stood up and turned his attention to where the screams were coming from; a dark dirty alley directly to the right of him. There he saw a woman struggling with a man for her purse.

He looked around him, frantically, to see if anyone could help. He saw a man look into the alley, and quickly sped up at what he saw and went away as if he witnessed nothing. A look of desperation appeared on his face, and Joey began to call for help and point into the alley.

"She's being robbed, help!"

But the people only looked at him as they passed by, thinking he was just another homeless crazy person.

The woman continued to fight off the man in full black. He covered her mouth to stop her from screaming but she was still tugging at her purse as hard as she could. He let go of her mouth and slammed his fist in her head, sending her to the ground. But she still held on to her purse and kicked at her attacker.

Joey called for help once more until his unnourished throat hurt. He reached out to a woman passing by.

"Get away from me!" she cried in disgust as she knocked away his hand and ran.

The boy's body tingled as he watched the continuing tussle in the alley.

Calling for help would be useless, if he really wanted to save this woman he would have to do it himself. Without thinking twice, he ran towards the man at full speed and rammed his right shoulder into the man's back,



sending him diving onto his face. Joey went over to the black haired woman in the red dress and helped her to her feet. Without a “thank you” she ran right out of the alley.

The enraged man got to his feet and pulled out a pocket knife from inside his jacket. Joey focused his attention on the hand with the knife. His body was now shaking with fear, but mostly with excitement. This would be his seventh fight since the start of the year. Not something he was looking forward to but circumstances demanded he fight for his life.

The man jabbed at Joey, he was nearly stabbed but he leapt out of the way just in time, his feet constantly moving in anticipation of another attack. The man attacked once more, Joey ducked and came up with a punch in the man’s chin, and he stumbled back almost falling over. But the thief managed to balance himself and attacked once more. Joey dodged it successfully again but was hit in the stomach by the attacker’s unseen fist. He winched in pain; then felt an even greater pain in his left side as he crumpled to the ground.

The man pulled his knife out of the boy’s body, put it back his jacket and sped out of the alley, knocking down two people who had unknowingly walked in his way.

Joey pressed his hand over his wound to stop the bleeding as he gasped for breathe. But the blood had already soaked into his clothes and was seeping through his fingers. His voice crippled by pain prevented him from calling for help. He doubted that he would get any anyway.

Whatever the force that had compelled him to attempt such a heroic feat, he wish he could meet it and strangle the life out of it!

“The trail seems to end there between those two buildings,” Lezura said, pointing in the direction.

“Let us hope he is there then,” Donnowarru said. “These Humans are beginning to make me feel uncomfortable!”

People were beginning to gather where the UFO was descending. Vehicles stopped in the middle of the street and the occupants inside coming out to have a look at the phenomenon. People inside the nearby buildings poured out into the street to fuel the size of the crowd.

Lezura thought it would be best to stay out of the reach of the curious Humans, so she engaged the Thwopter on auto pilot hover above the alley. She leaned to the side in her seat and peered down into the alley.

“There!” she shouted excitedly. “There is the Rakai!”

She could tell by the shape of the Human’s body that it was a male. But she realized something alarming; he was not moving, barely at least.

“I see him!” Donnowarru replied, “I will retrieve him.”

Donnowarru swooped down into the alley. The crowd grew alarmed as they watched the alien descend. As their eyes followed his path they became even more alarmed as the man floated to a boy lying on the ground.

There was now a cause for concern; no one knew what this alien would do with the boy. Usually when they broke through the rift they only tried to get back, but this one was coming in contact with a Human!

What did it want? And why hasn’t the reapers appeared by now to stop this?

A few of the people took out their cell phones and dialed the number for the police. As noise level of the crowd increased a few persons called out to the alien.

“Oh my god!” a woman screamed.

“Leave us alone you damn bastards!”

“You don’t see us trying to steal of your goddamn people!”

And that man threw a bottle at Donnowarru.

The wizard used a gust of honoi from his hand to knock away the projectile. But soon other Humans caught onto the trend and threw objects as well. Donnowarru was forced to send out an even bigger gust of honoi from his hand and send the Humans at the mouth of the alley flying back. But they were not seriously harmed. Donnowarru however did not give a damn if one of them died and he had to face the reapers’ judgment.

Donnowarru cradled the boy in his arms and lifted him up. He noted the startling sight of blood on him and the thick smell of it. He looked down on the ground and saw a pool of blood, then came to the frightening realization that the Rakai was bleeding to death.

“What is wrong with him?” Lezura asked in a frantic tone when Donnowarru paused. She kept all her limbs inside the Thwopter to avoid the flying wrath of the Humans. At this point she was greatly disappointed. This was in no way the greeting she was expecting from the Humans. Yet she did not take it fully to heart. It would seem Humans have hatred against illegal aliens on their world as well. It brought back memories of her people.

Donnowarru looked up, “He has lost a lot of blood!” he told her, “We must get him to the reapers immediately!”

Laura's face turned stone cold with shock. "Bring him up onto the Thwopter!" she shouted it more like a command.

Donnowarru regenerated the cloud back underneath his feet and floated up to the Thwopter. Lezura unbuckled her seatbelt and turned around in her seat on her knees. There she and Donnowarru fitted the Rakai into the back seat and buckled him in firmly.

A piece of bottle was hurled with great athleticism and shattered on impact with Lezura's head. It stunned her for a split second, but she was not hurt, protected by her helmet. She continued to work.

"Are you alright?" asked Donnowarru. Not concern, but intrigued that Lezura did not retaliate at the Humans.

Another bottle broke against her shoulder. "I am fine, Donnowarru," she replied slowly, her voice emotionless. "I have more important things to deal with at the moment."

She took out a silver first aid kit out of her bag pack resting under her seat and asked Donnowarru to hold it open. She took out medicated cotton swabs, removed the shirt from around the boy's wound and cleaned it with gentle strokes.

They heard the Human utter a low groan as the chemicals came in contact with his exposed flesh. When she was finished with that she placed a large bandage over it. But blood still continued to seep into the fabric; though slowly.

"That will not keep him alive," Donnowarru argued, "We must seal the wound completely. We must get to the reapers."

Lezura shot a rigid glance at him, as if she was annoyed by how Donnowarru spoke to her as if she did nothing to help. "Lead the way then," she growled.

Lezura looked back at the Rakai, just in time to see his eyes open briefly. Then they closed.

*Humans have brown eyes! Another physical trait about humans I can jot down.*

Joey could feel his body moving without him ordering it to do so, but could do nothing about it.

*What was I thinking! He thought. What got into me, I'm no super hero. I can't save anyone. I should have just minded my business like everyone else. And I'm still hungry!*

Joey opened his eyes, and before closing his eyes again he got a glimpse of a purple face looking back at him with sparkling, bright pink eyes.

*Those eyes are really pretty, though!*

Donnowarru went in front of the Thwopter and ripped open the tunnel. The Humans gasped in shock and awe at the image. Still no matter how many times they saw it, such an image of something beyond their control and understanding was beautiful. And as the aliens flew inside with the Human the portal closed.

New York was left in hysteria at the sight of an alien abduction in broad daylight.

They traveled in the tunnel until they reached another white point.

“Terriak, Where are you?” Donnowarru shouted, and then called once more, “Terriak!”

Streams of smoke slowly hissed out of the walls and formed the reapers.

They gathered around the travelers but their attention was directed to the Human in the back seat of the vehicle. They went closer to the human.

They observed him exchanged comments.

“He has been wounded; we need you to help him!” Lezura said.

The star faced reaper stood over the Human and examined his wound. Lezura had turned off the Thwopter’s engine to reserve fuel and allowed the machine to float in the zero gravity of the tunnel.

“What’s his condition, Eirg?” Terriak asked the attending reaper.

The smell of blood filled Eirg’s nostrils, but as a trained doctor he was used to such scents. He pulled away the bandage over the Human’s wound and observed it. Placing two fingers around the opening he pulled it apart and checked the depth of the wound.

“I’d say he got stabbed with a thin bladed weapon. It went deep but it didn’t hit any vitals, just the blood vessels in the muscle tissue of his abdomen.” Eirg placed one hand over the wound. “He lost only enough blood to cause unconsciousness. I’ll just close the wound completely.”

Eirg’s hand glowed with a pink light. The particles of the energy went inside his body and provided the right stimuli for his cells to begin clotting the wound. After a few seconds he removed his hand and a thin scab was formed.

“With some rest and lots of food he should come around quickly,” Eirg said.

Terriak looked at both Nycarmans and laughed. “So, this is the Rakai; a homeless teenager.”

Lezura and Donnowarru had indeed noticed the boy’s appearance. But it had never occurred to them to question the Human’s potential.

Lezura looked at the boy’s face and could see the familiarities of suffering. She looked back at Terriak and said, “It does not mean that this Human is not capable of great things. He is the Rakai.”

Terriak nodded mockingly. He scratched his head and then said, “Boy, the Dielenganns sure know how to pick them, though!”

Donnowarru grew tired of Terriak’s remarks to one of the most revered figures in the history of his people-even if the Rakai was not a Nycarman.

“So, Terriak,” Donnowarru said, “can we bring this Human into our world without the future interference of the reapers?”

Terriak still felt uncertain as to whether he should have made the decision. But it was a risk worth taking for the sake of the inhabitants of Upsinodron.

He sighed with the pressure on his mind. “Yes, you have my permission.”

He walked up to the other end of the tunnel and pointed to the white dot. With a shot of pink energy the dot expanded. The reaper walked up to the Thwopter and came around to the seat of the Human. He gripped the Human’s wrist and let go after a brief glowing of his hand. Lezura saw a black band with purple crystals inside it. She gasped when she saw the band melting into the Human’s flesh and disappeared.

“This will prevent other reapers from detecting the planetary energy he will carry over to the other world,” said Terriak.

“Thank you,” replied Lezura.

Terriak waved a hand and said, “Do not thank me. By preventing his detection by the reapers I have just endangered his life. The aliens on your world will be after him and there isn’t a thin we can do about it.”

Lezura slowly accepted that truth and nodded.

“Well, it would seem that my services are no longer needed,” Donnowarru said.

He abruptly turned his entire body into honoi energy, and back into the statue. It floated around in the zero gravity until Lezura got hold of it and placed inside her bag pack.

With a final thank you to the reapers Lezura awoke the engine and flew the vehicle out of the tunnel.

Terriak closed the tunnel and stood there staring at the white point.

Something had also come to his mind. He would have to explain all of this to the Grand reaper-if he had not already found out!

## CHAPTER THREE

Lezura flew over a greatly vegetated stretch of land, with pillar and cone shaped mountains. All these made the Yuxu mountain lands. She could recognize it from when she first came here.

She looked at the radar on the panel for an area clear of trees to land on which would appear as a grey area. But most of what she saw was covered with clusters of trees, if not; it was dotted by solitary trees and rocks, not at all suitable for landing.

Eventually Lezura found a suitable place to land. She reduced the output of the engine and carefully descended directly over the desired area. As it did the pulsating rings from the antigravity orbs decreased in strength.

The machine landed on its three short horizontal legs. Lezura turned off the engine and stepped out of the vehicle. The Thwopter was about two feet off the ground. She landed in blue-green grass that reached up to her shins, swaying like playful little children around Lezura's feet.

Though she was only gone for two and a half hours when she checked the electronic watch in one of the pockets on her suit, she was glad to be back on her home world. She was glad to be with the familiar sounds of the creatures around her, the scent of the plant tainted air and the painfully colorful flowers, the sight of the twin moons and the glorious orange sun in the sky.

One of such kind of flowers around her was the krylic flower; which grew directly on top of the ground with eight large red petals and green, ten inch long filaments. Another flower was the cune flower; which stood at four feet tall with a coarse brown stem, and ten, large widely splayed red flowers with green edges.

To the north and east of her she could see the colossal yelm trees that starved the rest of the plants below them of sunlight and darkened the land.

Now in the familiar atmosphere of her planet she turned off the atmospheric converter and took off her mask, breathing naturally. But she thought about the Rakai's health. The Human was not use to her atmosphere. Even though he would be able to breathe the higher levels of oxygen here, she doubted that he would be able to last long with breathing in the nitrous-felluxide and the tiny bacteria in the air as well. He would have no immunity to them and would most likely die of prolonged exposure.

She took up her bag pack from beneath the seat and went around to the Rakai to unbuckle his seatbelt. Once she did so she took the first-aid kit out of her bag pack and searched around until she found a Q-tip. She placed the kit back in the bag gently cleaned the Human's left ear. She was surprised to see that he did not awake. He didn't even budge when she swirled the Q-tip inside his ear.

She placed the heavily brown Q-tip in a contamination bag (fearing discarding it might spread bacteria that would affect the wildlife) when she was finished and went into one of the pockets on her vest. Out of it she pulled out two small electronic devices; called Extraterrestrial Language Translators (E.T. translator or just translator for short). They were made from the most advanced Orderran, Ginlank and Nycarman technology.

They worked by converting the sound structure of the words of any alien language into sound structures that can be recognized by the user's brain. They were silver-blue in color, button shaped with a dome shaped top and covered in a soft cotton-like fabric so as to not irritate the inside of the ear. They were even water proof. They were half an inch in diameter and three fourths of an inch long.

Lezura carefully placed the translator in his ear while he was still sitting up; sound asleep with his head hung down. She placed the other one in her ear. This would make communication much easier by the time the Human woke up.

Next she went into the bag and took out a small metallic case with warning labels any species in the solar system could read, and a silver canister with a blue top and a white label around the body. She put down the case to free one hand and used it to cover the Human's nose and mouth. She proceeded to spray all over the Human with a highly strong, germ killing chemical. She did not want him to catch the diseases of her world, but neither did she want to get his.

She took up the case, entered a code in the touch screen at the top, and opened it to expose four vaccination shots with blue contents; all of the contagious, common diseases that could be cured in minute doses. After selecting one she lifted up the left shirt arm of the Human's shirt, wiped away the dirt around the area and gave him the shot. It was a painless one as the liquid entered his body through his pores in a fine mist. And he still did not wake up from his sleep.

This would give him enough time to build up some immunity to the infectious bacteria during his time here. But he would most definitely need



an Atmos suit before the day ended. More than likely she would need to give him hers.

She stood up with her hands on her hips and sighed as she observed the Human. The poor thing looked as if he had not had a good bath or have eaten for days, she thought. So the next thing she did was take out a clear, square shaped container and a bottle of water.

Lezura stared again at the Human, this time out of curiosity. She noted how he looked like a Nycarman, but with peach colored skin, brown hair and having tiny hairs on his body and a few on his chin and beneath his nose.

She went closer to him, and then with a slight shudder noted how he smelt like a wild gampadon.

Lezura tried to wake him up by tapping him on his cheeks. He murmured a sound and tilted his head, but he did not wake. She tried to tell him to wake up by talking in to the ear that had the translator, but he still did not move a muscle.

Had he still not recovered his strength from the wound he sustained?

Then, out of frustration she yelled into his ear.

The boy's eyes flew wide opened and his head swung up, "What! I'm up!" he shouted, and he turned to the person next to him with wide open eyes. At the sight of the purple woman he leapt out of his seat and onto the grass with a quick yell that made Lezura jerk and step back.

Joey quickly staggered onto his feet; but with a difficulty like that of weight being added to him, and stood there staring at the woman, panting heavily from the shock at what he saw. "Who-who are you?" he demanded, finding the strength to point at her.

She quickly put down the container and walked around the Thwopter to him, but he backed away.

"I said tell me who you are lady!" they boy demanded again.

"Pease, try to remain calm. I have no intention of causing you harm," Lezura said with her arms slightly raised in the air as a gesture of surrender. "I will explain everything to you if you would just remain calm and listen."

"Then tell me who you are lady," the Human said once more, this time his voice having a sting to it. Then he looked at his surroundings and gasped at the sight. He did so for five seconds before he turned his attention back at the purple woman. "And where am I?"

She could detect the panic and fear in his voice, so she spoke as calmly as she could, “My name is Lezura Hembim. I am a Nycarman alien from the planet Sangetsu. I-”

“Wait! Wait just a damn minute!” Joey stopped her and closed his eyes to think if she really said what he just heard. He opened them and stared at her angrily. “Lady I’m not in the mood for any crap, you feel me? Just tell me where the hell I am and what the hell’s going on!”

Lezura looked at him with confusion. “I am not sure I do *feel you*,” she replied calmly, confused by his way of speaking.

The Human gritted his teeth in anger, “Look here lady, stop playing with me and just tell me who you are and where I am! And I don’t want any more of that *alien* bullshit coming out of your mouth!”

Because Lezura had been expecting these kinds of difficulties in communicating with the alien she was not too furious at how he spoke to her. “I am telling you the truth, Human,” she pleaded.

“Oh please!” Joey droned. “Don’t give me that *Human* talk.” Then Joey realized, “So then if you are an alien how can I understand what you’re saying? Uh?” he said smugly, positive that this woman would not have a plausible answer, and would end her ridiculous game.

Lezura’s forehead wrinkled with anger. She could not maintain her composure anymore, not with the Human displaying that kind of attitude. “Listen to me you ignorant moron!” Lezura snarled so fiercely that Joey took a step back and looked at her innocently. Lezura continued.

“Regardless of what you think, I am telling you that I am a Nycarman alien from the planet Sangetsu, and the reason why you can understand what I am saying is because I placed a translator in your left ear.”

The alien was startled for a brief moment as he touched the device inside his ear. Then he looked at the woman in surprise. Lezura leaned forward and said smugly, “And that is *alien* technology you are touching.”

But the Human was not convinced, “Then where’s your spaceship?”

Lezura turned to the Thwopter, “It is not really a spaceship,” she said. “It is a vehicle designed for planetary aerial flight.”

The boy turned his attention to the vehicle and was instantly intrigued by its design. He touched its smooth surface and felt the hard metal that had been slightly heated in the warmth of the sun. “It’s real,” he said under his voice. He turned back to purple woman. “Then if this isn’t a spaceship, then how did I get here?” he asked a little calmer than before. “And where’s this damn place anyway?”

“I brought you here through the rift.” Lezura said. “It is a connected network of the planetary energy produced by each planet from its magnetic field and the numerous energies produced on it.” Lezura had not realized that she had actually gotten into a lecture with the Human. “These energies are then connected by numerous black holes that are disguised to the point of invisibility by the dark matter and dark energy in space. At least, that is what is assumed.”

The Human’s face went sour with confusion as he tried to process what Lezura had just said. But he soon realized something he had so foolishly ignored.

“Wait, you came through a portal?”

“Correct,” Lezura replied.

Then the boy’s face lightened. His voice grew more joyously in tone. “Like the aliens that come to our planet through the portal-things?”

“Y-yes,” Lezura was taken off track by the Human’s sudden interest. The realization came to her like a hard slap. The Human was beginning to catch on, because at some point he must have experience one of the dimensional rifts on his planet. But still she asked just to be certain, “Have you seen aliens on your planet?”

“Not all the time, but yeah!” he answered enthusiastically. “They come through the portals in the sky, and sometimes even on the ground! They haven’t really done anything to us yet, but people believe that they are here to abduct us...wait a minute...did you *abduct me*?”

Lezura looked embarrassed. “I would not put it in that term...but I did take you from your planet without the permission of your own people. It can only be classified as abduction if I took you against your will.”

It was some moment of amazed staring from the Human before Lezura got a response from him.

“Holy shit!” he said in a marvelously happy tone. “I got abducted by an alien chick! This is so fucking cool!”

The startled Nycarman was now amused to see the Human jumping around like a little boy. Then he yelled and fell to the ground, holding his side.

“What the hell,” he winched and said. He pulled up his shirt and saw a wound. Then he remembered what had happened. “That’s right. That son of a bitch stabbed me.”

“We-” she did not wish to explain the missing presence of the wizard “-I found you lying in an alley with that wound. You were losing blood and so I had to take you to the reapers for help.”

Joey became surprised, “The reapers helped me? You helped me?”

She nodded.

The boy staggered to his feet and looked at the woman differently. He could not explain it, but it was as if she seemed less alien to him.

*This alien and the reapers helped me!*

The thought of the act of help coming from the alien and the reapers was something he could have never fathomed. It was not as if he thought the aliens as mean, fierce creatures with the intent of casual and anal rape as the other Humans did. But the fact that the things he had always believed in to actually do something like this were only something he could dream of.

Without any thought as what their customs were and whether there was some health risk to either of them, the young man approached the alien woman with his arms wide open. Lezura cautiously made a step back and placed a hand on a non-lethal weapon around her belt.

But what happened was something she was not expecting at all. The Human placed his arms around her and touched her back. He brought her chest against his and rested his head on her shoulder.

“*Pakie...*!” Lezura whispered. It was an expression of surprise similar to “My...!”

“Thank you,” he said in her ear. “Thank you for saving my life.”

Lezura was speechless to the action of the Human...and his brutish scent. It would have been rude for her to shove him off and remarked on his odor, so she forced herself to put her arms on his back, but she had the manners to genuinely say, “You are welcome.”

The Human pulled off her and looked at his surroundings. His dreamy brown eyes sparkled with childish wonder as he looked at the magnificence of the alien world.

“All this is real,” the young man said instead of asked as he marveled at his surroundings. He bent down and plucked up a blade of the blue-green grass, crushed it and smelled it. *It smells like a real plant!* He thought.

The Human stood up and slowly went over to the purple woman. He slowly raised his hand to touch her face. She realized that he wanted to see if she was real too, so she gently took his hand and placed it on her left cheek. He slowly ran his fingers along the creases of her soft skin. As he did

so he stared into her eyes; those beautiful pink gemstones that sparkled in the light of the sun.

“You’re real!” he said in amazement, then took his hand off her cheek and looked up in to the sky at the moons. He could feel the cool wind against his skin and see it swaying the branches of the weird but beautiful trees. The sounds of animals and the sight of a few of them flying in the air filled him with a long yearned joy. He smiled. “It’s real...!” he shouted. “It’s all fucking real!”

Lezura couldn’t help but smile, pleased that the Human had come to realize that she was telling the truth. She took note of his strong vocabulary and the energy that generated from his words.

But then another question, another important one, popped into the boy’s head. He turned his attention back to the woman. “Hey, lady-”

“Please, call me Lezura,” she insisted.

“Yeah, alright,” he agreed. “Well then-ah-my name is Joey...Sadowski...Joey Sadowski.” He extended his hand for a shake, Lezura looked at it and then at Joey with a confused expression. She realized it was a greeting but did not know how to do it.

Joey was a bit surprised. *She really is an alien after all*, he thought, and then said, “You’re supposed to put your hand in mine and then we shake it.”

She extended her right hand into his carefully, and then they clasped them and shook it slowly. Lezura was intrigued by the Human way of greeting to the point where she asked Joey to do it again. Joey couldn’t help but smile. “You really don’t know about this, do you?”

“Of course I do not,” Lezura replied with a smile, now seeing that the Human was now beginning to believe her even more.

Joey got back to the matter at hand. “So, why did you bring me here? What’s the reason?” he asked. “Do you want to study Humans?”

Lezura stiffened her back and swallowed in preparation to explain the important reason as to why he was here. Possibly the most important thing this Human will ever here in his life.

“You should have a seat for what I am about to tell you,” Lezura said. Joey stared at her suspiciously for a brief moment, then sat in the back seat of the Thwopter and focused all his attention on Lezura. “This planet has been through two of the greatest wars in its history. The first Great War was between the different kingdoms of this planet, all fought against one kingdom who sought domination over this world. When the king of that

kingdom was defeated by the Dielenganns, the four rulers who defeated him feared that he might one day return to seek revenge on the world.”

“Uh-uh,” Joey nodded with a blank face. He was not getting the point that was currently being presented to him.

“So the Dielenganns created a machine that could fight against Dranaki’s future army, and a key that could activate it when the world would need it the most.”

“And they need it now?”

“Yes, they do, as a third Great War is approaching.”

“But I still don’t get why I’m here,” the bewildered Human said in a tone of despair.

“The Dielenganns said that the key would be bestowed upon someone of great will and power. This person who is worthy of carrying the key,” she took the key from around her neck and gestured it to Joey, “Will be known as the Rakai.”

Joey shot a startled glance up at her, “Wait-you mean-you me?” he said, and poked a finger at himself to stress the word, “*Me?*”

“You are the Rakai, the key chose you,” Lezura insisted.

“You can’t be serious, lady” Joey replied. “I mean; first you tell me that you are an alien, and it looks to me like you really are. But now you’re goanna throw some ‘chosen one’ shit at me? Okay, now I don’t believe you!”

Lezura gritted her teeth in frustration.

*And just when I thought I was convincing him!*

“It is not *shit* as you say it is boy!” she spat at him.

Joey was startled by the venom in her voice and the murderous look on her face, but he still continued. “Lady, look, just-just take me back and stop playing with me, alright.”

“Do you even have a home to go back to?” Lezura said. “Because when I found you were bleeding to death!”

“Who the hell do you think you are asking if I have a home?” Joey snarled while pointing a stiff finger at her.

“Well do you?” Lezura said again fiercely with her arms akimbo, her eyes narrowing into his.

Joey could see that this woman; or whatever she was, was too serious for him to argue with and expect to win. He was thinking that maybe he should just believe her and went along with whatever story she told him. The truth is; he really wanted to believe what she was saying, he would do anything to

get out of his current situation; being the chosen one for an alien mission sounded a whole lot better than waking up every morning beside a dumpster, awaiting the cooks in the Chinese restaurant to toss out the unneeded scraps.

But he also had to be realistic about the whole thing. How many people do you know just get up one day and are brought to another planet by aliens?

Joey leveled his stare at her. "I don't, alright! I don't have a home, I have no friends, no family, and I don't have anything! And I'm not in the mood for some..." he gestured to Lezura "...purple lady telling me that a bunch of old alien dudes chose me to be their key keeper or... whatever it is that you call that person! Because no one ever cared about me to choose me for anything! The only thing I was ever chosen for was to get beat up at school and live and suffer like I'm some fucking wild animal!" Joey was now breathing heavily, his shoulders and chest rising up and down like an angry beast. Lezura could feel the anger and hurt in his voice. She was beginning to understand his skepticism. *No one cared for this poor child.* And she looked at him with so much sympathy that she frowned.

"So don't tell me that those Dielengann chose me for some...damn mission! Because if my own people didn't give a shit about me why would E.T.?"

There was a long moment of silence as the two aliens just stood there, looking at each other with their eyes and faces pasted with emotion. It was Lezura who finally approached Joey, and gently laid her hands on his shoulder. She could see that his eyes looked like they were ready to shed tears.

"Let me tell you something, Joey," she said softly. "There are seven planets in this solar system that support intelligent life, like you. And there are an estimated *fifty-five billion* sentient beings in the entire solar system, but out of all of those people the Dielenganns sent me all the way to another solar system just for you," then she squeezed his shoulders lightly and gestured to him with her chin for emphasis, "for *you*, Joey Sadowski. You are that important to us."

Joey lifted the gaze of his watery eyes off the ground and laid them on Lezura, "I-guess that does mean something," he said in a low voice.

"It does," Lezura replied with an assuring smile.

A sudden thundering in the Human's bowels made him furrow his forehead in annoyance and massage his stomach. Lezura heard the startling

sound and reached a hand on her pistol. She quickly realized where the sound came from and reached for the container on the seat.

“Here, eat this,” she said as she opened the container, and the scent of the cooked meal made Joey's mouth water instantly.

“What is it?” Joey asked cautiously as he peered into the container. He saw cream colored, flat ovals and little chunks of brown meat smothered with a golden-brown sauce.

“It is boiled dumplings and stewed basurel meat,” Lezura said.

“Does it taste good?”

“You will have to try it for yourself,” she said, and gave Joey the fork and told him to sit in the Thwopter.

He took up a piece of the meat with the fork and tried it, the strong taste of pineapples and fried eggs burst from the juicy meat onto his tongue. He ate hurriedly, throwing the pieces of food into his mouth. As Lezura watched the phenomenon she thought he was just swallowing instead of chewing.

Forty seconds later he handed her an empty container with only moisture on the inner surface. She gave him the bottle of water to drink. His lips pulled so hard on the bottle that after the water was gone he sucked the air out of the bottle and crushed it.

With a loud sigh he lay back over the seat and smiled. “That was really good,” he said in a pleased tone of voice. “The first good food I've eaten in four days!” he sighed once more and closed his eyes.

Lezura felt sadden when she heard how long the boy; how long the Rakai, had gone without food. As she was about to ask him about it he looked up at her and spoke, “Thank you, Lezura. I really appreciated the food”

She smiled at him, “You are most welcome,” she said.

Joey stood up and stretched his limbs. “So where are we going from here?” he asked.

“So does that mean you have accepted your mission?” Lezura asked enthusiastically.

Joey stopped stretching and looked up at her, “Yep, I have,” he said. “I'll stay and see what this is all about.”

Lezura's smiled widened till she opened her mouth; she clasped her hands, “Fantastic!” She took the bottle from Joey and packed it and the container into the bag. “We will be going to the Ixian kingdom; there you will begin your training.”



Joey narrowed his surprised gaze at her. “*Training*, I thought I was just supposed to carry around the key?”

Lezura looked up at him from over her bag. “You will need to know how to defend yourself if you are to survive in this world,” she said.

Joey shrugged smugly at her. “Well don’t let this little scar fool you,” he pointed to where he was wounded, “I can take care of myself. I’ve been doing it since I was eight years old”

Lezura paused, and looked up at him in both surprise. “Eight years old?” she asked in disbelief.

“Yep, you better believe it!” Joey said, sounding proud about it

*What has this boy has been through?* Lezura thought. But she had no intention on asking him right now, she had to get him back to Ixia without any delays.

“Well,” she said, “I should tell you from now about the atmosphere of this planet.” And when she did tell him Joey replied with a terrorized face. “Not that it is going to kill you right away!” she quickly added with waving hands to dismiss the thought he had about imminent death. “It will take about four days until the toxins fully affect your body...and kill you.”

“But I’m still goanna die!” Joey said.

“Not unless I give you my suit. I can set it to filter the toxins in the atmosphere so you can breathe oxygen.”

“The one you’re wearing right now?”

“Yes.”

“But I’m goanna have to wear it all the time!” Joey protested. He looked at her suspiciously. “And you might have *alien cooties!*”

“Not exactly,” Lezura answered. “There is a chemical that can allow non-natives to breathe this atmosphere without harm from the nitrous-felluxide. But unfortunately it is nowhere near this region. You will have to make due with the suit until it is time to leave our next destination.” She gestured to the back seat, “Well, you better strap yourself in.”

Without any further complaints the Human got into the seat and fumbled with the seatbelt lock. Lezura saw that he was having difficulty and went over to assist him. They both found it kind of amusing that Joey couldn’t lock it around him and they chuckled briefly.

Once he was safely buckled in she got into the driver seat, locked the handles of the silver bag with clamps at the foot of the seat and strapped herself in. The moment she started the engine Joey immediately gripped the

bottom of his seat and watched nervously as the vehicle rose off the ground.

Lezura took a quick glance behind her at the Human, “How are you doing so far?” she said as they flew.

“I’m doing great,” Joey replied in a shaky voice.

Lezura chuckled softly when she heard the nervousness in his voice. But she didn’t know that this was Joey’s first time in a flying vehicle.

“You will be safe with me, I promise,” she said in her most convincing tone.

“Eh, that’s what *you* tell me,” Joey said nervously.

After a few minutes into the flight Joey was relaxed enough to observe the landscape.

With each sweep of his eyes he saw either a tree or mountain that filled him with awe; especially the yelm tress. He imaged that they were taller even than the empire state building.

Then out the left corner of his eye he spotted something in the air. He turned his attention to it and saw that it was a flock of large bird-like creatures.

Joey couldn’t see them in great detail, as they were couple meters away, but knew that they had dark, pinkish-brown skin, long necks and featherless wings.

He leaned closer to Lezura’s seat. “What are those things?” he said.

Lezura looked in the direction in which Joey was pointing, and immediately recognized the creatures. “They are called tratalies,” she said.

“Tratalies...tratalies,” Joey repeated the words to himself silently so he could remember the name. He said, “Do you think you could get closer so I could get a better look?”

“They might get startled, but I will still try.”

They were about fifty meters behind the flock of tratalies to their left. Lezura flew the Thwoppter twenty meters closer with expert control. The Human leaned his head out, and could see them in more detail.

Their heads were small, with small amber eyes at the sides and two nostrils at the top of their snouts. Their mouths were wide, and their beaks seem to have been modified into small teeth around the edges of their mouths.

Their ears were a yellow membrane in a deep socket, and at the back of their jaws were large, red quills. Their wings were made of a membrane that stretched from the tip to their sides, and was in the same color as their skin. The tail, however, was in a purplish-red color and with row of thin bones

that stretched it open or pulled the tail closed. He could also pick up a faint sweaty smell from the animals.

But they still smelt better than he did.

Joey estimated that they were a little wider than the Thwopter (5.5 meters).

While Joey watched the breathtaking view of the first alien creatures he saw on Sangetsu, he was also thinking about the people he was going to meet and what his training would be like. He knew he should expect strange things, and therefore he had to get himself in the right frame of mind for anything and everything this new world would throw at him.

But he still wondered what he had just done by accepting the offer of Lezura. What kind of life had he now led himself to live?

But for now, he decided to just sit back and enjoy the moment, as the cool alien wind caressed his dirty, salty skin. Then it made him realize; he hadn't bathe in *six* days!

## CHAPTER FOUR

One hour and forty minutes had passed since Lezura had brought the Human into this world. She was flying over the Yuxu forest and was expecting to see the top of the temple on the horizon of trees at any moment. But first she had to go over the colossal yelm tree that was in her way. She successfully gained more altitude and went over the tree. Below her she could see at the very top a flock of flying creatures that have nested there; including the huge tratalies.

She urgently wanted to get the Rakai out of his rags and give him a good scrubbing so he could wear the Atmos suit. If only she were able to do this before presenting him to the wyassies; especially to Murbella.

At the moment, Joey Sadowski was fast asleep in his seat with his head hanging down; which would rock with each occasional turn of the Thwopter. As much as he had wanted to stay awake to view everything on his travel, he was completely exhausted from the excitement.

Lezura saw the temple as they approached over the trees. She called Joey's name two times to wake him up.

"What? What is?" he woke up asking as he looked from left to right, nearly falling out of his seat but saved by his seatbelt.

"We are here!" Lezura said.

Joey rubbed his eyes, leaned forward and looked over her shoulder and saw the building. Though he had seen larger buildings back on Earth, he was impressed by its cylindrical, angle-less design. He knew he didn't look the part of the "great Rakai", and hoped that they; like Lezura, would be willing to look pass his appearance...and ignore his smell.

But he still did what he could to make himself look a little more presentable. He set his fingers like claws and ran them through his hair to straighten it and remove any debris. He wiped the smudges off his face into his shirt, and checked to see if his breathe was proper enough to speak to their faces.

Surprisingly it was!

The Ixian people were still at their daily activities. The children were playing games with each other in the village. Elderly women were tending to their gardens, and the men and a few women tending to the crops and

animals on nearby fields. A few others were busy with welding work, or just leisurely sitting about, conversing with each other.

Though they were not sure how soon Lezura would be back with the Rakai, their anticipation was still at a high. They were all told by the wyassies that Lezura would be the one chosen to journey to the Rakai's world and bring him here. There was mass objection by the village people at first; *why should an outsider be chosen for this task which had no relevance to her culture?*

But the wyassies reasoned that Lezura was the only one with the necessary skills and equipment to communicate with Humans. No one else knew how to operate her Atmos suit, or knew the contents of her medic kit in case of an emergency. Plus only she knew how to operate the Thwopter.

Seven Nycarmans that wore the purple yotas, they Tyhunies, were out on the balcony engaging in an activity that could only be described as martial arts. They were mostly throwing punches and trying to pin each other on the ground. They had taken off their yotas as to not get them filthy.

Normally such activities would be done in the temple's gym, but these young Nycarmans had chosen to do this on the balcony where they knew Lezura would land her machine when she came back.

A woman kicked at her male sparring partner, but he ducked out of the way. He grabbed her foot and swept the other one off the floor, sending her onto her back. The young man smiled smugly as he looked down at her. But the woman struck out with her foot again and caught him in his stomach, sending him staggering back. Before the young man could attack again she flipped off her back and onto her feet in one fluid motion. The man regained his fighting composure and attacked once more.

The woman blocked the man's overhead down chopping hand with her forearm, and she crouched and came up with an uppercut in his stomach. His face twisted with pain and he fell on his bottom. Then the woman stood over him and smiled the same way he did at her.

Her ears suddenly picked up a familiar sound originating in the sky before her. Without even looking up she could tell that it was Lezura's Thwopter. She looked up and saw it in the distance to the east. She could barely make out the blurry mess, but she was certain by the shape and the color. Her ears swiveled up with excitement and she smiled broadly. Soon the others on the balcony heard the sound, ceased what they were doing and turned their attention the sky. Even the beaten man sprang to his feet.

“She has returned!” the young woman shouted. They all rushed to the edge of the balcony.

They had seen the Thwopter from a distance where it was out of view from those below in the village. But when it came over the heads of the people all of their work immediately stopped. There was now a surge of excitement in Ixia.

“Go tell the wyassies that Lezura has return!” one of the oldest women on the balcony said to a few, and they all dashed inside the temple, returning moments later with the three wyassies.

The wyassies had to weave their way through the crowd to reach the edge of the balcony. Those who saw that they were there respectfully stepped back and allowed them to pass. At this point the balcony was so crowded that it appeared that Lezura would not have any space to land. The three stood motionless awaiting the Rakai to set foot on their temple. They knew that Lezura had the Rakai with her, or else she wouldn’t have returned so soon, or at all; as she had promised.

Lezura turned the Thwopter in a position where the side was facing the balcony, as the Nycarmans had taken up most of the space there. As they descended Joey was tapping his fingers nervously against his seat, his eyes sweeping across the crowd of aliens; or *Nycarmans* as they were called, and he immediately noticed how differently they dressed from Lezura.

*Hmm, they look like monks*, he thought. But common sense told him that the mere fact that they were aliens did not mean they would have any connection with anything back on Earth. And he had to cement that into his head as early as possible.

When the Thwopter landed Lezura turned off the engine and got out. She walked over to Joey and saw that the Human was reluctant to move.

“You do not have to worry,” she said as she unbuckled his seatbelt. “These people will not harm you. As a matter of fact, they are the ones who really need you!”

Joey decided to take Lezura’s word. She has, after all, been telling the truth so far. He stepped out of the Thwopter and slowly walked towards the crowd. He could see and hear the exchanging of comments amongst the people. Though he could not hear what they were saying exactly, he was thinking that they were talking about how dirty he looked.

Lezura's ears however could hear them clearly. They were not so much speaking about his clothes, but more about how he looked as an *alien*.

Some were trying to squeeze their way to front of the crowd to get a closer look, but those at the front would not give up their space. Others balanced themselves on the railings at the sides. Eventually they created a tight semicircle around their most special visitor.

The Human stopped half way between the Thwopter and the Nycarmans, paying close attention to the three aged Nycarmans approaching him. He stood motionless as the three circled him slowly, scanning him with their eyes from top to bottom with the outmost interest.

Then the blacked haired woman placed two fingers on his left jugular as if checking his pulse. The two men held both his hands in theirs and placed two fingers on his wrist also. They did so for four seconds. Their bodies stiffened slightly with shock. Joey remained still and watched then with nervous brown eyes.

*Such great amount of honoi energy!* Dunit thought.

*I have never known of a sentient being whose honoi energy is so great but has remained untapped for so long!* Telkit thought also.

Murbella spoke to the two men, "Do you all feel it?"

"Yes," Telkit replied.

"Absolutely," seconded Dunit.

They took their hands away from him and took a few steps back. Joey was a little relieved of his nervousness by the pleasant look on the faces of the three. He also noticed that they had earpieces; possibly translators.

"What is your name, child?" the woman said.

"My name is Joey Sadowski," he said nervously at first, then spoke with a little more confidence. "I'm a Human from the planet Earth. I'm seventeen years old, and despite me looking like a wild animal I'm one of the most charming Humans you'll ever meet."

He was looking directly at Murbella when he spoke. She smiled just a little, amused by his personality. The two men chuckled silently.

"My name is my Murbella," the woman said.

"I am Dunit," one of the men said.

"And I am Telkit," said the other. "And on behalf of every one of us here, it is an honor to be in your presence, Rakai."

They gave him the Nycarman greeting and the rest of the crowd quickly followed.

Joey was left speechless. These people were actually bowing to him; showing him respect! It was then that he truly realized that all of this was really a serious thing, and so were these people. The mere fact that they were showing *him* respect meant that he too should take all of this seriously.

*This...this is some real shit!* He thought. *These people are expecting great things from you Joey, this is your chance to finally be somebody; and you better do it!*

Joey threw his arms around the three Nycarmans in one big hug. They noted his foul body odor, but they said nothing of it. They did not want to look like bad hosts to their most special guest. But they did see it necessary to get him out of his dirty clothes immediately before presenting him to the villagers.

When Joey was finished with his hug Murbella spoke, “Now, I will not allow you to walk about this place in those pieces of cloth on your body. The first thing we shall do is give you a well-deserved bath.”

Joey smiled with pleasure at the thought of getting his skin feeling normal again.

Murbella’s eyes suddenly went alert, she bent forward just slightly and looked at stains on Joey’s shirt.

“Is that *blood?*” Murbella’s voice was strong with concern. It had also alerted the nearby Nycarmans into a frenzied chattering.

Joey quickly said to put her at ease. “I got into a little fight, but I’m okay now, really! Lezura took care of me!”

Murbella was uncertain until she laid a glance on Lezura. Lezura nodded to her firmly.

“The Rakai is fine, everyone,” Telkit said to the crowd, fanning his hands down to suppress the commotion.

“We shall go inside,” Dunit said, and Joey followed the wyassies and the rest of the Nycarmans around him towards the large door. The crowd respectfully made a path for him to walk without bumping into anyone, but they still kept as close as they could to the Rakai.

The Human had never once in his life imaged that he would be walking so close to extraterrestrials as to actually be walking into one of their buildings. The notion rekindled his excitement and his nervousness. So many thoughts of what alien culture were like flashed through his mind that he could barely focus.

The door was made of two parts, and seemed large enough to permit four people to pass at once. It was painted in gold with carvings of animals at the edges and center. Two Nycarmans near the door pushed it open.



The light from the sun illuminated a large circular room. It had pale purple colored tiles on the floor and on the walls. The ceiling had carvings of naked Nycarmans holding hands; both male and female. From it hung surf board-sized leaves that were constructed into ceiling fans. There were eight statues of life sized Nycarmans going around the room with large candles in the palm of one hand.

“What do you use this room for?” Joey said as he surveyed the place.

“We use it for special ceremonies;” Telkit said; “group prayers and meditation and the appointing of new leaders; wyassies.”

“The statues of the Nycarmans you see in the ceiling represent the bond of many individuals that is needed to achieve full harmony with each other and the gods during meditation,” Dunit said.

“Oh,” the Human said, and then tried to memorize the word *wyassy*.

They came upon a large door at the end of the room, which led into a hallway with three corridors going in each direction. There were doors on the walls of the hall and the corridors, with a window at the end of each corridor and lamps lining off the walls. The hallways were decked in the same purple tiles, all square and rectangular.

“This is the last level of our sleeping quarters,” Telkit said. “The two floors below us are also sleeping quarters.”

Joey did not want to seem rude but wanted to ask, “Do I have a room for myself?”

“Of course you do,” Murbella answered. “Your room is next to mine, Telkit’s and Dunit’s.”

Though he was happy to hear that he would have a place to sleep for himself, he would have liked to have his room next to Lezura’s. He turned to Lezura, who was pacing at his side and still in her suit. To him it made her seem more alien to everyone else than *he* did. “So where’s your room?” he asked her.

“My room is on the first level sleeping quarters,” Lezura said. “It is at the end of the first corridor to your left.”

“Okay, I’ll visit you sometime,” Joey said with a smirk.

Lezura smiled back, “Certainly.”

Joey was pleased that he was able to impress an alien like Lezura with his self-proclaimed swagger and charm. But he wondered why he had done that in the first place. And Lezura wondered why she had even entertained the idea of him visiting her.

At the end of the hall was a gold-railing staircase that spiraled all the way to the first floor. The steps were fitted with tiny marble stones in their creases that were able to sparkle even in the dim sunlight. Joey was timid at first to go down the high stairs, but he eventually got over the light fear and went down one step at a time. With the aid of Lezura he went down at the speed at which any normal person would.

The stairs spiraled down into five rings, each ring leading to a different floor. They walked pass the fifth and fourth floor and came onto the third. It had only two corridors, which divided the floor into four large rooms. Dunit had sent most of the Nycarmans politely away; telling them that the Rakai was about to have his bath and would need his privacy. Only five young women, including Lezura who he had asked to stay, remained to assist Joey.

A young woman suddenly came running up the stairs and onto the floor, as she did she was fumbling with a translator in her ear. When she came to a stop before them she narrowed her gaze at the newcomer, and she shifted her attention to Lezura.

“I am so glad you are back,” Marina said in their embrace.

“I was not gone for that long,” Lezura joked. She turned to Joey. “Joey, I want you to meet my good friend Marina.”

“Nice to meet you, pretty lady,” Joey said, trying to sound as charming as he could.

Marina blushed unwillingly, her cheeks turning a bit yellow for a moment. She regained her focus and greeted Joey. “It is an honor to meet you, Rakai,” then she gave him a bow.

Marina was a little shorter than most Nycarmans, equaling to Joey’s height. But what she lacked in size she made up for it with the length of her hair. The golden silk on her head reached to her waist. Not to mention her breasts; which were larger than those of the other women around her. But her face was young and rounded, with large, bright, wild eyes and a smile that almost reached the ends of her ears. Jewels sparkled in her ears as bright as her eyes did.

Joey found himself staring at her breasts for a moment, but soon he was captivated by the sheer intensity of her bewildering bright eyes. He had to blink and hold his eyes shut for three seconds in order to not get sucked into them.

“Marina,” Murbella said. “The Rakai will be taking his bath, would you like to stay and assist him?”

“I certainly would love to,” she said eagerly.

Murbella turned to two of the young women and said, “Would you ladies be so kind as to please retrieve a suit of the newest clothes from the tailoring room.” And the two women went off into the room on the left. She turned to the rest, “Escort the Rakai to the men’s bathroom, if there is any one inside, please ask them to quickly finish up so the Rakai can have his privacy.”

“Understood,” they said.

“When you are finished Joey Sadowski, please meet with us down stairs. The rest of the Ixian community would love to meet you,” said Murbella.

“Sure thing,” Joey said.

And Murbella went down the stairs.

“Joey,” Lezura said, “I will soon be back. I am going up to my room to change my clothes.”

As she was about to turn around Joey spoke. “If you have any, could you bring me a pair of new socks please? I want to wear them with my shoes.” Joey looked down at the feet of the women and saw that they were wearing leather sandals. “No offense,” he said, “but sandals aren’t really my style.”

They were in no way offended. To them it was merely a request for something the Rakai needed. “I will bring a pair for you fresh pair,” Lezura said as she went up the stairs.

Marina and the other women escorted Joey to the men’s bathroom; which was the room at the top right. When he entered through the door he saw six men in their underwear. Upon hearing the women enter into the room the men quickly turned around and reached for their clothes on the nearby benches.

Marina explained to them that this alien was the Rakai, and that he would be needing his privacy in here when they were finished. The men were embarrassed to be in the Rakai’s presence in only their underwear. They immediately greeted him and apologized for their manner of appearance. Joey smiled and assured them that he was not offended in the least, telling them about how he himself looked.

They quickly gathered their belongings; as they were already finished using the shower, and headed towards the door while at the same time glimpsing at the Rakai’s alien features.

The air in the room was tainted with the smell of flowers and mint soap. There were benches in two rows of four in front of five shower stalls, each with its own door. And behind them were another group of benches and

shower stalls. At the left hand of the room were six urinals made out of cement, and to the right were three toilet stalls. All the wooden materials in the room were polished with a waxy substance called cotax; which prevented wood from absorbing water and causing it to rot.

The room was lit by sunlight shining through the windows. Joey noticed how the light made the moisture and water droplets on the tiles glisten like sparkling gem stones. He also noticed that the tiles inside had a lighter color and rugs woven tightly from vines that were dyed in red.

He went over to one of the shower stalls and opened the door. Inside he saw a wooden clothes-hanger and a small rug in front of the tub, which was also made out of cement. It also had a shower curtain that was woven from vines and which was pulled to one side. The stall was also roofless and lit by the sun.

He was surprised that by the ancient looking architecture of the temple that these aliens had such modern creations. It was again another reason why his mentality about judging things at first glance should change.

Two women came into the room with a handful of clothes. They placed the clothes on a nearby dry bench and handed the Human a grey towel and a woven scrub pad. He went inside the stall, locked the door and proceeded to take off his clothes and put them on the clothes hanger. When he stepped into the tub he looked for the shower head and saw a stone tube in the wall and a lever beneath it. At the lower left of the wall was a soap dish with a pink colored soap that was still moist from previous use.

It had crossed the mind of some of the women to take a little peek into the shower at the Rakai's male parts, but they decided to suppress the urge. Such an act would be disgrace on the Rakai and themselves. But obviously no one mentioned that to Marina, and she decided to take a look for herself. Luckily the other women were there to slap her on her hand and pinch her on her ear; which was very painful to a Nycarman!

Joey pulled the lever, and water came gurgling out of the tube. He shivered and let out a sound of fright when the cold water made contact with his skin. He turned it off, soaped the pad and then every inch of his body and began to rinse. He savored the feeling of the dirt and grime being lifted off his skin.

He noticed that the soap didn't foam (but he did not know that the Ixians used plant pulp to make it and other products).

Joey turned off the water and finished drying himself. He went to the door, knocked two times and asked for his clothes.

Marina understood the command, and took up the clothes and opened the door slightly to push them inside the stall. Before she could push in her head one of the women yanked her hair and pulled her back.

Joey took them with a thank you and put them on. After putting on the pale green under pants, the brown trousers and the button less grey and black shirt he put on the yota and smoothed it over his body. He smiled smugly with himself, combed his hair with his fingers and went out to the women.

Their smiles indicated that they were pleased to see him clean and wearing their clothing.

Then, standing on the cold tile with his bare feet, he thought about Lezura and the socks-but mostly Lezura. Then out of the corner of his eye he saw Lezura quietly coming into the room. Her yota lay over her body like another layer of skin that highlighted her curves and the swing of her hips. He could also see the shirt on the sleeveless side of her yota. Her hair was so golden that Joey thought she must have melted pure gold and poured it all over her head.

He had to admit that she looked much more pleasing without that suit on. He hoped to always see her like this!

She stopped in front of Joey and eyed him from head to toe. "The yota suits you," she commented. She added somewhat teasingly, "But soon you will have to wear the Atmos suit."

"Thanks," Joey said grimly.

"Here are your socks." And Joey took them from Lezura and put them on.

He reached for the shoes he brought with him from earth under the bench before him and put them on. He felt complete with them on. "So, how do I look now?" he asked them. He still had the translator in his ear and could understand what they were about to say.

They looked at his hair and then rubbed their fingers against his skin and felt the flakiness.

"Come with us," one of the females replied. And they took Joey by his arms and escorted him out of the room and down the hall into the tailoring room.

In the center of the room were tables around which people were seated and sewing. At the sides of the room were racks and crossbars on which the finished items were hung; clothes, blankets, curtains and other materials. There were also tables which had cosmetic products, as well as necklaces

and earrings. Red curtains with golden patterns gently fluttered in front of open windows, the sunlight shining through them gave the room a reddish glow.

When Joey entered everyone immediately stopped what they were doing and stood up and greeted the Rakai. A few of them approached him and asked how they could be of assistance.

“Bring us a chair, two different of bottles hair lotion, skin lotion, a comb and a nail pick,” Lezura stated.

They quickly went for the items. Seconds later Joey was in a chair with women tending to him. Two were removing the dirt from his finger and toe nails that he could not get during his bath, and clipped away the claws. With each clip they turned their faces away from the sharp projectiles. Lezura and Marina were massaging vanilla and olive smelling oils into his hair from little jars, and the rest were applying lotion to his flaky skin. The women doing his hair were combing it his into a smooth ponytail. Minutes later they were finished, and two males brought a life-sized mirror in front of him and Joey stood to look at himself.

Joey thought he was looking at a totally different person in the mirror, only recognizing that it was himself when he recognized the childish smile on the face in the mirror. He never thought that it would be so soon before he wore new clothes again. Apart from the feeling of royalty, he felt like he was someone again.

He turned around to the Nycarmans and thanked them. But for Lezura, he gave her what he thought was more fitting for her; a hug. “Thanks, Lezura,” he whispered into her ear.

“You are welcome, Rakai,” she said.

## CHAPTER FIVE

The stairs ended in a hallway that led to the first floor. Going around the room were six large columns with a Nycarman wearing body armor sculpt on the front. There were three large doors facing north east and west, and many rows of benches, with the space between the groups of them being the walkway to each door. At the very center of the room were three giant, marble statues of robed Nycarmans, each facing the direction of one of the three doors.

The Rakai gazed up at the commanding figures as he walked towards them with Lezura, Marina and the rest of the Nycarmans.

“So who are those guys they made statues of?” Joey said.

“Those are who we worship,” Murbella said as she and the other wyassies approached from the left door.

“Your gods,” Joey remarked.

“Indeed,” Murbella. The wyassies stopped, and Murbella gestured to the statue of the female facing the front door. She was taking the opportunity to share part of their Ixian beliefs with the Rakai. “That is Kitivia; the creator. Her hands are cradled because it symbolizes a new born child, which is the universe she created.” Then she gestured to the statue of a man in front of Joey, “This is Kinu. His arms are folded against his chest because it shows that he is the preserver of the newly created world. And the other man is Kivabra; he holds out his right hand to show that he is about to destroy the world when it becomes too tainted with evil, so as to allow Kitivia to create a new world. They are the holy trinity.

“It has been said, that the world was destroyed and recreated fifteen times. The last times were when this planet experienced the second and first Great War. Our religion is called Tyhunism.”

“So you think that the world will be destroyed again if I don’t stop the Orderrans?” the Human said suddenly. His tone sounded melancholy.

“And for good,” Telkit remarked, “which is why the Dielenganns have sent for you. In this day and age there is unity between the many known races in the solar system, something which was not possible after so many years. If the Orderrans were to destroy or take over this solar system, then all of this unity would be lost, Rakai. You are here to preserve this unity.”

Now Joey felt an even bigger responsibility than before. Not only did he have the burden of carrying the key of salvation, but he had to preserve the unity in the solar system.

He sighed in exhaustion and confusion at the task before him. The wyassies could feel the discomfort in him.

“But do not let it tear away at your spirit, Rakai,” Dunit said. “We all have faith that you will successfully complete your mission.”

Joey gave a wan smile and nodded. But the boy was not entirely convinced by Dunit’s supposed uplifting remark. He knew that this would not be a walk in the park. He knew he could die here.

By the gloomy expression on his face Murbella realized that it was not a wise move to have brought up the prophecy to the Rakai. At that moment she was displeased with herself, realizing that she had acted like more of a devoted fan and wanted to impress the Rakai.

“It is now time for you to meet the rest of Ixia,” Murbella said in an attempt of her own to erase that look from the Rakai’s face.

They walked towards the front door. The Nycarmans before him made way so he could pass. Two males at the double doors pushed it open. First there was the warmth and light from the sun, and then there were the sounds of drums, flutes and something sounding like a violin; all playing in a welcoming rhythm. The Human stepped outside and was greeted by two lines of bystanders; women, men and children.

The men and women were playing the instruments. Little girls threw down heavily scented flower petals down at his feet with each step he took, giggling at him with fine teeth and yellow gums. The young women danced gracefully across the path with their hips moving dazzlingly, giving him sensuous looks and winks.

After walking pass the line of musicians Joey saw young boys, who were previously standing in a two lines, kneel before him. They had respectably classy armor and vibrantly decorated spears.

The armor suit consisted of a vest made from a thick, leathery material, covered in many small silver-green plates that were designed like leaves; even with the veins. The plates on the chest were slightly larger, and the ones at the back went down in two rows. The shoulder pads were almost circular, a dark blue color and had the symbol of the Ixian nation on the surface. The vest extended down to a short garment similar to a skirt. It was covered in larger, blue leaves that had a glossier surface. It covered the thighs and hung just above the knees. The shin pads were of a similar,



leathery material as the vest, but had only two sheets of bronze metal that covered the shin and the calves. Wrapped around their forearms were bracers of pure silver. The silver twisted around their arms until it formed the head of a serpentine creature over the top of their hands. The steel-blue helmet covered the head as well as the cheeks. A high, golden crest that curved outward was the only flair added to it.

When Joey walked past each youth in the lines they got up, turned in a military fashion on the heels and followed Joey. The young men were singing an old, lively Ixian folk song entitled “Phaswi”. Phaswi was the name of the ceremony held to welcome home soldiers from war. It was the only song the Ixians found suitable to sing for the Rakai’s arrival, and while swing the young men stomped their spears on the ground to create a catchy beat.

The line of Nycarmans extended out into the middle of the village where they formed a large circle around a Nycarman male and female.

As Joey got closer to the man and the woman his body tingled with excitement and pleasure at the welcome he was receiving. He bit his lower lip to hide his smile; that he was certain to make him look stupid. The stocky, gold haired man stepped towards him and gave him the Nycarman greeting, “My name is Halit, the village headman,” he said.

“And I am his wife, Mitithra,” said the black haired woman.

Halit and his wife bowed to Joey. Halit said, “I welcome you to our kingdom, Rakai. Please, eat drink and enjoy yourself to the fullest!”

Three young women came up to him with baskets filled with all kind of foods. Jugs as large as his torso were also brought before him to drink from.

Without a second thought he took the jug from one of them and brought it to his mouth. He brought his head back and poured the bitter-sweet fluid down. It overflowed and ran down his neck and chest.

Joey stopped and took a deep breathe. He laughed joyously with Halit and the others who applauded him and cheered.

Voices shouted, not in remarks to the Rakai or the event, but something else. They alerted Joey. The Human looked to the skies to where the fingers of some pointed. Under the sunny sky, what looked like dazzling orbs of white light descended upon the Ixians.

The music slowly stopped like a radio being turned down. With the music gone, strange, ominous, shivering sounds of ghostly wails of begotten souls

rained down upon them. The sounds became clearer, and sounded more like a low-pitched, mystical wind chime.

Joey lowered the jug, the hundreds of lights holding the glare of his brown eyes.

Out of nowhere he felt Lezura's hand on his arm.

"Do not be frightened..." Lezura whispered.

"What the hell are they...?" Joey whispered.

Lezura said with a loving smile, "They are believed to be the angels by religious groups. Scientists call them creatures that evolved to feed on honoi. We do not know the nature of their true origin, but we simply call them Oikumi, 'beings of honoi!'"

"Honoi...?" Joey's brain hadn't a clue what Lezura spoke off. But as the lights descended further and the sun's glare was eased up off their bodies, angels seemed to be what he could wrap his head around.

The lights were in fact creatures! Serpentine, skins of pure white scales with pink creases, large eyes of the most lustrous sapphire-blue. Their heads were near triangular shaped with a short, narrow snout. A line of dark pink swirled around their eyes and ran down their slender, two feet long bodies to the end of their arrowhead tails. Four crystalline wings with pulsating veins of blue light fluttered on their short torsos, and beneath it were six jointed legs.

"Whoa...whoa!" Joey said when the Oikumies formed a whirlpool of flying serpents and sounds of soft wind chimes around him. But he felt no fear, no immediate threat. No danger at all; only the sensation of a presence that seemed to erase all the emotions that would make him weak and unhappy.

Joey's eyes caught the stares of one of the luminous creatures, and like it received a signal, it darted forward for Joey.

Of all the unbelievable things Joey experienced, this was one for the books, as the Oikumi flew through Joey's body as if either one of them were just nothing but air and out the other side. Other Oikumi soon followed the first; mostly phasing through his head, emerging on the other side with faint traces of blue energy coming off their bodies.

Before Joey's eyes popped out of his head with disbelief, Lezura said to him from a distance, "Fear nothing Joey! The Oikumi only want to know who you are by examining your bioenergy...that is your honoi!"

Honoi...? Joey thought. He saw the otherworldly blue energy coming off an Oikumi when it emerged through his chest. Does she mean...does she mean my soul?

After what seemed like an eternity, the serpents ended their examination. The grace and beauty of their movements were gone, and like a raging vortex the Oikumi flew around Joey, creating a storm of light and cold wind that sent his senses on a roller coaster ride.

The Oikumi ascended to the sky. They quickly vanished, disappearing in the blue ether.

The Nycarmans quickly emerged around Joey. Someone held onto Joey's shoulder and another strung an arm under the other shoulder, as the Human seemed ready to faint.

The village headman, Halit, held Joey's face in his hand and examined the boy's eyes.

"The Oikumi seem to like you, child," Halit grinned.

Joey laughed in short gasps at the experience he just had.

I'm goanna love it here! He thought

Like some bird of prey scouting out its next victim, so was the nature of a black machine perched on a limb in one of the surround trees in the village. Like a black bird with a narrow, white head and red eyes, the robot focused its unshakable stare on the Human below. With its camera-eyes recording the current events, the robot had just begun its tasks of gathering data on the Human alien. The three silver toes on each of its feet danced it to another position on the branch; there it recorded from another angle as the Oikumi floated around the Human.

One that was finished, the robot bird snapped a picture of Joey. It opened its metal wing and exposed two antigravity orbs in each of them, and silently flew back into the forest.

After the welcoming ceremony was over Joey was given gift baskets of fruits, along with little trinkets and other items from the villagers. The Tyhunies kindly took these items up to his room in the temple.

After he had finished greeting the people he was told by a man that the wyassies asked for his presence. Though he didn't want to leave the hospitality of the people he eventually followed the man inside the temple.

There on the first floor he saw the wyassies and two other Nycarmans awaiting him. They were a blacked haired male and an elderly female, all waiting in front of the statue of the holy trinity. His escort exited the floor, leaving only the six of them there.

The Rakai stood six feet before them, analyzing the other two Nycarmans who also had translators in their ears. The slender blonde haired woman with her round wrinkled face and the slim but muscular, oval faced male; who appeared to be about thirty odd years of age. But it was the expression on his face and the sharpness of his nose that made Joey stare at him a bit longer than he should.

That nose looks so familiar, Joey thought.

Then the man gave Joey a light scowl that startled the Human and made him look away at the others.

“I hope you enjoyed the welcome you received,” said Murbella.

“Are you kidding? Of course I did!” Joey belched, loudly.

The Nycarmans almost flinched at the loud noise he made.

“Good,” Murbella continued, “Because from now on you will be focusing only on your training.”

Joey’s smile vanished slowly. He wore an expressionless face. He was so caught up in the experience of being on an alien planet that he forgot the real reason he was here. “Yeah, right,” the Human said glumly.

Murbella continued, “We have assigned to you these two teachers;” she gestured to the black haired man and then the woman, “Halirit and Mulena: Halirit will be your teacher in physical combat, Mulena will teach you how to use honoi energy.”

Joey’s forehead furrowed with confusion. “Hanoi energy...What’s that? I heard Lezura mention it before.”

Mulena exposed her right palm before him. A light, glowing mist was generated in her palm, which turned into a swirling ball that glowed a bright blue. “This is honoi energy,” Mulena said.

Joey slowly walked closer to the glowing orb. His face was just three inches away from Mulena’s palm. “Is that real?” he said in a low voice, almost unable to speak at what he saw. He touched it with his left forefinger and felt the coolness that sent a tingling feeling up his finger and all over his body. He pulled his finger away and smiled widely.

Mulena turned the orb back into misty honoi energy and it dispersed. She said, “Hanoi energy is the energy that exists in all living things. But only those with the knowledge of its existence can harness its power.”

“So do I have it... honoi energy?” Joey asked, desperately wanting to hear “Yes”.

Mulena smile at his enthusiasm. “Like I said, it exists in all living things; even plants. But you obviously do not know of it, is it the same for the rest of your race?”

“Well...” Joey was thinking about those people back on Earth who claimed that they had psychic abilities. But compared to what he just saw and felt? “...No, we don’t know about it.”

Though Mulena thought it was a little strange that the Rakai did not know about honoi energy, she was not that surprised. Some of the other alien species in their solar system did not know how to use honoi energy either; unless they were thought by a race that did-as she was told by Lezura.

“Well, do not worry, because I am here to teach you.”

Joey suppressed a giggle of excitement. He looked at Halirit, and hesitated a moment before speaking. “So, what kind of physical combat will you teach me?”

Halirit looked at him with an expression of almost annoyance. “The same thing every other person uses; martial arts and weapons,” he replied sourly.

“Oh,” Joey said. Though he was not as exiting about as learning how to use honoi energy, he still found it interesting and thought to take it seriously as well.

But honoi looks way much better!

“You will begin your training tomorrow at the first light of dawn,” Murbella said. “You will begin with Mulena and then Halirit. Each session will last six hours with a two hour break in between.” Then she narrowed her gaze at Joey, and he realized something familiar about her expression. “And you better not arrive late for any of your classes, understood?”

Joey could hear the authority behind her voice. He realized it would be a bad start to disobey Murbella. “Sounds good,” he said.

“Very well,” said Dunit. “Be free to spend the rest of the day exploring the area. If you need assistance with anything important, anyone in the temple will be happy to assist you.”

“Yeah...about that,” Joey felt his stomach rumbling, “Do you have anything to eat?”

They looked at him puzzled.

“Did you not just feast?” Telkit said.

“Yeah,” Joey said, “but you guys kind ‘a interrupted me when I was just about to eat this big, juicy piece of meat.”

“I would be happy to escort you to the dining room,” Mulena said.

“Thanks a lot, granny,” Joey grinned. He walked over to Mulena and she took his hands into hers.

Mulena scowled. “I am not that old, young man!”

Joey immediately said, “Oops...sorry!” Joey leaned close to Mulena’s ear and said, “Bur that guy sure looks grumpy though.”

“Then it is best you do not get on my nerves, then,” Halirit said.

Joey nearly chocked. He pointed to Halirit. “How did you...? Oh! The pointy ears uh?”

Mulena dismissed herself from the others and went up the stairs with Joey.

Murbella slowly walked to Halirit’s side. “So what do you think of him, my son?”

Halirit moistened his lips inside his mouth before speaking. “He appears to lack any kind of professional teaching, and his muscles are not very well toned; even for his age and his species. But his honoi energy is very great, just as you said it was.” Halirit turned and faced Murbella. “I could detect it without even feeling his honoi pulse.”

“So do you think you will be able to teach him properly?” Telkit asked as he stepped towards him. With acute hearing Nycarmans around, conversations could hardly be private. But this however involved all of them.

“It may take more time with him than it would with an ordinary Ixian,” said Halirit. “But then again, I know not the capabilities of his species. But I think Mulena will have a much easier task of teaching him the various honoi techniques than I will have at teaching him how to fight with weapons.”

“Let us hope she can manage him,” Dunit added. “After all; he is not Nycarman, and is the Rakai.”

Joey and Mulena went up to the second floor. It was divided into four large rooms, which were further grouped in two. The first two rooms were divided from the other two by a wall. The first rooms were the armory the left and the gym to the right. The door of the gym was open and Joey could see Nycarmans sparing on a large red mat with blue markings in the center. Sweat flew off their purple bodies with each vigorous movement of muscular limbs. He could also hear metallic clinking, which indicated to him that weights were being handled.

They continued through the door in the dividing wall, where there was the library to the left, opposite to the dining room. When they entered the room Joey was instantly assaulted with the rich, mouthwatering smells of freshly cooked food and those in the process of being cooked: foods such as pastries, meat and vegetables; all being prepared behind a long counter at the end of the room. In front of the counter were tables with benches that were covered in a pale yellow dining cloth. There were about fifteen Nycarmans in the room having their meal.

“So what do you think I should eat?” Joey asked Mulena.

“Well, I would recommend a bowl of suku,” Mulena said.

“What’s that?” he asked, but the name sounded so much like sushi. Was it?

“It is a dish of minced karoti meat, lucaysha tree roots and sliced papoa fruit.”

“Hmm, sounds tasty.” It really did to him, though he was clueless as to what made up a meal of suku.

“It is my personal favorite, but I really think you should try it.”

“Well, if you say so,” Joey said, “so long as I don’t taste too much veggie-stuff in it. It gives me gas!”

Mulena nodded. “I shall take that into consideration,” she said. “Please have a seat while I place your order.” She went to the counter and placed the order to one of the cooks.

Joey took a seat around one of the empty tables. As he sat there he was pondering upon what his training would be like. And also; where Lezura and her friend Marina had gone to?

For now she was the only Nycarman he trusted enough, probably because of the experience they had when they first met. But he would have to start trusting everyone, and he knew that.

He saw a few Nycarmans greeting him with nods and waves from across their tables. He replied with a wave; and a wink and a kiss at the women there. He was satisfied when he saw them blush. He was relishing his celebrity status. Yet he still could not believe that such fortune had happened to him.

Mulena came back with his meal. She placed the wooden bowl in front of him, along with a glass of pink pomeg berry juice, and took a seat beside him. The golden karoti meat had crisps on its surface, the cream colored lucaysha roots were boiled and chopped into bite sized pieces, and the pinkish-green papoa fruit was sliced into circles. The sweet smell made his

mouth explode with saliva. He took up the fork beside the bowl and ate. Mulena was surprised at the speed at which he was eating. She was also surprised that he didn't choke, as he seemed to be just throwing the pieces of food in his mouth.

"You do not have to eat so fast. No one is going to take away your food," Mulena said.

Joey stopped eating for a moment and looked at her, feeling embarrassed. "Sorry about that," he said. "It's just that...I never got the chance to eat good food until now, and where I come from you had to fight for your food every day."

Mulena understood what he was saying. "I am sorry to hear that," she said sullenly.

Joey putted down the fork and gave Mulena his full attention. "I don't want you or other people to think that I'm pathetic and feel sorry for me. What I want is help to get me where I want to go." Then he took a sip of the cherry and almond flavored juice and looked back at her. "And though I like the treatment I'm getting I still want to try and make it on my own."

Mulena was not sure if the Rakai spoke that way to impress her or sound as if he had higher standards than her and her people, but she liked his display of independence.

"But you would still need help if you are to make it," Mulena remarked.

"I guess," Joey said. Joey thought for a moment and spoke. "So...what's the whole story behind this Rakai stuff and the whole Great War thing?"

Mulena told him that for him to understand she would have to tell him about the origins of the first Great-War. Joey agreed to listen. Mulena had told about the entire beginning of the war until she had reached the point where she spoke of Dranaki's demise.

Joey wondered what she just said for a moment and then spoke. "But, how can Dranaki be alive after all those years? Wouldn't he be dead by then? And how can he survive as just honoi energy?"

"Hanoi energy is not just a power source in our bodies; it is also a part of our bodies and is our living identity which can live long after we are dead," Mulena said. "Because it is also physical energy, our souls can be contained in a dormant state."

Even though Mulena spoke about the soul; which to Joey was a bit unreal, the way she explained its make up made Joey believe her.

"So, Dranaki could still be alive," Joey said.



“It is a possibility,” Mulena said. She got back to their previous discussion. “Now, going back to the war; two weeks after Dranaki’s forces were defeated the four kings and queens maintained control over the Barsoon kingdom until a new, honest and morally driven ruler was elected into power.

“Then there were a few decades of peace among the nations. And the four rulers who defeated Dranaki were given the title of Dielengann by their nation’s people; which mean ‘the savior’. But the Dielenganns still believed that one day Dranaki would return with another army, and so they spent the rest of their lives building a machine that could defeat his army if that day were to ever come. And for that machine they made a key that could activate it. But it was a key that could only be used by a person of great will power-the Rakai.”

“And I guess that’s me,” Joey grinned.

“Correct. But there was one before you.”

Joey sat up briskly with a wrinkled forehead. “There was a first Rakai?”

“Her name was Yefia Illowise,” Murbella said. “She was from the nation of Tartian, and the first pilot of the God Titan.”

“And where’s she now?” Joey said.

“She had died many years ago.”

Joey sighed and slumped back in his chair. “Well that sucks. I would have really loved to meet her.”

“There are records of her all over the solar system; she was the one that saved our planet. I am very certain that you can find information about her. Lezura has a computer which you could use.”

Joey sat back up. “Alright, so I can do it later. Thanks.”

“Is there anything else that you would like me to do for you, Joey Sadowski?”

“No, this is enough for now,” he said. “But thanks for asking anyway.”

“Well, I will be off then.” Mulena got up, said goodbye to him and went through the door.

Joey was left at the table to finish his meal and ponder upon the first Rakai; Yefia Illowise. When he was finished eating he handed the plate to the woman around the counter to be cleaned. He went to the door to leave, and upon reaching saw Lezura.

They both smiled as if it were a reflex action.

“Where have you been?” Joey said.

“I went to give back a statue to the wyassies, and to take a bath,” said Lezura, which explained the fresh scent that was coming from her body that Joey had picked up. “And how has your day been so far?”

“So far so good,” Joey said.

Lezura took his hand into hers and said, “Come with me. I have some thing I want to show you on my computer.” And without giving Joey a chance to ask what it was she pulled him beside her and went up the stairs.

## CHAPTER SIX

Lezura's bed was almost oval shaped and situated to the left of the room. Ahead of Joey, across from the door, was a dresser with a few cosmetic products and other items on top; including those which looked like electronics. Joey looked to his right and saw a fairly long table. On the table was a very flat laptop computer which was connected to a generator beneath the table. There were wires leading from the generator through a hollow in the wall. Beside the table, beneath it, protruding from under her bed and hung on a wall were large bags whose contents Joey pondered upon. And hung just beside the head of her bed was the suit which Lezura was now taking off the rack.

Joey furrowed his forehead and frowned. "Do I really have to wear it?"

"You do if you want to live," Lezura said with a scowl. She folded her arms. "I already explained to you why you need to wear the suit. Right now you are just being annoying and foolish refusing to do so."

"It's not that I don't want to wear the suit because I don't like it, it's because I won't get to move about without a weight on me. And I've been feeling a little heavy since I got here."

Lezura paused and thought for a moment. "That weight you are feeling might be due to the planet's gravity," she said, "but regarding the suit you have nothing to worry about. An Atmos suit is lighter than it looks, and it offers flexibility so you can move about as freely as you normally. Plus you will not have to bathe very often; the suit has a ventilation system that gets rid of your sweat right off your skin. But," and she twisted her face slightly to indicate her dislike, "you will have to open the suit in order to use the bathroom."

Joey looked at the suit much differently now. "Well...I suppose I can't argue with the part about me needing to breathe on this planet--"

Lezura did not wait to hear anything more. From the Human understood that one fact he would be fine. She ordered him to take off his all of his clothes except his underwear.

"You mean right here?" Joey said with reluctance in his voice.

Lezura pointed to the floor and said, "Yes, right *here*."

Joey hesitated with a long sigh. He soon undressed. Lezura was now excited to see what a Human's entire body looked like. She could make

perfect notes about Humans' physical appearance. But she almost swore when she saw Joey's entire body.

Apart from a bulge in his belly from his feast earlier, the Human's body looked like a warzone. There was a huge scar across his chest that almost stretched the entire width. Below that scar were a smaller, horizontal scars and a huge discoloration of pinkish black flesh. Another scar was on his left shoulder and one more a little to the left of his abdomen, including where he had been stabbed recently.

Lezura's stomach was unsettled and felt as if she would vomit at the sight of the injury on his chest. Joey grimaced at her expression. His fists trembled.

Lezura's voice was sympathetic and low, "Joey, what?"

Joey reached for the suit in her arms with animalistic hands. "Give me that damn thing!" He looked at the suit for a start on putting it on. But he was doing so as if he intended to rip it apart. He finally gave up and looked at Lezura, "How do you put this damn thing on?"

Lezura ignored the brief shock between them and help him suit up. She showed him the zip in the middle of the suit. She told him to pull it down and step inside the suit feet first. He sat on a chair around the table and fitted his feet into the boots. They stretched to accommodate his feet. In comparison to the rest of his body, he was at the moment a bit slimmer than Lezura, so he had no problem fitting into the rest of the suit. Lezura sealed the helmet to the suit's neck by squeezing the edges together. They made a snapping sound that told they were tightly shut.

She showed him how to pull down the mask and he did so awkwardly. The final thing she showed him was a touch screen at the right of the chest to turn the atmospheric converter on and off, and the screen to the opposite which showed the contents of the air and what was currently being filtered into the suit.

Cool air filled his helmet and the rest of the suit. From the holes on the atmospheric converter a thin mist puffed out each time he exhaled.

Lezura ordered him to try and move about in her room. He did so without added effort; he sat, ran, walked, jumped, bended over, reached up and twisted from side to side freely. But there was the helmet. It was not heavy; it fitted his head neatly and allowed rotation of his head, but the feeling of always having it on his head would take some getting used to.

But when he looked into mirror on the dresser, he loved his spaceman look already. He made muscles and posed in his reflection.

Lezura knocked his helmet and got his attention. The final thing Lezura did was to go over the suit's operating system with Joey. He did not understand one thing about the symbols showed on the touch screen, and Lezura made it a key note that before the day ended she would start at least a little of teaching the Human Nycarman language and counting.

"See," she said, "It is not so bad, now is it?"

Joey flexed his fingers in the gloves, looked at her and said, "No. you were right all along." His tone got more subtle, "Sorry about the little attitude a while ago."

Lezura dismissed it with a wave, "It was nothing to complain about."

But they both knew that that was a lie.

They both sat around the table. Lezura pulled the top of her laptop and it automatically came on. There were no windows in the room, so lighting was provided by the light of the computer screen. The keyboard was a touch screen, and while Lezura accessed the desired files in the computer she spoke to Joey. "Now Joey, what I am going to show you is a brief summary of the planets in our solar system and the origins of the Second Great war," she said. "Some of the scenes have been computer generated, but depict actual events that have occurred. The reason why I am showing it to you is because I want you to be familiar with this planet's history. Now you said that Mulena told you about the first Great War, right?"

"Yeah," said Joey.

"So it is only good that you be told about the cause of the second Great War," she said. Lezura stopped for a brief moment and turned to Joey with a cautioning look. "Now I should tell you from now, there are a few scenes in this video that might be a bit too graphic."

Joey scoffed. "Lezura, I grew up around violence, and I've seen people die before."

Lezura was silent for a moment as she took what Joey said into deep consideration. She was beginning picture a possible explanation for the scars on his body. "All right then," she replied. She turned back to the computer. "But before I do I want you to know a little about our solar system."

She accessed the video files, and up on the screen came the picture of the blackness of space and the dotting of the stars that sparkled like diamonds. The image zoomed onto a star; around which seven planets orbited. Then the image changed to focus on each planet with its intelligent life form beside it in their nude appearance; both male and female.

Joey sniggered. Lezura realized what he was smiling at and nudged him in his side for him to stop.

Joey did not understand the words the computer was narrating, neither could he under the writing on the subtitles, so Lezura had to translate so he could understand.

The first planet she spoke about was hers; Sangetsu. It was the second largest planet in the solar system. She told him the planet's mass, which he did not understand but nodded anyway. But in simple Human terms the planet was nearly one and a half the mass of Earth, with three moons. It had five continents and a few small islands.

Beside it was the Nycarman species. She read about how they were built; they had no body hair or pubic hair except the hair on their heads, and sweated through the crease on their skin. They had acute hearing, and the hair on their head could be either gold or black colored or rarely red. They had a life span of up to 110 years.

The second planet shown was the planet called Gammuo. It was about the same size as Earth, had three continents and a recorded twenty islands and a single moon. Its key geological features were its tapering mountains that reached an altitude of twelve thousand meters, and being ice cold at the tops.

Its sentient species were known as the Lazhinians. They had yet to have slimy bodies and long tentacles as Joey was expecting of the aliens here, instead the Lazhinians had a Humanoid design just as he and Lezura did. The difference was their slimmer physique, dark blue skin, large circular eyes off bright orange and their small, flat noses. One thing that did stand out with their appearance was the presence of two, fish's scale shaped protrusions above their foreheads that Lezura identified as sensory quills. Its purpose spanned from picking sounds to temperature changes and electrical impulses.

Lazhinians are noted and admired for their unique biology of hyper cell regeneration, giving them a life span of 220 years.

"Well that's kinda cool," Joey remarked silently.

The third planet was called Slyerrick. A little smaller than Earth, with six continents, tiny islands and had two moons. The planet was famous for its red lakes and rivers; which were caused by the presence of the abundant mineral *ridapin*.

It was a planet of reptilian creatures; which to Joey looked a lot similar to dinosaurs. Though there were those who looked totally alien.

Its sentient species were also somewhat reptilian, and were called the Rapturans. They had scaly skin in a variety of green shades. Their body structure differed among the three breeds of their species. There was one breed, the Dracoids, with a fairly large build, craggy looking skin and a face that looked somewhat like a snout. They had spines running from their necks down to their backs that could be relaxed and erected. They had the largest teeth of the species and ghastly clawed fingers.

The second breed was the Vipoids; characterized by a slender body, limbs and a very narrow face. Beneath their large, snakelike yellow eyes were pits they used to sense heat up to ten times greater than any heat detecting device made in the galaxy. Also different was that their faces had an extremely pale purple-green color that ran down to their chest and the inner of their thighs. They lacked the muscle of the Dracoids, but were very agile and possessed deadly venom in their two inch fangs.

“Cool...!” Joey said.

The last of the three breeds were the Geckoids; small, about four feet, ten inches tall. Even more agile than the Vipoids, the Geckoids possessed rounded, large heads with huge sapphire eyes, a wide mouth of fine teeth and compact nostrils. Their skin had horizontal, thin bands running around the body and even the neck, arms and legs that could change to mimic any color by pigment manipulation. These bands were also present around the eyes of the females of the breed, and could be expanded to cover the entire body, hence giving the Geckoids completely body color change. The Geckoids had small frills on their neck and backs; also changing color with their mood. Geckoids also had adhesive pads on their hands and feet that allowed them to climb on any surface, and superb leg muscles that could become as hard as rock, allowing them to leap incredible distances.

What was common about all breeds was that they had rich red hair and small pointed ears. The females of the species also had breasts. Except the Geckoids who had stripes, the other breeds had tiny spots on their skin that could change color depending upon their mood or to send a signal to each other. The Vipoids and Geckoids had a life span of up to 107 years. The Dracoids usually lived about seven to twelve years less.

“Since when do reptiles have boobs?” Joey said.

“Have *what*...?” Lezura replied with a puzzled look.

Joey groped his chest. “Breasts,” he said.

“That is what you meant,” Lezura said, finding the Human term “boobs” to be quite funny. “Actually, the Rapturans are not completing reptilian.

They have mammalian DNA which results in the females having breasts and their species growing hair from the scalp, underarms and groin. Organisms with reptilian and mammalian characteristics are known as *therapsids*. Something you should note, Joey, whenever the time comes that you leave Ixia and venture into the wider world where you will encounter Rapturans, do not even refer to them as *lizards*, *scabies* or *ropetongues*. It is a racial slur that is extremely offensive.” Lezura glowered at Joey, “And I do not ever want to hear those words coming out of your mouth when you are speaking to them.”

Joey frowned. “I’m not that kind of person Lezura,” Joey said. Growing up in a place like New York, Joey was exposed to a multi-racial society. He didn’t find it too strange that the different alien races would have derogatory names for each other.

Lezura smiled and nodded. “Good to hear, Joey.”

Lezura continued dictating.

The fourth planet was called Narz. It was a little larger than Earth, with two moons, four continents and noted for its electrical conducting mountains and rocks.

It was the home of the smallest sentient species in the solar system; the Ginlanks. They were four to four and a half feet tall, with bright grayish-green colored skin, large round heads and big yellow eyes and wide mouths. Their noses were small and flat and their ears internal. Their bodies resembled that of Human children in its build, except the usually cross expression of their faces which would make them look like angry, small old people. They are trademarked for their high electrical body content and had a life span of 70 to 75 years.

*Neat!* Joey thought. *I wonder if all the aliens in the solar system have some unique ability. I wonder if any can belch their alphabet. I can’t even make it pass “P” without throwing up!*

The fifth planet was Natraun; a little smaller than Earth, with three continents; one large and two small, fourteen islands and four moons that gave the oceans and seas massive tidal waves. Its key geological features were its three-mile high active volcanoes on the continent of Hirrien, which for some unexplained reason spewed out lava from the sides instead of the top.

It is home to some huge, imposing people that called themselves the Yautgans. Standing eight foot tall, their bodies were beautifully muscled like the prized works of Greek sculptures; both male and female. They were so



strong they could bend a metal pipe with ease. The skin that covered their muscles was either a steely-grey light blue or pale grey-green color. Instead of hair they had feathers on their heads; and the females having feathers on their private parts, that came in a wide variety of colors.

Their faces were usually long and their noses short and rectangular. Their mouths were wide with large teeth and their eyes oval and green. Their life span was between 90 and 100 years.

Sixth on the list was the planet Hatur. It was about the same size as Earth with two large continents and two smaller ones, seventeen tiny islands and a single moon. Its key geological features were its giant craters formed during the birth of the planet and deserts of bright red sand and mountains.

Its sentient species were known as the Raizean. They were people of bright green skin color, but not little green men though, as they seemed to be reaching six foot in height from what Joey saw. Their bodies were very slim, and their chins pointed. Their ears were membranes inside a socket. Their nose bridges were thin and their noses small. Their eyes were a bright blue and the species had a complete absence of hair. The back of their heads had four, dark green flaps through which they released heat, and the top of their heads were in four segments. Running from the top of their heads, down their necks and to the tip of their fingers and toes were blue, angular veins that contained honoi. Their lifespan was up to 150 years.

And the seventh and largest planet in the solar system; twice the size of Earth, with eight small continents, ten islands and three moons, was the planet Veheculon. And homed to the most hated and feared race in the solar system; the Orderrans.

Orderrans had very pale skin that was almost white in appearance and black hair. Their noses were like a protruding snout; increasing the amount of olfactory cells and giving them a very sensitive sense of smell. Their eyes were glowing red, and the irises were twice as large as any other sentient being-like that of an animal. They could see the faintest traces of heat coming from the bodies of living organisms and also had excellent night vision. The high sense of smell and the heat vision were adaptations to help them survive on their dark planet. The females were taller and stronger than the males, making them the slightly dominant sex on the planet. The females could live for up to 130 years, but males rarely reached beyond the age of eighty.

“So...these are the bad guys?” Joey asked as he stared into the deep red eyes of the Orderran female on the screen, almost drawn into it as if he were hypnotized.

“You must understand that not all Orderrans are evil,” Lezura clarified. Joey turned his attention to her abruptly. “But their species started the second Great War of Sangetsu and the first Solar War.”

“What’s that...the Solar War?” Joey questioned.

“It is a war that takes place within a solar system amongst the different planets.”

Then Lezura accessed a video file. “Now that you know the different races in our solar system, it is time for you to see how they all came to live as one.” Lezura said, as the video symbol loaded into the film. It showed a magnificent city of 400 story tall buildings, floating billboards whose lights were of every single color and shade of the rainbow, weird looking vehicles and streets that were floating in the sky; these were bordered by yellow lights and occupied by flying vehicles. On the ground Joey saw Nycarmans walking about their business under a dusky sky of yellow-green and yellow-orange clouds.

It seemed to the Human to be just another day on Earth, only a lot more pleasant to look at; with futuristic stuff, and most importantly *robots!* But that was until the sky suddenly crackled with electricity, shimmered with heat and roared with thunder.

All the people looked up to behold a colossal, flying machine breaking through the planet’s atmosphere and ripping the clouds apart. They marveled at the huge black structure with its giant, white faces positioned on specific parts of the machine.

The people only realized when they saw the mouths on the machine opened, and released giant beams of white energy down upon the city, that they were being attacked. The beams incinerated the buildings below in a wave of brilliant blue and red flames that moved from the impact zone and out into the rest of the city. The people ran away screaming like maniacs as the wave of heat consumed everything in its path, flipping vehicles off the ground and burning running flesh to an ashy crisp.

Joey’s jaw dropped in horror at the level of destruction taking place before him. Lezura kept close watch at Joey’s expression.

This was the city of Kern in the country of Faleetia, the first country on Sangetsu to experience the Orderran invasion.

Soon other cities around the world had their skies darkened by the shadow of the Orderran war ships. Buildings and lives were laid to waste by the Orderran light beam-cannons and nuclear bombs.

But the Nycarmans did not just stand by and watch as their world got demolished before their eyes. Their technology was not as advanced as that of the Orderrans, but it was sufficient enough to stand up against the invaders. Soon the different militaries of the nations of Sangetsu armed themselves and faced the Orderrans; even the civilians armed themselves and formed organized resistance group to fight the invaders who came into their communities.

The Orderrans had machines in the primary black color, and it would then have a secondary of any color. The Orderran soldiers were assisted in battle by their robots, which could be of any design. These robots too had the primary black color, and the secondary color would be a result of the Orderran nation from which the army was from. These robots had faces that were white like an Orderran's, and eyes that glowed red menacingly.

The Nycarmans, also, had war machines, and the one Joey noted that they commonly used was a machine Lezura identified as a *Viceken*. It was a vehicle that had the cockpit as the torso, the arms equipped with guns at the ends and legs that were designed in many forms to suit the type of environment they were used in.

Seeing the machines put a childish smile on Joey's face, and in his mind he thought of one day piloting a Viceken. But all of those happy thoughts were erased when Joey saw an Orderran missile explode and tore a group of Nycarman soldiers to shreds.

"Holy shit!" Joey said under his voice in revulsion.

Lezura gently rubbed Joey's shoulder, realizing the effect it was having on him.

Eventually, the Nycarmans went for their most powerful weapon and last resort. Yefia Illowise, at the age of thirty nine, went to the Rudos nation to activate Lirgaze. From there she piloted the immense, humanoid machine from its keep to the city of Illemin in Rudos.

It now seemed that this video footage was authentic; the camera kept on shaking and swinging with the trembling of the owner's hands as he or she recorded Lirgaze entering the edge of the war-torn city.

Joey sat up in a split second and told Lezura briskly to pause the video. He told her to enhance the image of Lirgaze for him to see it. Joey estimated that the machine was about twice as tall as the empire state building back

home. It was a lanky looking figure, but with a commanding presence that debased the relevance of everything else around it. Glorious lights came from the spaces between the white armor on its body. Mounted cannons on its shoulders glowed at their mouths with a passionate fire. On its back was an assortment of mechanical parts that served a purpose only those who built might have known, but they formed an attractive, ornate ring that glowed blue at certain places. Its face was silver, with a purple helmet that covered the entire head and red projections all around that formed a crown. Its eyes were defined with purple irises and gold rimmed pupils. It had no design of a nose, and its mouth was interlaced teeth and a lower jaw that stemmed to a long chin.

Lezura saw Joey looking at Lirgaze with more lust than male would ever show for a female.

Lirgaze was facing a vast number of Orderran machines, both on the ground and in the air. The moment Lirgaze raised a mighty hand and expelled a beam of energy that lit up the entire city, the camera spun around and the videographer ran. The device was now taping the holder's feet as they plowed down the stairs of the building. The holder slipped and fell down the stairs. Blurs were the only thing Joey saw.

Other armature videos managed to get a few glimpse of Lirgaze as it laid waste to the Orderran robots and warships.

Lezura thought Joey was going to get an erection at how excited he was. She never saw such grinning in anyone. Not even the most excited child.

Lirgaze itself could not defeat the entire Orderran invasion fleet, but it provided the leverage for the Nycarman nations to counteract the alien forces. Yefia piloted Lirgaze across the entire planet and aided the other nations. Soon, after thirteen days of the Orderran chaotically invading Sangetsu, they were chaotically quelled and defeated. The surviving Orderrans either fled the planet or were taken as prisoners of war.

Sangetsu defeated the Orderrans in the year 11817.

It was later discovered; after searching through Orderran archives that were left behind on the planet, that the planet Sangetsu was not the only target on the Orderran's list.

The united nations of Sangetsu had a meeting at its headquarters in Barsoon. It was decided after twelve days of consideration that as the first planet in the solar system to have defeated the Orderrans, the Nycarmans had a responsibility to aid the other planets.

The Nycarman military force organized nearly two hundred thousand of their troops and machines to travel to the each planet to assist their neighbors. Unfortunately, Lirgaze was not able to leave the planet, as there was not a ship big enough to contain it back then.

It was on the second class worlds (worlds that were behind in technology; like Gammuo and Hatur.) that they saw the full extent of Orderran destruction.

Many cities were wasted to nothing more than ancient ruins. A huge percentage of their resources were mined and stolen. Cities that were not destroyed were colonized by the Orderrans, and it was those people who the Orderrans had as slaves there who suffered the most. The women and young girls were raped; Joey had the displeasure of seeing such actions which were videoed by a sinful Orderran soldier. It made his face wrinkled with disgust.

He wondered why in the hell would Lezura have such things on her computer

“Jesus Christ!” he said in a voice that was strained by his emotions. The men were mutilated; some even castrated, and forced to work in the fields and mines digging for minerals; even though the Orderrans had machinery that could do the work ten times faster.

The Orderrans punished the men this way.

But it was the sight of the mass graves of rotting corpses, and the pits of people who rebelled against the Orderrans being burnt alive that finally struck the Human the hard blow.

Joey felt his stomach churn and squeeze violently. He sprang up from his seat and bolted out the door into the hall. Lezura called after him like a wife concerned for her beloved husband with tears in her eyes. Joey slumped over the sink at the end of the hall. He frantically pulled the mask up from his face and vomited into the sink. He fell on his bottom, breathing heavily. Lezura came and knelt down before him, holding him by his cheek and shoulder. Her drooped like a displeased dog.

“Are you all right Joey?” Lezura said in a low but still frantic voice, not wanting others to here and attract attention.

Joey couldn't speak; he was still trying to catch his breath.

“Please speak to me Joey!” Lezura begged.

“What...” he was still trying to catch his breath, “...what the fuck was that, Lezura?” He looked up at her with hatred in his eyes.

Lezura fumbled for the right words before she could speak clearly. “I just wanted to show you what happened on our planet before you came here Joey! I did not wish to sicken you,” she managed to say with some level of controlled emotion in her voice. She helped Joey to his feet by lifting him under his arms. “But you said that you could handle it; that you have seen people die before?”

Joey remembered that he had indeed said so, and now had to explain his reaction. He hesitated before speaking. “Yeah... you’re right,” he said sullenly, “but I only saw it happen once...” And then he stared directly into her eyes, “...To my parents.”

It all became clear to Lezura. His family had been unfairly taken away from him before he had the chance to learn how to survive on his own. But she had never for a moment thought that something like *that* would happen to the *Rakai*.

Lezura tried to understand what made him react the way he did just now. She stepped closer to him and laid her hands gently on his cheek and spoke softly. “Did you run out of the room because what you saw on the computer brought back those memories?” she said.

Joey had his watery eyes on the floor, but he nodded slowly, almost without life.

“Believe me Joey, if I had known about that I would not have thought of showing it to you at all!” Lezura said.

The Human lifted his eyes to meet hers, and he touched her hands and gave them a gentle squeeze. “Don’t worry about it, it’s not your fault,” he assured her. “But it’s just that... sometimes when I think about it; it makes me angry and sad.” Joey stared towards the door of Lezura’s room. “But it was really those things I saw on the computer that got to me. I haven’t seen shit like that in my life! I know we Humans do it, but...I didn’t expect it here at all!”

Lezura took her hands off his cheeks, sensing some relaxation in his body. “If you want, you do have to watch the rest of it.”

Joey now tried to portray his manliness to Lezura again. “Well I will have to watch it. I mean; the whole reason I’m here is to help fight a war, isn’t it?”

Lezura gave him a tight smile, she could still hear uncertainty in his voice, but she admired his commitment to his mission. “If you think you can continue, then I will not protest,” she said, though she really wanted to out

of concern. But when Joey took a step towards the door she held his hand and stopped him.

Joey looked back around at her and saw great concern on her face.

“What’s wrong?” he said.

“I am very scared for you, Joey,” Lezura said.

“Why? You shouldn’t have to.”

“You could die, Joey. You’ve seen what the Orderrans can do.”

“You’re probably right,” Joey said. But he suddenly spoke with such confidence that it startled Lezura. “But they haven’t seen what I can do!”

“This is not a joke, Joey, this is a war!” she said. “The Orderrans that fight us are mass murderers!”

“I know that, Lezura. But I can’t be afraid. If I’m afraid of them then I’ve lost already.”

Lezura instantly understood what he was saying and could add to that, “Because the more you are afraid, the more power you give them.”

“Yeah,” Joey was deeply impressed by how quick she caught on, “you’re thinking just like me.”

“Not really. It was just something my father told me.”

Joey nodded in approval. “He sounds like my kind of guy.”

Lezura gave him a wan smile. “I am sure he would have loved to meet you,” she said glumly.

Joey narrowed his gaze at her, “*Would* have?” he said.

“Joey, let us just go back and watch the rest of the video, please,” Lezura quickly responded to end the conversation.

Joey could see that Lezura was upset by what he said, so he didn’t push it any further.

“Okay. Let’s go,” he said.

The two of them walked into the room after Joey washed the vomit down the sink. Now it was Joey who was looking at Lezura with concern.

*What happened to you Lezura?*

They sat so close together that their thighs and shoulders were touching. Lezura rested her right hand on Joey’s thigh to reassure him that the rest of what he would see wouldn’t be as horrendous as the a while ago.

Her touch did have this effect.

The video was now showing the Nycarman spaceships breaking the sky of the Orderran occupied cities on each planet. Anti-Orderran force on the

planets and the Nycarmans joined forces to exterminate the Orderrans from the cities and the rest of their strongholds.

Joey smiled with satisfaction as he saw the Orderrans fleeing the planet for their lives.

After eight years all the Orderran occupied planets were rescued, the remaining Orderrans were taken as prisoners and were sentenced to life imprisonment.

But the aftermath was devastating on the second class planets, and they were in deep need of assistance if they were to ever regain some level of civilization again.

So the united nations of Sangetsu and other planets decided to send twenty thousand of their people; doctors, carpenters, technicians and architects, to help rebuild the planet and restore some level of prosperity. The United Nations also offered to allow those who wished it to immigrate to their planet, where they and their families would be offered jobs, a home and equal rights as the native species.

Because of Sangetsu's size it was the planet which got the most immigrants. In the year 11845, 28 years after the war against the Orderrans, 2300 Lazhinians and 1700 Raizean landed on the planet and were given a warm welcome by most of the Nycarmans. The first four years of their lives was a challenge, as the few who were against alien immigration protested against their presence on the planet. They stated that all who were aliens to the planet were just as evil as the Orderrans. There were hate crimes against them, but they received full protection from the Nycarman governments.

After the Nycarman military had imprisoned the leader of the anti-immigration group; known as the "Rutanchi," there was finally hope for a normal life for the alien immigrants.

Years later more alien immigrated to Sangetsu, even the Rapturans, Ginlanks and Yautgans.

Some of the Orderrans who were taken as prisoners had their sentence reduced and were given their freedom. They could now live amongst the other members of society, but with the agreement of three years' probation. The Orderrans who had fled to the rural areas of the planet ventured out into the wider world and could live as citizens. Though there were still those who hated them and protested against their freedom. But this was a small percentage; as the rest of the world had grown tolerant over the years because of the presence of the other species.



This was the same for the other planets, and soon every planet in the solar system; uncertain of Veheculon, was homed to more than one sentient species. Sangetsu was homed to all of them, which made it the most unique planet and the center of the solar system.

And the video ended on that note.

“Looks like a nice place,” Joey remarked. “Too bad about the war though.”

“But that is why you are here,” Lezura said, “to prevent it.”

Joey went silent, thinking about the perils he will have to face. Then he felt Lezura’s hand on his. He looked at her and saw her smiling.

“Do not worry, Joey. I will be there by your side.”

Lezura was about to turn off the computer when Joey stopped her hand. He asked if he could see a picture of Yefia Illowise. Lezura obliged and quickly accessed a file that showed a picture of her.

Yefia Illowise was seated in a green chair with ornate twisting designs on the feet and arms. She was seated with her legs crossed and her hands on her thighs. Her skin had a lovely purplish-blue color. Her face was finely rounded, and her chin very angular. Her half-moon eyebrows hung over her thick-lashed, small eyes. It was her eyes and short, needle-stiff hair that made her look Asian to Joey. Lezura explain that her race was known as the *Lalu*.

She wore an auburn blouse tattered with black spots. Over it she wore a pink, V-shaped fabric with a very luminous material that extended down to her groin. It was a traditional garment known as a *cepti*. Her black tights reached her knees and highlighted the thickness of her thighs. Her shoes were pink and simple looking, but there was an exception for the amount of jewelry on her fingers, wrists and ears.

Behind in the background Joey saw various objects which he paid little mind. He was focused on the image of the first Rakai. He judged that by the size of the diamonds on her fingers and in her ears that she must have been loaded. He thought about if she were alive; how the two of them would get married and he would become a wealthy man.

She was also beautiful by his Human standards. But he also thought of another beautiful Nycarman.

After his briefing of the second Great War, Lezura started Joey’s Nycarman language class.

Lezura and Joey turned their chairs so they were facing each other.

“Now there are many kinds of Nycarman languages,” Lezura said. “The one I am going to teach you is called ‘Naasi’. It was first spoken by the people of Atileten.” Joey nodded. Lezura continued, “Now this is how we are going to go about it. There is a button at the lower left of the helmet that turns its built-in translator on and off. I will first speak a word while you are listening without the translator, I will then repeat it, but you will then listen with the translator turned on. Understood?”

Joey nodded again. The Human felt the indicated side of his helmet until he found the lump which was the button. “Found it,” he said.

Lezura unplugged her laptop and gave it to Joey right after entering a different program on it. She carefully gave it to him in his lap along with a stylus. She indicated where the space bar was on the touch screen. She told him to write on it the words he heard based on how they sounded to him. So long as he understood.

Joey said, “Just make sure they aren’t any big, fancy words.”

“We will begin with counting from one to ten,” Lezura said, “nothing difficult.”

Lezura spoke. He heard the pronunciation of the word as “Sih.” He managed to identify the “h” at the end based on the hiss he heard in Lezura’s voice. He wrote what he heard and then turned the translator back on. He heard her say “One” in his ear, and he wrote it beside the “Sih” on the screen.

His education might not have gone beyond the primary level, but he paid attention in his English class.

They continued, and minutes later Joey had successfully counted from one to ten in Nycarman Naasi.

He counted for Lezura as best as he could, “Sih, se’in, sete, si’ili, sai, toji, desi, casi, sris, ti’ep.”

Lezura applauded silently. Joey smiled and rocked back and forth in his chair childishly. They continued from that point and counted from eleven to twenty.

Three hours after his Naasi class, and a quick meal of suku, Joey was out on the balcony with Lezura and Marina at his side. They were leaning against the railing, looking up into the sky at the beautiful sunset of warm colors. As the sun set it brought the other, single moon that the planet

rotated to face at this time, Flitin. Flitin was a rusty brown color, luminous and patched with craters.

The coming of the night was signaled in by the howls, chirps, croaks and hoots of the nocturnal creatures.

But the jewel of the night was the desert of stars across the blackish-purple of the sky; like a billion pearls and diamonds crushed and sprinkled across a black canvass.

“It’s so pretty,” Joey said in an appreciative tone.

“I am pleased that you like it,” said Marina.

Their eyes savored the view, and they soon saw a large flock of flying creatures rising from the depths of the forest and into the lit sky. Their numbers were so great that the flock stretched over the full length of the village.

“What are those things?” Joey said.

“Those are arcops,” Marina answered.

“There’re so many of them; are they dangerous?”

“You do not have to worry about those animals,” Marina said with an amused smile at what the Rakai was afraid of. “Arcops are insect eaters, and rarely attack anything larger than your fist.”

Joey turned his gaze back at the animals in the sky with a look of relief.

The arcops had wings similar to that of a bat, with a claw at the wrists and a small head on a thin neck. Their snouts were short and tipped with a small beak. They had small ears, large pink eyes and brown skin. There were yellow markings on their backs and blue markings on their head and neck. Though Joey was unable to determine their exact size, but estimated them to be a little larger than a chicken.

“Enjoying the view?” a voice came from behind the three. They turned around to see Dunit approaching them around the Thwopter. He stopped three paces before them, looked at Lezura and then at Joey. He said, “If you young ladies do not mind, I would like to speak with the Rakai alone.”

“Certainly,” Marina said.

Lezura was reluctant to answer. “Sure...”

The two young women left them alone on the balcony. Dunit went and stood beside Joey, taking in the view as well. Joey had his arms resting on the balcony railing and his head on top of them.

“How did you find your first day on our world?” Dunit said.

“It was...” Joey sighed with a smile “...something else. I liked it. Actually I loved it. I never thought that one day I would be somewhere like this; on the balcony of an alien temple looking up at a sky like this, but I love it.”

“Always expect the unexpected, Rakai,” Dunit replied.

Joey opened his mouth with a smile. “I’ve heard that before.” Joey looked across at Dunit. “Is that what you really wanted to talk to me about?”

Dunit smirked. He was caught. “You are right, that is not what I want to talk to you about. What I really want to ask is; are you having second thoughts about accepting your mission?”

“What makes you think that I am?”

“While you were in the dining room moments ago, Lezura told me how you reacted to what you saw on the computer.”

Joey laid a startled glance on him. “She did?”

“Do not look so surprised Rakai, I instructed her to inform us of any problems you might be facing.”

Joey was displeased to know that Lezura had not kept that incident between them a secret. He was clearly wondering if he could trust her at all.

Dunit could read the expression on Joey’s face. “Do not be upset about it, Joey Sadowski. We are only concerned about your wellbeing; which is why I am asking you if you are up to such a task as this. If not, we would understand, and return you back to your home world. We are not going to risk the life of a child for our own need if the child does not wish so. It would be difficult, but I am certain that we could find another Rakai.”

It was Joey who was now caught. He had actually been thinking about returning to Earth after what he had seen moments ago; in fear that he might die. But he realized that there was nothing for him back on that planet. It would be stupid to leave the comfort of the temple and its people all because he was afraid of dying. Was he not about to die this morning but was saved by one of these people? At least here he could die with some sense of dignity. Plus, the thought of someone else taking his glory was not something he wished to happen.

“I was thinking about going back,” he said, “but then I realized that if I were to walk away from a chance like this; a chance to save lives and be a hero, I would never get that chance again.”

“So I assume that you are staying?”

Joey smirked. “Of course I am! Besides, you guys need me.”

Dunit grinned at the boy’s cockiness. “All right then. You better get some rest; training begins bright and early tomorrow morning.” He cocked his

head to the left and stared at Joey's suit. "Though I wonder how you will do it in that outfit."

Dunit looked behind him and saw all the other Nycarmans in the temple filling the room. Joey looked around and saw them as well.

"What's going on?" Joey said.

"It is time for our evening prayer," Dunit replied. Dunit turned to Joey. "If you wish, we will pray for you-that you are safe during your stay here."

"Well...sure," the Human said.

Dunit left the balcony and went into the room with the others. Joey looked at the sky for a few more seconds before leaving. He went down stairs and into his room. To get to it he went through a door in the main hall which opened into a horizontal one; this was the wyassies chambers. Before him were four doors, and was previously informed that the room on the center right was his.

The room was slightly larger than Lezura's. The bed was covered in a dark blue spread and a bright blue floor mat was placed before it. The red curtains gently fluttered before the open window. The air was filled with the scent of fruits from the baskets on the table.

But he had had quite enough of sleeping in the cold, so he turned a disc on the touch screen of the Atmos suit with a finger, and soon warm air gently filled inside his suit.

He vigorously brushed off his feet on the floor mat and leapt into his bed. His muscles instantly began to relax and adjust to the soft surface.

Upon thinking upon the unbelievable that had happened today he took the key into his hand and looked at it with appreciation. *You really made my day, you little motherfucker,* Joey thought.

He kissed it from behind his mask, turned in the bed and went to sleep soundly.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

The window of Joey's room was still open, allowing warm fresh air to blow inside and light for illumination, even making the material of the Atmos suit glisten.

Marina, Lezura and Murbella entered his room quietly. They noted how peaceful he looked while wrapped up in his blanket during the tossing and turning of his sleep. But they will have to unfortunately disturb his peace, as morning had already approached.

Lezura went over and looked at his face behind the transparent mask. The corners of her mouth went up in a smile when she saw Joey drooling. She knocked on his helmet repeatedly. He did not budge.

Lezura turned to look at Murbella. She could clearly see the annoyance on the mother wyassy's face.

"*Rakai!*" Murbella shouted.

Joey's eye lids snapped open. He struggled from under the sheets and flew onto his feet before the women. Tiredness and a mysterious weight made him fall over, and he sprang up again.

"I'm up! I'm up!"

Murbella scowled and said, "Good morning, Rakai."

Joey looked startled. "Good morning too...Murbella," he quickly responded. Then he greeted Lezura and Marina.

"Brush your teeth, get a bath and get something to eat," Murbella said. "You will meet Mulena on the first floor in seventy minutes." Murbella turned and left the room.

Joey turned to the women. "So, ladies, where's my tooth brush?"

Marina pointed to a little stick with a bristled end on the table beside one of the baskets. Joey went and took it up. The girls giggled at the face he made as he examined the item in his hand.

"Well its better than using tooth paste on a sponge," he said.

"The tooth paste is out on the sink in the hall," Lezura said.

"Sure," Said Joey. "See you ladies down stairs."

After a getting refreshed and a meal of mint tea, meat bread and fruits from his room, Joey met up with his new teacher.

*Boy am I glad we aren't having math!* Joey thought.

There on the first floor he saw Mulena seated on a bench and people kneeling before the statues of the holy trinity; with their heads bowed and whispering words he could not make out. He realized that they were praying to their gods, and bothered not to ask Mulena about it. He studied them closely as he walked pass towards Mulena, who stood to greet him.

“Morning teach!” Joey said.

And upon remembering that he would be learning how to use honoi energy today Joey smiled and rubbed his hands together.

They went outside through the door on the left and out into the sun’s warmth. His lungs were instantly filled with plant scented air; as if someone crushed leaved and held it directly to his nose. He didn’t realize that the atmospheric converter would be filtering in these smells.

The remaining morning dew sparkled like gemstones on the leaves of the plants which bordered the walkway. As they made their way around the back of the temple the Human noticed bright yellow colored insects with long necks and a rectangular body.

He was told they were called lobbleflies when he asked his teacher their identity. They flew from one flower to another to feast on its nectar.

Lankers; very small relatives of the tratalies with dark blue skin, long green and red colored feathers on their heads, flew across the cloud patched sky in all directions as they uttered high pitched quacks. Purple and green patterns on their wings gave them some level of camouflage in the nearby trees.

Joey was made aware of their presence by their calls. He looked up at them, and estimated their size to be about half that of the arcops he saw last night. He looked down before him on the tiles which he was walking on. Each tile had in its center the symbol of the Ixian kingdom in a dark green. But most of the tiles were cracked and chipped by weathering. Grass sprouted from between the tiles, along with flowers, adding to its return to nature.

The path ended at a rectangular field at the back of the temple, twice the size of a swimming pool. The grass was cut to a height of three inches, and the field bordered from the rest of the surroundings by exquisitely polished rocks. On the inner sides of the field were a few small benches, and at each corner was a tree with a reddish trunk and large blue fan shaped leaves—called a pihok tree.

They walked into the shade of one of the pihok trees. There Mulena opened the bag and took out a huge brown carpet which she laid out on the grass, then invited Joey to sit with her.

Joey stared at her attentively, his rigid posture indicating that he was ready to absorb every ounce of knowledge Mulena was about to give him.

“So let us begin with a question,” Mulena said; “what is honoi energy?”

Joey remembered what she had told him yesterday. “Honoi energy is the bioenergy found in all living organisms. It can be harnessed and used as how the user desires, and therefore is a part of that living organism’s body.”

“Very good, Rakai,” the proud teacher said. “And to add to what you already know; honoi energy is produced by brain cells in the mid-rear of our brains. It is then channeled throughout our entire body in tiny streams that can remain undetected unless you have the ability detect it.”

“So, how can someone know it’s there?” Joey said.

“It can be done through meditation,” Mulena said. “A person meditates by erasing all thoughts about the environment around them. Then they withdraw into the depths of their minds, or allow another otherworldly force to enter their mind.”

Joey leaned closer. “So...I just don’t think about anything and I’ll feel the honoi energy inside me? Kinda sounds like hocus-pocus...”

“It does not work like that exactly,” Mulena said. “You have to focus hard enough and feel the flow of the electricity in your brain. Then you will have to trace those electrical flows to the untapped areas of your brain. Once you have found that area, you have found where honoi is produced.”

Joey gave her a smug smile. “So, all I have to do is just reach within my own mind for the parts I never use, and I’ll be using honoi in no time?”

“Not immediately,” Mulena said with a tone of controlled disapproval. “The process could take weeks.”

Joey gawked in disbelief. “*Weeks?*” he said.

“Yes,” Mulena said. “The first Nycarman in history to have learned how to use honoi energy was a woman named Vu Ra’honoi. She was a part of a covenant that believed in the existence of another force in the universe. It took her years to access her honoi energy. From there she taught the rest of her covenant, and from there they departed and taught most of the world.” She gave him a reassuring smile. “But do not worry, Joey. We have a faster method of achieving this. Turn around.”

Joey did as he was told, though he was wondering what Mulena was about to do. Mulena crept up closer behind him and produced honoi energy in



her right hand to the point where the entire hand was glowing and steaming with honoi like a burning piece of wood.

“What are you doing back there?” Joey said.

Mulena did not provide an answer; she only gave him an order. “Lift off your mask. When I count to three I want you to take deep breath.”

“Why?”

“I will cover your face with honoi energy, and you will inhale it. When this is done it will enter into your lungs and the rest of your body. Your body’s honoi energy will be triggered into action by the minute electrical charge of *my* honoi energy.”

Joey turned his head around slightly in her direction. “Will that actually work?”

“Indeed it will, Rakai,” she said.

Joey pulled up his mask and straightened his head. “Alright, I’m ready.”

Mulena counted, “One. Two-”

She reached three. Joey took a deep breath and Mulena placed her hand over his face. The Human inhaled the cool, alkaline and lemon scented energy into his lungs. His chest cavity became cold and he gripped Mulena’s hand tightly at the sensation. His whole body surged with vibrations of cold and static.

“Do not try to fight Rakai! It will be all right!” Mulena said.

The cold feeling traveled from Joey’s chest towards the rest of his body. Then it reached his brain where, where Joey felt it strongest. He closed his eyes because of the intensity of the feeling. The moment he opened them he was seeing nothing but bright blue light. Mulena tilted his head back to look at his face. The boy’s eyes were glowing blue. She smiled widely in satisfaction.

“It is working!” she said. “Your honoi energy is responding to mine!”

Blue streams of energy shot out from the pores of Joey’s skin. Joey’s face grimaced with pain at the process. When it finally stopped Mulena removed her hand and allowed the Human to breath normally again by placing on his mask. All this took place in under a minute.

She got up and knelt in front of her student. She could see that his skin was glowing still slightly, but the light in his eyes were gone.

“How are you feeling?” Mulena inquired excitedly.

Joey felt the coldness fading away in his chest, but not in his head.

However, Joey could feel something chilly flowing through his body as if it

were on a circuit. He looked up at her in bewilderment. "Did it work?" was all he said.

Mulena smiled. "It certainly did."

It was as if upon hearing those words Joey got a burst of energy. "Well, I'm feeling great!"

Mulena went into the bag and took out a wooden jar. She knelt in front of Joey and took out an irregular shaped red sweet and gave him to eat. It tasted like cherry and mint; like the hespi berry he ate this morning. It made the cold feeling in his head subside immediately.

Mulena went back to her space on the mat. "We will begin the first lesson in honoi energy," she said; "how to control its flow. Now hold up your hands and look into your palms."

Joey did what she said. But he wondered if she meant his bare hands or his gloved hands.

"The particles of honoi energy seeps through anything with a density similar to your skin," Murbella said. "It might be able to seep through your suit, but anyway, back to what I said. Can you feel the honoi energy flowing inside your hands?"

Joey kept his hands steady. "Yeah...I think...actually I can! It feels cool!"  
"Good, now try to control the flow of the energy."

He looked up at her with his forehead wrinkled with confusion. "How am I goanna do that? It's not like I can actually touch it."

"Just concentrate on something that makes you happy. The pleasure center of the brain is close to where honoi energy is produced; if you think about something happy or engage in an activity that gives you pleasure it will increase the intensity of the honoi flow in your body. Just close your eyes and concentrate."

Joey closed his eyes, relaxed, and searched through his mind for anything that could lift his spirits. But all he was finding were the images of bad memories; his parents dying; his father getting shot in his chest and the bullet tearing through his mother's head. The images of war and destructing that he saw on the video last night made him feel even worse.

But he remembered how Lezura comforted him at that moment, how good her soft touch on his cheek made him feel. He remembered being stabbed by the mugger in the alley, and how the first thing he saw after waking up was Lezura's face. From there he was brought to this magnificent world, flying in the back seat of Lezura's Thwopter, the smell of her hair blowing back into his face. The thoughts brought a pleasurable

smile on his face that heightened his awareness to the point where he could feel his honoi energy inside his body, as if it were a something just like his blood.

He opened his eyes and looked at his hands. By flexing his wrists outward, honoi energy spouted from the creases in his palms. He marveled in appreciation at his accomplishment with a wry smile. Mulena clasped her hands together in a proud manner.

“Well done, child,” she said.

Joey exerted honoi energy from his palms rapidly with childish glee, shrouding the air around the two of them. He got up and ran around the mat, laughing like a goof. Mulena saw that he was enjoying himself, but she also saw the danger in it. She grabbed his hands and held them steady.

“You must not waste your honoi energy like that, Rakai!” she said so sternly that Joey immediately stopped smiling. “Always remember that honoi energy is a part of your body, and if your body is lacking in anything essential you will die. Now that you have accessed your honoi it has already integrated itself with your brain cells.”

Joey straightened his back in response to the seriousness of the matter. “I’ll...I’ll keep that in mind...”

“You should,” Mulena said, and let go of his hands. As she settled herself

Now Mulena could get to the heart of the training. She got up and went into the bag. Out of it she took a bronze ring ten inches in diameter, and went over to one of the stumps that have been placed in the center of the field the previous night. She placed the ring in a dug out grove on the top where it was held in place. She gestured for Joey to come by her. They stood some meters from it.

“Now, I am going to show you one of the most basic honoi fighting techniques. It is called the honoiburst.”

Joey murmured the word and memorized it.

Mulena slowly raised her left hand and opened her palm towards the ring. She told Joey to pay close attention. The creases along her arm glowed blue until it reached her wrist.

“It is done by building up honoi energy in your wrist,” Mulena channeled honoi into her wrist, “then flexing your wrist outward quickly at the desired target.”

She looked along the middle finger of her hand, aligning it with the center of the ring. She flexed her wrist and a concentrated blob of honoi energy shot out with a faint blue trail. It flew through the air until the resistance

wind caused it to form an oval shape. It went through the ring and slapped into a pomeg tree in the distance, sending splinters flying out from the crater.

“Nice!” Joey exclaimed with an approving nod.

“Now you try,” Mulena said. She stepped away to observe from a safe distance. There was no telling what this alien could do. “But do not think that you will get it right away, this technique can take days to master.”

Joey walked into his position and raised his right hand. “First you build honoi energy inside your wrist,” he channeled honoi energy into his wrist. He thought he was using the right amount, but Mulena realized he was channeling too much. Joey did not realize that his hand was shaking under the pressure.

“Joey you-”

But before Mulena could stop him a massive honoiburst; six times the size of Mulena’s, boomed from his hand. The Human was sent flying back from the recoil. The honoiburst impacted into the tree with a loud boom. It sent all the creatures in the tree flying and swinging away with frantic cries. Mulena had quickly leapt back and shielded her face with her arms as the explosion sent chunks of the tree trunk flying.

The blue mist cleared seconds later, revealing a huge gaping hollow on one side of the tree. Mulena slowly walked closer to where Joey was to get a detailed look at the destruction. She tried to find the words for what she saw. She couldn’t. She did not even know what to think. She could only stare.

Joey braced himself up on his elbows and flashed his aching hand in the air to cool it. “Man, that thing really hurts!” he said with obvious signs of discomfort on his face. He blew on his hand with his breath and looked at the tree. And upon seeing the destroyed tree his mouth dropped open. “Whoa!” Joey smiled and shivered with excitement. He giggled and jumped around in the air.

“I did it! I did it! I freaking did it!” Joey hollered triumphantly.

Mulena stared at Joey; almost with a sense of fear at his power. “He is truly incredible,” she murmured. “He mastered the honoiburst on the first try! A task which took me and everyone else here at least two days to accomplish! But this child did it within the space of a few seconds of me telling him how it is done!”

The grip of fear subsided in Mulena, and the feeling of pride overtook her when she realized that her student was able to understand something she

thought him so quickly. But she wondered if it was really her, or the fact that this child was the great Rakai.

*Then again, she thought, he could have been born to do this.*

From a safe distance in the bushes around the field, Lezura, Marina and a few Tyhunies and villagers observed Joey's training; and were astonished when they saw the size and lethality of his first honoiburst.

Lezura smiled with herself at the fact that she was the one who had brought such a great person to Ixia. The fact that she knew this great person, the Rakai personally; if she could conclude that based on last night. And if she was not pleased with herself for thinking so, she was pleased that Joey was making his mark here on this planet.

They all wanted to comment on that honoiburst; such power in it that it could be compared to that of the wyassies or the village headman, or even greater! But they remained silent, for they were not even supposed to be watching the Rakai during his training.

But the headman and the wyassies knew that they would have a hard time getting them to follow their orders when it came to the Rakai. So the wyassies and the headman did not bother to send them away as they stood behind them, watching.

Mulena held Joey steady by his hand and spoke, "You did very well." She let go of his hand. "But you still have one small problem."

"What's that?" Joey was clearly perplexed. Did he not just do the honoiburst; even a more impressive one than hers?

"You lack control, Rakai," she said, "which can be very dangerous to you and others." She pointed to the tree. "That is a clear enough example."

Joey was unable to hide his displeasure. "Are you saying that I would hurt these people here?" he said.

Mulena was taken aback. "I did not say that you would do such a thing child, nor did I ever think of you being capable of doing so. I merely pointed out that you must control the amount of honoi energy you use."

Joey folded his arms. "It didn't felt like I used a lot to me," he said.

Mulena now became intrigued. "Are you certain it did not?"

"Of course not," Joey said. "That's why I asked if you think I was putting everyone in danger, it didn't felt like I over did it." He paused for a brief

moment and thought, “Well...maybe the whole falling flat on my ass may have made it seem that way.”

“Do not forget the tree,” Mulena added.

As they spoke the remainder of the tree’s foundation gave way. The tree collapsed into the forest with a roar of smashing leaves and snapping limbs. Once again the forest creatures nearby where startled into a running and flying frenzy.

The two of them turned around to see only a missing tree. It revealed a startled basurel that stared back at Joey and Mulena.

It looked like a featherless bird with long thick legs that were gold in color below the knees. It had a brown colored body with blue and green markings on its back and around its long neck. Its snout was slightly long, with a golden beak that was covered at the sides by its skin which gave it cheeks. Its ears were circular, silver membranes inside a deep socket (like most animals on the planet). Its eyes were large and pink. It had long, green feathers on its head and small vestigial wings. Its tail was short with greenish-blue feathers and it stood two and a half meters tall.

Joey looked at the beautifully colored creature until it tilted its head and blinked its large eyes. It turned and ran away from the potential predators.

“Some bird,” Joey remarked in a low voice. He turned to Mulena, who looked at him sternly with her arms folded. He retracted his head as if to hide it from her inside his body, and laughed nervously. “Maybe I do need to learn some control.”

Joey and Mulena had continued with target practice. They used small rocks on top of another log behind the one with the bronze ring. Joey had to knock the stones off with a honoiburst. Mulena kept close watch at how Joey built up the honoi in his wrist from the mat. From there she instructed Joey when to increase and decrease the amount of honoi in his wrist until he got the honoiburst right.

After a few tries; each with a huge burst, Joey was able to release a controlled but still lethal honoiburst. He released bursts from one palm and then the next at the stone until it was pushed off. He repeated it forty more times; thirty times with some difficulty aiming, until the lesson was over.

After the exhausting exercise Mulena poured a cup of fruit juice from a bottle in the bag and gave him to drink in a small wooden cup. Joey came

and sat beside her. Mulena took the opportunity to explain how the use of honoi energy can cause death.

“Because honoi energy is produced in your brain it is a little close to the areas which controls the involuntary functions of your body; your breathing and your heartbeat. Your brain is constantly producing honoi energy. If you use up all your honoi energy the sudden stop in the production of it will have a traumatic effect on the involuntary control centers of your brain; causing a cease in the activity of your heart and lungs. You will die instantly.

“Luckily, there is a small amount of honoi energy produced in your heart that is constantly being pumped into your brain to act as a quick backup source in case your brain stops producing it. From there your brain can recover from the trauma to produce more honoi energy,” Mulena waved a finger at Joey, “which is why you must never use honoi energy from your heart.”

“I got it,” Joey said with a firm nod.

Mulena quickly discarded the memory of the discussion, and smiled at the progress of the day. “You are truly amazing, Rakai,” she said.

Joey smiled. “Yeah,” he said. “But I hope I can get as skilled as you one day.”

“I am very flattered, Rakai,” Mulena chuckled.

“So...are you going to tell the wyassies how great I did?”

“I do not think I need to,” she said as she stared with a smirk at the bushes and trees to her left from the corner of her eyes, “I am sure they already know that you are capable of great things.”

Joey saw the strange look on her face for a brief second. He wondered about it, and forgot about it. Something else came to mind. “So what will we be doing tomorrow?”

“We will start off by going over target practice with the honoiburst. Then you will be attempting the honoibeam.”

“Could you show me how it’s done?” Joey said excitedly.

Mulena chuckled, pleased with his enthusiasm. “Let us save that for tomorrow. Right now you should take a break and prepare for your class with Halirit...” and she narrowed her gaze at him and spoke sternly, “...and you better not be late.”

“I won’t,” the Human said.

Mulena packed up the items she brought back into the bag and left. Joey was there on the field alone. He turned back to the stump. Pretending that

the ring was still there he smiled smugly, and fired one more honoiburst and walked away.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

Joey spent his two hour break walking through the village with Lezura and Marina at his side. With the presence of two beautiful women at his side, It made him feel important...more important than just being the Rakai.

It was why Lezura and Marina looked at his smile and wondered.

He was greeted by passers and those who stopped to say hello. Some children flocked around the Rakai. They asked him all kinds of questions with their childish enthusiasm for an answer; where he was from, what was he, what was his name?

Their parents came and politely ordered them to stop harassing the Rakai. Joey thought nothing of it more than children being children, and laughed when he heard the parents say they would not give their children any sweets after dinner if they didn't get moving. Within seconds the kids were all gone.

*I feel like president is this place!* Joey thought.

“So how many people live here in the village?” Joey said openly.

“One hundred and seven,” Marina said, “and there are fifty-one Tyhunies in the temple. So the overall population here is one hundred and fifty-eight.”

Joey stopped and noticed the different color yotas the people around him were wearing; the majority wore gray, the rest wore purple. There seemed to be no coordination of it, men and women, adults and children wore the different colors.

“Why are some folks wearing grey yotas and others are wearing purple?” the Human questioned further.

“It is because of their religion,” Lezura turned to him and said. “As the wyassies told you in the temple, they practice Tyhunism; the worship of the holy trinity. Most of the people in the village practice ancestor worship. Because of this difference in beliefs they have separated themselves by the different colors of their yota. Tyhunies wear purple, and those who worship their ancestors are called Bloodliners, and wear grey.”

“But if they are divided as you say are, Lezura, how comes there're Tyhunies living in the village?” said Joey.

“Those are the Tyhunies who are starting their own families,” Marina explained. “They move out of the temple so they can have their own place to raise their children.”

“Oh,” Joey now understood, “so that’s why I didn’t see any of the Bloodliners in the temple when I came here,”

“That is correct,” Marina said. “Bloodliners do not wish to engage in the activities Tyhunies do.”

“Like what?” Joey said, clearly getting caught up in the discussion.

“Like Spirit Talk and morning prayers,” Marina said.

“But otherwise from that, everyone here lives in peace with each other,” Lezura added.

“Well that’s good to hear,” Joey said, “I wouldn’t want to get caught up in whatever feud they have. But then again...I’m sort of the peace bringer here, so I’d probably have to get involved.”

“No one here would put you in harm’s way because of their personal problems,” Marina said, shaking her head convincingly.

They were so busy talking that they didn’t notice the large creature galloping down the path; that was until Lezura’s ears picked up the heavy landing of its hooves thirty-five meters away. She quickly alerted the others and they all hurried out of the way.

A man ran alongside the beast, yanking on its harness to bring it under control. He called out to the creature by the name he gave it for it to stop. After a few good powerful yanks he finally brought the creature to a stomping halt. The man went in front of the panting animal and stroked it on its short to produce a sense of calm in it. He could feel the heavy wind from its wide nostrils each time it exhaled on his hand; like a turbo fan.

Now that the creature appeared to be under control Joey stepped away from the two women and approached the man and the animal. Lezura and Marina quickly walked up to his side to protect him.

The animal was tall, nearly three meters. It had a very impressive musculature; as if the animal were a muscle builder. Its body was designed like a horse, with green colored skin on the upper sides of its body, neck, head and its long tail. The rest of its body was whitish-grey, including under its neck and its four legs. Its head was rounded with a high, red backward curving crest that ran all the way down to the end of its neck. It stared at the strange Nycarman that was Joey with four pink eyes that were right in front of its membranous ears. And its eye catching body did not stop there; on the end of its chin it had two black tusks as long as Joey’s forearm.

Joey knew the man did not have a translator, so he told Lezura to ask what the creature was.

“It is called a mynamather,” the man answered when Lezura asked. He gave the mynamather a gentle pat on its snout. “We catch and raise them to carry us, and our loads.”

“Do they make good pets?” Joey said, and Lezura translated.

“They are not just pets,” the man explained to Joey, shaking his head. “Our ancestors domesticated the mynamathers centuries ago. They rode on the mynamathers whenever they went out of the kingdom to go hunting or to go to war,” he turned around and stared at Joey, “these animals are a part of Ixian culture, Rakai.”

Joey felt like he just made an ass of himself. “Sorry about calling it a pet.”

But the man understood that the Rakai did not know about their culture. “Do not think much about it Rakai,” he looked at Lezura, “Lezura called it the same thing when she first got here.”

Joey swung his head to look at her, “You’re not from around here?”

Lezura could see the surprised look on his face, and she herself was surprised. “I thought you would have realized by how I look.”

“Well...I know that you have a smaller nose...and a better looking butt,” Lezura’s eyes glowered and the fingers on her hand stiffen, but she refrained from slapping him. Marina sniggered, “but I never really thought that you weren’t from around here.”

“Nycarman’s with small noses like mine are called Outo,” Lezura said. “The Nycarmans here with their straight noses are called Uolas. I came here a few years ago from Ugatin.”

“Oh. So you’re a foreigner just like me then?”

“I guess so.” But Lezura’s voice was not lively when she thought about that term- *foreigner*.

“You know, Rakai,” the man said, “if you want to, I can teach you how to ride a mynamather one of these days.”

Joey’s eyes lit up, “Really?”

Lezura quickly said, “Lafit, I do not think that that is such a good idea!”

Lafit waved the notion away. “Come on, Lezura. The Rakai would love to do something like this. It would be fitting for him to have his own mynamather while he is with us.”

“Yeah, Lezura!” said Joey.

“Yeah Lezura,” Marina entered. “Mynamathers are easy animals to domesticate. Even the Rakai will not have trouble taming one. Unlike you, who got angry when you tried to ride one and he threw you off. Then got up cursing at everyone and kicked the mynamather in his testicles.”

Joey tried to suppress his laughter but could not. His mouth exploded with a loud outburst that triggered a reaction with Lafit who remembered the incident.”

Lezura slapped Marina across her head, kicked Joey on his shin and yanked on Lafit’s left ear.

The three of them looked at Lezura with their faces contorting with stinging pain.

“Jeez Lezura!” Joey whined. “Can’t you take a joke?”

Lezura looked at him with a smirk and said, “Well, I was going along with the joke when I spoke about my bottom.”

Lafit swiveled his ear to increase the blood flow. He had forgotten about Lezura’s temper; which was why after she kicked the mynamather she punched him in his groin for convincing her to ride the animal. He never forgot that day. He had to sit for three hours.

“So what do you say Rakai?” Lafit asked.

“Hell yeah!” the human shouted, making the ears of the Nycarmans sting a bit.

“What?” Lafit said.

“I think he means yes,” Marina said.

Lafit nodded. “Oh!”

“When do you w-”

“Tomorrow,” Joey cut him off with his answer.

“You do not waste time, do you?” the man said. “Well, tomorrow it is then. By the way, my name is Lafit.”

“Joey Sadowski.”

Lafit guided the mynamather down the path and back into its pasture near the forest.

Joey felt two hands hold onto his shoulder from behind. The person pulled himself over and flipped over Joey and landed in front of him. The Rakai was both shocked and angered. The young man turned around and faced the Human with a grin.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” Joey snarled as he stepped towards the man. Lezura and Marina knew who the man was, and Lezura was willing to translate, even with the same emotion Joey was displaying.

“I just wanted to see how good your reflexes are, Rakai,” the man said with a cocky grin that chewed at Joey’s nerves. He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “And judging by how you almost fell over; I guess you are as fragile as a dried leaf.”

Joey narrowed his glare at the man, his fists clenched. “What’d you want man?”

But the Nycarman man didn’t wait for Lezura to translate. “You do know I cannot understand a word you are saying, Rakai,” he remarked deliberately to anger the Human. He looked at Lezura and Marina. “And you girls are actually wasting your time speaking for this *alien*? He should learn how to speak *our* language.”

“Well, in that case,” said Joey, “I guess you won’t mind if I tell you to get your punk ass away from us.”

Lezura and Marina laughed. Joey shook his head at them to indicate to them no to translate. He wanted the Nycarman to be in the dark about what he just said about him.

The man could obviously see that the amusement on the faces of the ladies had something to do with what the Rakai said about him-which he didn’t take likely.

“Did you just say something about me, Rakai?” he said, pushing his head out.

“Yes,” Marina said distastefully. “He just did, now get going Karit!”

Karit stiffen with suppressed rage. He and Marina had a long stare at each other. Finally he spoke to the Human. “How dare you come into my village and mock me, you *alien*! I will not be insulted by a...” he studied Joey from head to toe “...shabby looking alien in a silly spacesuit!”

Joey raised an eyebrow at the man, who he thought by how his body looked was a few years older than he was. “It’s Atmos suit, you big dick!” Joey turned to Lezura and asked, “Who the hell is this guy?”

But it was Marina who answered. She scowled at Karit while she spoke. “This is Karit. He is the son of the village headman. And unfortunately for these people the future headman of the village.”

Joey shot a startled glance at the man.

Karit was slim built but muscled. His hair was short, golden, and with a Mohawk and the rest in a ponytail. His face was oval with a straight chin. His nose was very straight, and he wore a bright red necklace which symbolized that he was from the royal family.

Karit smiled at the expression on the Rakai’s face. “Ah, I see you are amazed by my level of superiority.”

Joey regained his cocky attitude. “No,” he said, “I was just amazed that they would actually let you be the village headman. What’re you goanna do

for these people; teach them how to eat shit with their hands tied behind their backs?”

When Lezura translated it for Karit he got so furious that he walked up into Joey’s face, just four inches away. “You are either very foolish...or completely stupid if you think you can just come into this kingdom and insult the village headman’s son, Rakai,” Karit strained the words through his clenched teeth as he stared into Joey’s eyes.

Joey stared back at him with equal intensity. “Well, if you haven’t heard-” Lezura and Marina realized that it was going too far.

“Joey, let us just be on our way,” said Marina. She gave Karit a venomous look, “And leave Karit to himself.”

She grabbed Joey’s hand to pull him away, but he shook off her hand. “Well if you haven’t heard I’m the Rakai. I’m known throughout hundreds of years of Nycarman history, while only the people in this village know who you are.”

“Oh, this is my entire fault!” Lezura said in a frantic voice as she watched the conflict unfold. “I should not have been translating all those things Joey said!”

“You are not responsible, Lezura,” Marina assured her. “We all know how Karit is. If there is anyone to blame it is him.”

Joey did not hear Lezura translate, he turned to her. “Tell him what I just said.”

“Joey you should stop-”

“Lezura tell him!” he silenced her with another demand.

Lezura looked at Marina helplessly, and then Joey. Lezura reluctantly translated.

“Ha!” Karit said. “If you think I am going to let you out class me Rakai you have another thing coming! I am royalty here!”

There were a few people who were watching the confrontation between the Rakai and the village head boy. Two of the most important people in the Ixian kingdom were at each other’s throats. Lezura and Marina stood firmly at Joey’s side, while Karit’s close friends came to his, outnumbering Joey, Marina and Lezura seven to three.

Before the confrontation could escalate into a possible physical one a few Bloodliner men came to Joey and his friends and offered them a drink, deliberately trying to put the conflict to an end. Joey knew what they were trying to do, and quickly declined in a rough voice. He was not about to

back down from a fight. He never did on Earth; he wasn't about to start here-even though his ass was handed to him 95% of the time.

"Joey, stop it!" Lezura pleaded with him.

Joey could sense that Lezura was becoming unhappy. It was only then that he turned to the men and walked away with them.

"That is right, run away from my overwhelming, imperial essence, Rakai," Karit said.

Joey spun around, his face flushed with anger-mostly at the description of Karit's self in the sentence he just said. He struck out at Karit with a punch. Karit easily pulled his head out of the way. Joey swung another fist at Karit. The Nycarman threw his left forearm and blocked it, then delivered a blow into the Rakai's stomach with the other hand. Joey staggered back, but anger made him attack once more; throwing punches wildly at Karit. Karit blocked each of them successfully. But it was Joey's strength and determination that finally made him land a blow on Karit's jaw. Karit quickly leapt back and looked at the Rakai with a wry grin.

"Is that all the Rakai is capable of?"

Joey's face went red when he realized that Karit was still standing. Karit's taunt worked, Joey lunged at him once more. This time Karit caught his fist, then held his arm with both hands and twisted it. Joey yelled as Karit brought him to the ground and pinned him down.

Karit knelt down over him and spoke into his ear as Joey struggled to get free, "Very impressive Rakai!"

"Get the fuck off me!" Joey barked.

Joey struggled so much that his entire muscles were hurting. Finally he got one arm free and sent his elbow into Karit's neck two times. Karit released him and retreated a few steps back. As Joey got up, Karit punched him back down flat on his back. Joey quickly rolled on the ground to the other side and sprang up, coming at Karit with a roar and a fist ready for delivery, only to have Karit dodge it again and strike him in his stomach once more.

The older men tried to get to the two to pull them apart, but Karit's friends held them back, trying to allow their friend to win the fight without intervention. But they had more trouble trying to hold back Lezura; who punched one of the men. The man she struck got enraged and pushed her hard onto her back.

Unfortunately for him Joey saw it, and ran passed Karit towards him, turned him around and shot his fist into his eye. One of Karit's friends struck Joey down onto his belly.

Marina said for the sidelines, “Everyone is romping but me!”

Marina searched around for a weapon. She found a smooth big-stone near a display of flowers near a house. She blindly swung down in the crowd with the weapon. She heard it connect and heard a scream.

Marina was shocked to see Joey fall out of the crowd rubbing his head “Marina! What the Hell?” Joey cried. “That even hurt through the damn helmet!”

“Sorry,” was all Marina had time to say as she struck into the crowd once more.

This time one of Karit’s companions fell down.

Marina jumped for joy “Yes!” she cheered. She tried to continue her luck with one more hit.

Fear gripped Marina by her nervous system when she saw Lezura staring at her, holding her shoulder.

Lezura shouted, “Marina you brute!”

Marina fought to move her muscles. She dropped the stone and sped away.

Lezura was knocked down once more. Joey was kicked in the rib by Karit. Lezura saw the bastard in the act. She got up, forcefully pushed two men out of the way and landed a blow under the young man’s rib. Karit thought that his body was going to explode when he fell down.

The young man was unfortunate to be the first to find out that Lezura was stronger than he or any of his friends were.

And how in the wide universe could a woman be so strong?

Joey pushed himself up and spun around to meet his attacker. The moment his fist shot out it was caught by a strong hand that held it immobile. Joey followed the hand up to its owner’s face and saw that it was Halirit. His almost expressionless face and firm posture made Joey’s body tense with surprise. Halirit had caught his fist just in time; it was only inches away from Lezura’s face.

Halirit stared down at Joey with authority and disappointment. “Is this what you came here to do, Rakai?” he said in a calm voice.

Joey was pissed. He pulled his fist out of Halirit’s hand. “What the hell are you talking about?” He pointed a stiff finger at Karit who was nearby, “He’s the one who started all of this shit!”

Lezura quickly dusted off her yota and approached Halirit. “Halirit, it was not Joey’s fault,” she said. Halirit turned his attention to her. “I was the one that was translating all of what Joey was saying. If I-”



“I’m the one who made Lezura do it, Halirit!” Joey quickly cut off Lezura to get her out of trouble. Lezura gasped lightly in surprise. Joey looked back at Karit. “This guy just came and flipped over my shoulder like he has a thing for me. Then he was talking about how he wanted to ‘test my reflexes’, so I got angry and told him to leave. *Then* he started talking all kinds a blasphemy about me; and I wasn’t goanna stand for any of that shit.”

“So you chose to let Karit pull you out and get you into a meaningless fight,” Halirit remarked. Halirit looked at Karit’s friends as they pulled the dead-looking Karit to his feet. “And you Karit-”

Karit looked at him in disbelief. “Me?” he managed to say.

“Your Father has spoken to you so many times about your attitude, yet you still choose to act like a spoiled child who just has to have his own way.”

“You cannot speak to me like that,” then Karit added with a tone of disgust, “you wretched *Tybhuny!*”

Karit suddenly felt a hard slap across the back of his head. Karit looked around to see who it was. His eyes widen in helpless terror when he saw his father standing before him.

“And you cannot speak to an elder like that, boy!” Halit said sternly.

Karit kept silent, looking intently at his father, expecting another slap across his head.

“You are lucky for now boy,” he continued, “because when your mother gets back from her garden you are going to have to hide when I tell her what happened.”

Joey smiled mockingly at Karit. “Hah, hah, mamma’s boy!” he taunted Karit. He winched when Lezura elbowed him in his lower rib for him to shut it.

“You and your friends better leave now, boy,” Halit said so terrifyingly that Karit quickly limped away, leaving his friends to catch up to him.

Halit approached Joey. “I apologize for my son’s behavior, Rakai,” he said in a low voice. Joey knew he had no translator, so he just nodded. Halit continued, “Ever since he heard that he would be village headman he started acting as if he already got the title.”

Then Halit shifted his gaze to Halirit. “I hope this does not cause any problems with the relationship between you Tyhunies and us Bloodliners.”

Halirit kept a steady gaze on the man. He didn’t have a genuine dislike for Bloodliners; but at this moment, when one of them provoked the Rakai into a fight, he had it passionately. But Halirit still had to portray the more

civilized faction of the kingdom, as a follower of Tyhunism and the son of the wyassy Murbella.

“We shall quash this for peace’s sake, Halit,” Halirit said, “but it shall not be forgotten.”

Halit forced himself to smile at him. He didn’t like the Tyhunies one bit; not even the ones living in the village. And he hated the fact that it was they who first made contact with Lezura and the Rakai and had them wearing that ridiculous purple yota.

The moment Halit turned around and walked off his smile quickly vanished and was replaced with a scowl.

*It would not have been so bad if Karit had picked a fight with another Tybuny, he thought. But picking a fight with the Rakai? That boy must be out of his mind!*

Halirit spoke to Lezura, “I need you and the Rakai to follow me.” Both Joey and Lezura exchange worried glances. “It appears that the Rakai’s combat class will begin early today.”

## CHAPTER NINE

A few minutes after Joey had his tussle with Karit his combat class had begun. But first Halirit ordered Lezura to fetch some clothes for Joey.

The Human looked at the clothes Lezura placed on the bench questionably.

“Change,” Halirit said to Joey.

Joey’s face frowned abruptly at him. “What?”

“Get out of your suit and get in those clothes,” Halirit said once more.

“I need this suit to survive if you haven’t noticed,” Joey said.

Lezura realized that she hadn’t fully explained to the Human how long it took for the nitrous felluxide to take effect on his body.

“The chemical that is harmful to your body will not kill you right away,” Lezura said. “The nitrous felluxide needs at least a day to build up in your body. Then for the next two days it will begin to destroy your cells until you are finally unable to carry out your body’s metabolism and die the next day. But if you inhale it in small doses each day, those small doses can easily be carried out of your body by any means of excretion.”

Joey looked at the ground thoughtfully, then back at Lezura. “So unless a day passes, I’m actually fine breathing the air?”

“Yes,” Lezura said.

Halirit answered with a firm nod. “So you can easily carry out your lessons in my class. So get dressed.”

With some reluctance Joey took his clothes and went off the field to a shallow area of bushes. There were a few people hiding there, and they quickly retreated from the area with skillful quietness.

Joey took off the Atmos and placed it on the leave littered ground. An insect unintentionally perched on the bare skin of his neck. With a hard slap and a squishing sound the insect fell off. But soon more little insects began to perch on him and fly around his head irritatingly. He was now more appreciative of the suit.

He quickly got dressed in a black and grey shirt and brown trousers, and left the area with the suit in hand and fitting the translator in his ear.

By the time Joey got back Lezura was gone. He and Halirit stood in the middle of the field with their bare feet facing each other. Halirit had on a sleeveless sand brown shirt and dark brown trousers. The muscles on his slim arms bulged beneath his skin as the Human observed them.

*I wish I had muscles like that,* Joey thought.

The sun's light was put on pause by the clouds that drifted slowly over the field. There was the sound of only leaves rustling in the wind and the movement and sounds of the nearby animals around them.

"Now, I want you to try to hit me as hard as you can," Halirit said.

Joey hesitated with his response. Not knowing what this man was about to do.

"That was an order, Rakai," Halirit said.

"Well, okay. If you say so," Joey said.

The Rakai swung his fist around towards Halirit's face. The man held his hand out and caught it effortlessly.

"Now stop," Halirit said so quickly that Joey was almost unable to stop his second attack. "Now what did you do wrong?"

"What do you mean?" Joey said. "I tried to hit you. Didn't I?"

"You did. But I caught it. Plus you were aiming for my chest; which is composed of the many bones in my ribcage." Halirit released Joey's hand. "When you attack your opponent you must not let them evade, or if possible catch you. You must make sure that you always land your blows. And always attack the vital points on someone's body; this includes the throat, nose, under the ribs, the abdomen and the groin."

The Human said, "Alright. I got that."

"When you punch always strike straight out, never curve your arm. The curving motion will cause your arm to bend and create a hook. Your opponent can put *his* arm outward into that hook and easily block it. Like what Karit did the first time you attacked him."

Joey's anger roused when he heard the name; Karit. He realized something. "Wait, you were watching the whole time?"

"Yes, I was."

"Why didn't you do something?"

"I wanted to see what you were capable of," said Halirit. "And I must say that I am not impressed."

Joey snarled. "The only reason he was able to hit me was because he got all of this training I'm getting now; and I still managed to land a couple blows!" the Human stated, and folded his arms and pouted.

"Karit cannot fight anyone," Halirit said. "I am surprised he managed to hit you."

Joey giggled. "Eh, Karit can't..." Joey found out the other point of what Halirit said "...hey!"

“Now back to the matter at hand,” Halirit said before they strayed from the point. “Always strike with straight punches,” he gestured for Joey to come towards him, “now once more.”

Joey shot out his fist straight out at Halirit’s face. Halirit pulled his head out of the way to the side and caught Joey’s hand.

“Now, if your opponent ever doges and attack like this and catches you, expect him to counter attack. Never let your opponent get hold of you; it would most likely mean you are dead.

“But the most important thing when fighting someone in hand-to-hand; is to always know what they are capable of before the fight. You will rarely get the chance to stop and analyze your opponent during a fight. And stop looking in my eyes. When you are fighting someone keep track of the movements of their hands and feet; unless you are fighting a *gufder* or *carspi* that attacks with their mouths.”

For a moment Joey wondered how the animals Halirit mentioned looked, but he quickly discarded the thought and got back to the lesson. “So I should always keep watch at whomever I’m fighting hands and feet?” Joey said.

“Correct,” Halirit said.

“So what stance should I take?” Joey said.

Halirit tilted his head slightly in confusion and asked, “What do you mean by *stance*?”

“You know,” Joey positioned his fists in front of him, “boxing,” then he kicked out his foot, “kung fu,” then waved his hands around him with the intent of creating mystical display, “or tai chi”

Halirit gave him a light scowl and shook his head. “Not only did you look very ridiculous,” Joey scowled at him and mumbled, “but doing so will also tell your opponent that you are ready to fight, and you would have put your hands in his sights so he can see what you are about to do. It is best you keep your body tensed so you can readily move your muscles quickly at the last possible moment of confrontation.

“Or if you do wish to prepare yourself, hold your fists up beside your head to block any attacks coming towards you, while turning your body sideways and crouching to make yourself a smaller target. Also ensure that your feet are positioned so you can rock back and forth. This is a common defensive stance.”

Though Joey was not expecting an answer like that, and hated that Halirit said he looked ridiculous, what he said made sense and he accepted it.

“So, how should I really fight?” Joey said.

“With precision, speed and strength,” Halirit said. “And to acquire that, your body needs to be in perfect shape, which yours is not in at all.”

“You don’t have to be so mean about it,” Joey murmured to himself.

“And for some reason I feel damn heavy on this planet. It’s like I got six extra pounds on me.”

Halirit thought upon Joey’s problem. “I am no scientist, or as knowledgeable as Lezura, but it would seem that this planet has slightly stronger gravitational pull than your own.”

Joey himself was not a genius, but understood something about the working of gravity.

“Well that’s a bitch.”

“I am sure that your body will soon adapt to this change. We Nycarmans have evolved dense bone structure and stronger muscle fibers to solve this problem. Now I want you to adopt the defensive stance on my say-so...defensive stance!”

Joey leapt into the stance with a sharp shout. He held his fists up to his head, crouched and turned sideways.

Halirit paced around his pupil slowly with his arms behind him. Joey kept his intense gaze forward as if he really were looking at an enemy in front of him.

After observing Joey’s posture with a condemning expression Halirit kicked away Joey’s feet from beneath him. The Rakai fell on his back and shouted “Ouch!”

“With a stance that weak even the wind can knock you down Rakai!” Halirit said. “Stop treating it like a friendly sparring and more like life or death-defensive stance!”

Joey got to his feet and leapt in the stance once more. His scream this time was so intense that Halirit felt his ears sting.

Halirit kicked Joey’s foot. It slid a few inches back but didn’t collapse beneath him. Halirit kicked the other foot and it was as sturdy as the other.

“Good,” said Halirit. He went in front of Joey and adopted the defensive stance himself with impressive speed and visible firmness. “I want you to observe me keenly and follow what I do Rakai.”

Joey nodded. Joey now understood that less talking and more listening was the best thing to do here.

Halirit swung his right forearm outward brusquely. “This is the upper-right,” Halirit said. He swung his left out in the same manner. “This is the

upper-left. Both these movements are to stop anything thing coming at your head or neck. Once one arm blocks the attack, the other arm can be used to counter attack. Understood?"

Joey nodded.

Halirit flicked his right arm down over his right knee, crouching with it as well. "This is the lower-right," Halirit flicked his other hand, "this is the lower-left. These movements are used to block any attack aimed at your feet." After a firm nod from Joey Halirit crossed his forearms below his groin. "This is the double block, or the crown jewel."

Joey said, "*Crown jewel?* Is it the money fighting style?"

"Focus boy!" Halirit snapped.

Joey timidly went back into his stance. "Sorry!"

Halirit said, "This movement is used to stop any attack coming from behind you or in front of you which is aimed at your groin. And make sure you use this when needed, we do not want a penis-less Rakai walking about our planet."

Joey allowed a smile to crack across his face for only the briefest of moments. He didn't want Halirit to seem him laughing.

Halirit raised his left forearm above his head and held his other fist at his side and pointing out. "This motion is the upper-block, used to stop any attack coming from above and aim at your head." Halirit moved his fist for Joey to notice. "Your other hand is then free to launch a counter attack."

The Nycarman straightened himself with his hands at his side. "Stand easy, Rakai."

Joey exhaled loudly, kicked out his legs and flashed his arms.

Halirit said "We will be going over the stance until *I* think you have gotten it correct...defensive stance!"

Joey went into the stance. Halirit called out all the motions which Joey was to take. When Halirit had reached the "lower-right" and the "lower-left" he had to stop. He crossed his arms and frowned. Joey's arms were way behind him and his head stuck out.

"What are you doing Rakai?" Halirit said.

Joey knew he had unintentionally made a mistake, but he wouldn't tell Halirit out of fear of the embarrassment of knowing what to do but still doing wrong.

"I'm skiing," Joey said plainly.

Halirit said, "I have no clue what *skiing* is, but I would assume you intended for that to be a joke. I hope you will find it funny when you and

your companions are in a war; and one of them is lying on the ground with his guts sticking out, another is lying on his back without his arms and legs and you are bloodied and near death and outnumber one thousand to one.”

Joey didn't find that funny one bit; especially when the thought of having Lezura lying in her own blood with her guts splayed across her body.

*I think you better tone down on the antics now, Joey,* he thought.

Halirit said, “Defensive stance!”

This time Joey went through the entire six motions as best as he could. It wasn't the best display at first; when Halirit tested his defenses he could easily break through it and reach Joey. But as Joey went over it without stop he was getting better.

Halirit brought his arm down hard on Joey's upper-block. Joey winched, feeling like a bomb went off on his arm. But his defense kept up. It had done so the pass seven times Halirit tried to break through it.

“Well, done,” said Halirit. He stood before his ashen looking student in an erect posture. “I will now put your defense to the test...for real this time. I want you to try and stop me from hitting you ten times. If you can last two minutes without me hitting you, then you have been learning something in my class.”

“Really, all I have to do is last two minutes without ten hits and it'll be all over?”

“If you can last two minutes against someone as experienced as me, then you are learning.”

Joey grinned wryly. He adopted the defensive stance, rocking back and forth eagerly. “Okay,” Joey gestured at Halirit, “Bring it on, punk!”

Halirit moved like a jet, his foot reaching Joey's head before Joey could even realize. The Rakai managed to block Halirit's foot, then flicking his left arm down to block Halirit's kick at his knee. Halirit stepped on Joey's toe hard like a dropped bomb, making the Human lift his foot. With that Halirit shot a punch in Joey's face, sending the young man's head twisting.

Joey was enraged into punching at Halirit. The Nycarman ducked beneath Joey's hand. Joey swerved out of the way of Halirit's foot, then blocking the attacks coming at his head. Joey's groin block was superb, stopping Halirit's foot dead cold.

But Joey's defense weakened, enabling Halirit to slip a kick under his lower ribs. The wincing pain staggered Joey. Halirit followed up with a kick to Joey's knee, a chop down into his forehead and a knee into his gut.



That combination alone was enough to drop Joey. The Rakai rolled on the ground in agony, clutching his side and his gut.

“What are you trying to do you son-of-a-bitch?” Joey cursed. “You wanna kill me so early?”

Halirit found Joey’s words annoying with a sickening creep up his spine. Halirit knelt over Joey, who had rolled onto his back and was staring up into Halirit’s face intensely.

“Let me ask you something,” Halirit said, “do you think we summoned you here because we want to treat you like a king?”

Joey temporarily lost control over his emotions and let them be heard in his voice. “That wouldn’t be such a bad idea!” he said. “I understand that I came here to fight a war, dude...but god dammit, you guys don’t have to try to kill me! Someone already tried that yesterday before I came here!”

“You should consider yourself lucky they were not successful,” Halirit said without a hint of concern for Joey in his voice, “the next time around you might not be so lucky.”

Halirit offered Joey a hand to help him up. Joey knocked the hand away and slowly got his feet on his own. Pain popped up all over his body when he moved, like bumps in an allergic reaction.

“I’m not done yet...” Joey said “...I don’t go down so easy...” Joey took his stance. “Let’s go again you bastard!”

Halirit shrugged lightly. “Very well...”

In no time Halirit took down Joey with a punch to his nose and a kick to his head. Joey yelled and fell on his face.

“I think you have had enough, Rakai,” Halirit said out of professionalism. “Rest, we cannot possibly hope to get everything done in one day.”

Joey was on his hands and knees. He got up and spun around to meet Halirit with a discoloration over his left eye and a bloody nose. He took the defensive stance, but his legs were wobbling. “Like hell I will!” Joey snapped. “You think you’re just goanna kick my ass and get away with it?”

Halirit noted the passionate hate in Joey’s voice. “Rest,” Halirit said, “that is an order, Rakai. Stop behaving like a child; do not take it so seriously!”

Joey charged at his teacher. “You’re the one who said I should take it seriously!” He tried to punch Halirit but the Nycarman got out of the way. Joey followed up with a low punch at Halirit’s groin that the Nycarman had to block. “And there’s no way in hell you’re goanna mouth me and get away with it you purple alien bastard!”

Halirit flicked away Joey's kick and shot his palm into Joey's chest. The loud thud on the impact and the grunt made by Joey caused silent gasps from the onlookers hiding in the foliage.

Joey seemed as if he was about to fall, but he clumsily caught his footing and attacked once more.

*This blasted child is so hard of hearing!* Halirit thought. *I will have to knock him out for him to stop.*

Joey grunted and screamed behind each attack he made. They were wild, unrelenting and packed with his rage behind each of them. Halirit was actually working overtime to block them. The right thing for Halirit to do would be to just give Joey a blow to the back of his head and drop him, but the damn Rakai just wasn't giving him the opening he wanted.

Halirit gave Joey a right hook that sent spittle flying out of his mouth. Joey closed one eye, looking like he was about to fall.

In the foliage, Karit was all grins with his friends. He was relishing the view of the Rakai's pounding.

"Gentlemen," he whispered to his entourage, "witness the glory of the Rakai in action."

Karit's friends answered with giggles and grins.

Not too far from Karit were Marina and Lezura. Lezura had to cover her mouth to hide her embarrassing gape. Marina shook her head.

"One thing though," Marina said, "If we cannot give the Rakai props for prowess in battle, we can give him props for his endurance. I do not know of anyone else who can stand up and take so much beating to their skin!"

"Why does he not just stop?" Lezura said. "What is he trying to prove?"

Joey opened his eyes with burning fury. He shouted and swung his arm, slugging Halirit across his face.

Gasps rippled through the surrounding trees.

Lezura's gape slowly formed a smile. "My word!" she said.

Marina was smiling brightly. "He is not a punching bag after all!"

Karit walked away dejectedly with his entourage. "Not even I could punch that damn Tyhuny!" he complained.

One of Karit's friends, a gold haired young man named Bahit, put his arms around Karit's shoulder and said. "Do not feel too down, Karit, you are still great in the eyes of us, your close are trusted comrades. Remember that time when you took down that basurel all be yourself?"

Karit gave Bahit a disgusted look. "Bahit do not mock me. We all know that I was running from a pack of gufders and ran into the blasted bird."

Bahit's face contorted, seeming to be reflecting back upon the incident. "Oh yes, yes. That was what happened, no?"

Joey started to laugh heartily. He pointed at Halirit with a wobbling finger, as the rest of his body did. He chanted. "I gotcha...I gotcha teach! I *gotcha...*!"

Joey staggered around Halirit, waving his hands around in triumph. He said, "I got you you bastard! Not so tough, now are you!"

Halirit face stung a little, but it was a hundred times better than the obvious discomfort Joey was in. The young man moved about like drunk, tripping four times in his wake.

Joey stopped and leaped in the air with a shout, "Yeah!" And afterwards he fell on his back and passed out.

## CHAPTER TEN

After his excruciating class with Halirit, the Rakai Joey Sadowski was lying on his bed in his Atmos suit, trying his best to relax the pains throughout his body. He had set the Atmos suit to pump in cool air to soothe his muscles.

He hadn't gotten a beaten like this in a long time, but he preferred these pains over hunger pains any day.

There was a modest knock on his door, it pushed open and Lezura entered, in her purple yota, with a wooden cup of some kind of drink.

She pulled out a chair from the table and put it at the side of Joey's bed. She flopped the loose parts of her yota between her thighs and sat.

"Is Halirit okay?" Joey said. "I heard I gave him a mean ass punch that almost knocked him out."

Lezura smiled humbly at him, exposing some amount of teeth. "Are all Humans as cocky as you are, or are you just trying to smother the fact that your teacher gave you a scolding?"

Joey said quickly, "Hey, no one scolds the Rakai! Besides...I didn't want to show him too much of the skills of the Rakai, so I let him get in a few good hits so he wouldn't get embarrassed."

Lezura laughed humbly, allowing her mouth to open and expose her yellow gums and healthy teeth briefly.

Something inside Joey was making him feel warm and pleased being able to make Lezura laugh. He found himself staring a bit longer when Lezura's mouth closed and her lips came together.

"Here, drink this," Lezura said.

Joey sat up in the bed, slowly and grunting at the aches he felt. He took the cup and looked inside, yellow fluid rippled slightly with the motion of the moving cup.

"What's this?"

"Hespi berry juice," Lezura said. "It is a bit sour but should help with the aches." Lezura sat back and observed Joey keenly. "How is your body feeling-otherwise from your class?"

Joey had lifted up his mask and took a mouthful of the hespi berry juice. It was indeed sour, but the sweetness in it and the drink's smoothness made it bearable. "What do you mean?" Joey said.

Lezura said, "You seem quite fine after eating our food. I am wondering just how strong a Human's digestive system is. Some alien species in our solar system, particularly the Ginlanks and Raizean, cannot consume certain foods due to their body's inability to break it down or to stomach it. Take that hespi berry drink for example."

Joey eyed his drink suspiciously. He looked at Lezura the same way. He smirked. "You gave me this to test me, didn't you?"

Lezura said, "Not necessarily. But it had occurred to me to take your health in regards to the food you will eat here into consideration."

"It's no problem," Joey said, drinking some more of the juice. "I've eaten worse tasting things than this, and when you're really hungry it doesn't really matter...so long as it isn't any broccolis or any other veggie stuff!"

"Humans do not eat vegetables?" Lezura said.

"I don't," Joey said.

Lezura narrowed her gaze at Joey. She said slowly, "Vegetables are good for you, Joey."

Joey started back at Lezura. "So are fruits, I prefer to eat those...no veggies."

Lezura made it a mental note to prepare something *nutritious* for Joey later on.

Joey said, "Besides, I can make a hell-of-a honoiburst without eating any green stuff." Joey finished his drink, shuddering at the sourness. "You should have seen it Lezura! I got it on the first try!"

Lezura wasn't about to say she was spying on Joey. "So I have heard. I am very impressed, Joey." Lezura decided to tease him. "But I have seen much better."

Joey stopped smiling. "Who's that?" he said. He asked as if it were a real challenge to his power.

"The wyassies," she said.

"Eh, I'd expect so," Joey said humbly.

Joey thought. Lezura could see his expression become tense. It was enough for her to wonder.

"Is something the matter?" Lezura asked.

"Nothing, I'm just thinking."

"Do you mind me asking?"

"Well...I was thinking about you."

Lezura now became interested and sat up.

Joey spoke in a low voice. “Yesterday... when you spoke about your father-”

Lezura sighed. “I was hoping you would forget it,” she said in an irritated and tired voice.

“I couldn’t,” Joey said. “I couldn’t stop thinking about you and how you looked when I asked you about him. I was hoping you would talk to me about it.”

“Joey, please understand that there are things that happened in my life that I do not want to talk about.”

“I’m not trying to stick my nose in your business, Lezura; it’s just that...I kind of got a little worried about you.”

“And I thank you for taking my wellbeing into concern, Joey. But still, I do not wish to speak about myself. It is not something I like to do with other people.”

Joey found himself not accepting that answer. “But it’s not like I’m a stranger...I thought we were...well...*friends*. You know things about me that the other people here don’t!”

Lezura got fed up and got out of her seat. She said, “Look, Joey, I do consider us as friends, but we are not close. Not as how Marina and I are.”

Joey took offense and flew off the bed, the sting of his pains lessened by the juice. “So what?” he said. “What are you saying, I can tell you personal things about me and you can’t do the same? What kind of a shit is that?”

Lezura said with her eyes glistening and her voice trembling, “Because it hurts to talk about it Joey! Just as how it hurts you to remember, it hurts me as well!”

Joey had to shut up when he saw a tear roll down Lezura’s face. He looked into himself and asked what he had just done. Lezura sat back in her chair. The ravaging thoughts were seeping their way up to the surface of her mind. They ripped her apart and brought her to streaming tears. She held her face in a hand and wept.

She didn’t want the Rakai to see her weak, but she couldn’t control her emotions.

Standing there, looking like an idiot, the Human cursed himself and hung down his head. He had brought his foolish behavior to this world. Now he saw the consequences of how he dealt with others.

So often had he used his life as an excuse to get away with the things he did. Now he could not escape what he had done to Lezura.

What would they all think if they saw the Rakai making a beautiful young woman cry? Was this really the person they asked to save an entire solar system; a complete average idiot?

*No*, he thought. *I can't be this person anymore.*

With what little dignity he had left he walked over to Lezura and knelt before her. She acknowledged his presence; lifting her head and looking at him with her glistening pink eyes. She snorted once and sat up, wondering what he was about to do.

"Lezura I'm sorry," Joey managed to say. "I didn't mean to make you upset. I just wanted to help you. That's all I wanted. I always thought that the worst things only happened to me; I never once thought of anyone else. So that's why I didn't think that you would end up like this when I pushed you. Whatever happened to you, I want you to know that I'm sorry, and that you can trust me as much as you can trust Marina."

Lezura wiped her eyes and said, "That was a very average apology coming from the Rakai." She allowed herself a smile afterwards.

Joey laughed at himself as well with a snort. "Yeah, it's the first time I've actually apologized to anyone in years."

"But I do appreciate it," Lezura took his hand into hers, "thank you."

Joey thought of changing her mood by asking, "So, why don't you be a good little servant girl and go and get me a sandwich!"

Lezura pushed Joey's head away playfully. "You wish you had such a privilege," she laughed.

There was a loud thunderous sound that made the foundation of the building shake. Lezura's ears immediately swiveled up and she sprang out of her seat.

"What the hell was that?" Joey asked in a frantic voice as he looked around in the room, finally laying his stare on Lezura for a possible explanation. Her posture was rigid and tense; as if preparing to take a blow.

Then there was the sound of screaming from outside. He couldn't tell what the words were, only that the voices were hysterical.

"Lezura what's happening?" Joey asked her once more, but before she could answer there was a knock on the door. It pushed open.

A black haired man pushed his head into the room, surprised to see Lezura inside with the Rakai, but he quickly got to the matter at hand.

"Quickly, to the armory!" and that was all he said before leaving down stairs. His footsteps echoed with the running pace of the others in the building.

“Come, Joey!” Lezura said, and headed for the door.

Joey’s voice stopped her, “Lezura what the hell’s going on?” then one thought came to mind. “Is...is it the Orderrans?”

“No,” said Lezura. “It is Barakies!”

“What the hell are Barakies?” Joey asked Lezura as they hurried down the stairs and onto the second floor with the others.

“They are monsters from another dimension,” she said.

Joey said, “There’re monsters here?”

“We do not have any time for talking, Joey!” Lezura said roughly. “We must get ready for battle!”

*Battle?* Joey thought. It was enough that he had to fight Karit and train with Halirit today; but *monsters?*”

They made a brief stop at Lezura’s room before going any further. She was moving ahead of him and reached inside before he did. By the time he got to the door Lezura already emerged with her goggles and a pistol she holstered on her waist.

The doors of the armory were splayed wide open. Nycarmans were running inside in packs; later emerging wearing their Nycarman battle armor. In one hand they had a two feet long saber; with wave like patterns on the silver steel of the blade, and a wooden handle with a short piece of red cloth hanging from the back. He noted that they were also wearing something looking like an earmuff over their ears. They were made from wood with a flexible center and had a silver rim at the muffs.

Joey wondered as to the purpose of this instrument. *Could these guys really goanna be listening to music?*

As they came to the door Joey saw Dunit and Telkit putting on the final parts of their armor. Dunit finished, and looked up to see Joey and Lezura.

“Are you ready for your first taste of real combat, Rakai?” Dunit said with a calm expression, even his voice was still calm despite the commotion outside.

Joey thought about what kind of horrors were outside. He straightened his body and spoke in a very shaky voice, “I’m as ready as I’ll ever be!”

“Then hurry up and get suited!” Telkit said. “We will meet you outside with the others!”

Lezura lead Joey into the large room. The room was lit by six lamps along with what light remained of the dying evening’s sun.



Walk space in the room was limited, as body armor was hung up on stands everywhere. The swords were laid in large numbers on bordered tables that slanted from the walls in the room. There was no indication of personal ownership of the armor and swords. A Nycarman simply grabbed the nearest suit and put it on. (Only the wyassies had their personal armor; which was a yellow-orange color and had red hair-like fibers hanging off the back.).

Lezura was able to suit up in less than three minutes. She looked across at Joey; who after successfully putting on the heavy chainmail over the Atmos suit struggled to put on the vest. Lezura sighed in irritation and went over to help. After she patted the vest down on him she strapped on the pads around his forearms and shins. Joey was already wearing a helmet, so he needed only the weapons.

Lezura went over to one of the tables and took up a sword. She went over to Joey and placed it in his hands. "This is an Ixian sword called a ve'ran," she said to him. "Always run with it pointing behind you, or else you might run and fall on it if it points in front of you and kill yourself."

"Got it," said the Human, wincing at the thought of the ve'ran piercing his eye.

She gave him a dagger and a silver shield with the crest of a mynamather to top it off. He put the dagger in a holster on his abdomen and the shield on his back.

He noted that Lezura only took up a shield and a dagger.

"That's all you're carrying?" Joey said.

"That is all I need!" Lezura said.

The sound of the cladding of the metallic plates on the armor and the almost unison of the running footsteps rang in Joey's ears. Though his armor was heavy, and felt like he was carrying the weight of a small child, it fitted him almost perfectly. (That was the elastic material stretched to accompany his size). He looked across at Lezura, who appeared to have no trouble moving under the weight of her armor. He could even see her curves and her breasts to give the heavy metal she wore a feminine look.

They followed the rest of the Tyhunies out the central front door where they saw the whole community; Tyhunies and Bloodliners, wearing body armor and clustered underneath a giant slash of glowing red in the sky.

Joey looked up at the glowing streak. He looked around him at the Nycarmans. He spotted the wyassies in the center of the cluster, along with the headman. He weaved his way through the crowd.

Joey came to Telkit's side. "What's that in the sky?" he said.

Telkit spoke slowly, with his gaze kept steady on the huge rip, "That, child, is a rip in the fabric of our universe. That red line in the sky is a portal to another world."

Joey remembered something Lezura told him when he first got here. "Is that how I came here?"

Telkit noted how the question had no relevance to the situation here, yet still provided an answer out of manners. "Yes, it was."

Joey looked around him once more, and then looked back at Telkit.

"What are we all standing around here for? Where're the Barakies?"

"We are waiting for the reapers to seal that portal. If they fail; then we will have to fight the Barakies that come through."

There was another thunderous roar as the rip grew larger. Joey ducked when he heard the sound and covered his ears when pain flashed in his ears. The Nycarmans were not in the least bit moved by the sound, their earmuffs effectively decreasing the intensity of the explosion above.

Soon small circular portals opened around the large rip, and out flew twenty dimension reapers.

They were flying on large, pink structures that looked like tiles. They went in front of the rift and unleashed a kind of purple energy in many long whips from their hands. The whips traveled to the edge of the rift like snakes and started the process of stitching the rift close. They crisscrossed from one side to the other until a network of fibers was formed.

How it was being done made Joey smiled with amusement and fascination, completely ignoring the danger he and the others were facing.

But the rift was not closing that easily. With another thunderous roar the rift expanded again, stretching the threads and loosening them across the rift. But the reapers still continued to stitch. The threads glowed more intensely as the reapers applied more pressure. Still, the rift resisted the contraction of the whips as if it had a mind of its own.

At this point, Joey was swiveling his finger in one ear in an attempt to open the canal so he could hear properly again. Eventually normal hearing returned.

Without warning the rift expanded exponentially, tearing the threads which immediately vaporized. The force sent the reapers flying back from

the rift. They quickly regroup and floated in front of the now portal. The tiles didn't move an inch from beneath their feet.

"What happened?" Joey said.

Telkit was silent for three seconds before he finally answered. "The reapers failed!"

A shot of adrenaline burst through the Human's body. The crowd dispersed, raising their swords and spears.

Lezura weaved through those in front of her and held onto Joey's hand. He turned to look at her.

"Get ready, Joey," she said.

"Lezura," Murbella looked across at them and called, "do not leave the Rakai's side-no matter what happens!"

Lezura said, "Understood!"

In their hands the reapers generated their strange energy until they formed weapons. It was a rifle with a white segmented body, black back and handle and a wide barrel. Equipped on the top was a holographic scope.

"Get ready," one of the reapers said to the others in a hoarse voice of unknown language. "Send back whatever comes through that portal!"

A flying beast burst through the portal. Its body was humanoid and feminine in shape. On its back were wings that looked like the cross between a bat's and a butterfly's, made of green membranes.

"Holy shit, it's a monster bird!" Joey screamed.

The reapers flew out of the way of its large black grasping talons. Three of the reapers flew after the creature. It tried its best to avoid being caught but the reapers out maneuvered it and caught up to it. The reapers shot stun beams at its wings until the green membranes tore apart. With a scream the Baraki swatted one of the reapers away before it went hurdling towards the ground.

But the reaper recovered from the blow, and she and the others dove after it. Before it could reach the ground they all held onto its legs and had it suspended in the air. A reaper flew under the squirming Baraki. In her hands the reaper materialized a silver handled scythe with a golden blade and ripped open a portal in thin air. On the blade were the words engraved in a language like scribbles with line going through them "Property of the Reaper Corporation; if found, please give a shake and a squeeze and a reaper will soon arrive for it. Don't keep it, we will find you!"

The Baraki pleaded for her life...in English "Please, you cannot send me back there! We are being killed! Please!"

The other reapers let go of the creature and let it fall in. the portal subsequently closed.

“Is it over already?” said Joey.

More of the flying creatures burst through the portal. The Barakies saw the reapers and instantly made towards the ground.

“Fly as fast as you can, sisters,” the Baraki leading the rest said. “Do whatever it takes to survive!”

The reapers caught up to them, and without any other choice the Barakies engaged the reapers in battle. The creatures; called *harpy* Barakies, scratched at the reapers with their claws and bit at them. The reapers stunned them and threw them into portals.

A stunned harpy fell towards ground. The Nycarmans scattered further and watched as the creature slammed to the ground. Joey was the one to first creep closer to it. Lezura was still close at his side.

“Do not get too close,” Lezura said to him.

“I’m not stupid Lezura,” Joey said. “I won’t let it get me. I just want to see if it is dead.”

Other Nycarmans closed in to inspect the corpse. It lay on its back with its feet and wings splayed across the ground. Red blood streamed from the wounds it received. Joey raised his sword and poked it. The others kept watch with their swords ready to swing at any response the creature made.

On closer inspection by Joey, the harpy looked eerily Human. Its face was definitely Human shaped, but there were lines running along over the eyes from the forehead to the chin. Its hair was a sliver color, its eyebrow made from bright blue feathers and the nose small. Menacing claws were at the end of its fingers and toes. It was definitely female, as her breasts bulged beneath a strip of cloth across her chest. And there were her two black horns on her forehead, a common trait of all Barakies.

But the most striking thing that Lezura had noticed was that there was jewelry around her neck, wrist and ankles. Never has she seen one up close to have noticed such things.

*Monsters do not adorn themselves with well-crafted jewelry.*

One of Joey’s pokes hit a bundle of nerves in the harpy’s body. Its wings fluttered up and it made a quick cry. Its first instinct was to turn and bite the closest thing to it. The startled Joey instinctively pushed Lezura behind him.

A Nycarman woman plunged her spear grotesquely into the harpy’s chest, the sound of breaking ribs rattled in Joey’s ears.

The harpy's pupils dilated, her mouth gaped and she coughed up blood. She lied back down, silent.

Joey was expecting the death of the Baraki to be relieving, but he didn't feel that way. It felt too much like someone, a person, had just been murdered before his eye. His body couldn't move.

*Shit!* He thought. *What the hell's this feeling?*

There was an incredible shriek coming from the sky. They all looked up to see the reapers chasing seven harpies down towards the ground.

"Raise your spears!" Halit shouted.

"Shoot them down!" Murbella added.

On command honoibursts and arrows ascended into the air.

The harpy closest to the Nycarmans' body was torn up by the honoibursts. She landed on the spears of the Bloodliners. They all braced upward to ensure that spear went all the way into its body. With a dying scream the harpy lay dead on top of the spears. Another harpy was shot down. It landed on the spears, but it still tried to squirm off. The Nycarmans below twisted their spears and pushed up. Blood streamed down onto their hands. The harpy stopped squirming.

Joey's breathing intensified at the sight of more harpies dying.

"Come Joey!" Lezura ordered, pulling him by the arm from the other Nycarmans.

The rest of the harpies diverted their flight from the Nycarmans back up into the air; right in the path of the reapers. The reapers fired, the free handed ones catching the stunned harpies and throwing them back into their world.

Further up in the sky the rest of the reapers were stitching the portal close. After several minutes and much effort they were able to stitch it flat. The red line slowly vanished into thin air.

The remaining six Harpies flew onto the ground and confronted the Nycarmans.

The three wyassies easily killed one of the harpies; Telkit and Dunit distracting it from the front while Murbella shot out a fairly large honoiburst that tore apart the creature.

Halit, Mulena, Marina and two other Bloodliners were constantly dodging a harpy's sweeping, claw tipped wings and thrusting talons. Halit sidestepped the clawed leg and slashed at it. The harpy quickly flew up into the air and kicked him down on to his back. As the others came to his aid the harpy's wing membranes began to glitter. She flapped her wings

towards the Nycarmans and released the sparkling dust. The bare faces of the Nycarmans itched and burnt when the *scales* made contact.

They wildly tried to brush off the burning scales. One of the Nycarmans got caught in the eyes by the scales and was blind for a few seconds.

The burning had soon stopped, but it gave the harpy enough time swoop down and kick down Halirit. She kicked away his shield, reached and took off his helmet. She stood over him with her silver ponytail over her chest. Halit struggled to free his hands beneath her feet.

“Squirm all you want you wretch,” the harpy said with her dreadful smile of sharp teeth and eyes of blazing orange. She knelt over him and sunk her claws in his cheek until blood ran from his face.

Mulena knocked the creature off him with a honoiburst. Marina sent it further with another. The harpy cried in pain as she tried to regain her footing. But the two Bloodliners finished her off with their ve’rans

Joey yelled, duck and rolled out of the way of the swooping creature. He sprang up and swung his ve’ran wildly the moment the harpy came close.

There were two explosion, and then two red holes in the dark skinned harpy’s head. The harpy fell on her face. Lezura came up behind it with her narrow barreled, sliver colored pistol aimed at its head. She could detect the life force from the harpy slowly fading away. And there was not anyone known to survive two close range headshots from a lance-pistol.

“Are you all right?” she asked Joey.

Joey shouted, “Duck!” and he pushed her out of the way of the incoming, airborne harpy. He raised his hand and released a massive honoiburst. It tore the flying harpy apart in an explosion of blue light. Everyone ducked and covered their heads with their shields as pieces of harpy sprayed all over.

After that Joey paused, realizing he had just taken the life of another being. He didn’t know what to think; he still felt that the harpies were more of people than monsters.

“Joey!” Lezura dove with him onto the ground, just beneath the scraping talons of an enraged harpy. Lezura fell on top of Joey. Lezura rose up, still sitting on top of him. “Pay attention you moron!” Lezura blurted in Joey’s face.

Joey stared at her with blank eyes.

Another harpy swooped after Lezura. She lay fat against Joey’s chest, rolled off and brought her weapon up to align it with the harpy moving in the air. Lezura fired. The harpy performed some incredible acrobatics and

avoided all the shots. The harpy landed before Lezura and charged. She brought her gun up to shoot but the harpy twisted its body and knocked the gun away with a wing, then followed up with a kick that knocked the air out of Lezura and gashed sparks against the steel plates of her armor.

Lezura rolled over and onto her feet with her knife drawn. The light skinned harpy took a swing at Lezura's face, missed, then took another swing and missed again. In frustration the beast lunged at the Nycarman. Lezura dove out of the way and rolled onto her feet a few feet behind the harpy. The harpy spun with a clawed hand and plucked off one of the steel plate and exposed Lezura's chainmail covered breasts.

Using her elbow Lezura swatted away the harpy's oncoming hand, kicked out at the harpy's knee and bringing down on one knee. With grace and precision that seemed impossible to achieve in a situation like this, Lezura slashed the harpy's jugular with the knife, slashed her throat and ran the blade up into her abdomen. The harpy fell with blood spurting from her neck. Air bubbles were formed in the blood in her mouth as she gasped for air.

Lezura cleaned off her knife and sheathed it. She reached for her fallen pistol and went over to the Human.

Joey was sitting on his butt, holding his throbbing hand that released the honoiburst.

Lezura rushed over to him and helped him to his feet. Lezura and Joey looked around to see that all the harpies have died and were being tossed into portals by the reapers. Even the harpy that exploded; the reapers gathered the pieces of her from all around. They even used their energy to pull their spilt blood into a ball and consume it, erasing every shred of the harpies' existence from this planet.

The wyassies knelt down to pray, thanking Kinu for preserving their lives during the battle. The rest of the Tyhunies immediately joined them in the short prayer.

The reapers turned their attention to the Nycarmans. Those that were wounded went to them and were healed of their injuries. Those who had their children hiding in their homes quickly went inside to check up on them. They were frightened, but were all safe.

Lezura brought Joey to a nearby reaper. He turned around and saw the Human. He quickly readied his scythe to rip open a portal and spoke in English; "What are you doing here in this world?" he said so roughly that Joey jerked back.

Joey looked on helplessly and frightened at the large figure with its wonderful face of stars and a moon.

“Wait,” Lezura said. “This Human was permitted to enter this dimension by the reaper Terriak.”

Joey looked from the reaper to Lezura. “What’s going on?”

Lezura turned to him and said, “Dimension reapers are responsible for preventing what exists in other dimension from crossing over to other ones. By universal law you are not supposed to be on this planet because you did not come here using space travel.” She turned back to the reaper. “But our people’s history says that this Human is the Rakai; who is to aid fight a war. I was allowed to enter into his world and retrieve him with the permission of one of your own.”

“And how did you enter the dimensional tunnel, Nycarman?”

“With the aid of Donnowarru,” a voice replied from behind the reaper. Lezura recognized it; and sure enough there was Terriak floating towards them. He came to a stop beside the reaper and gazed at Joey with a little smile behind his mask. He turned to the reaper beside him. “She is right, Yonnoik. It was I who gave her permission to enter the realm of Earth and retrieve this Human.”

“And you are prepared to accept responsibility for any wrong this Human does to destabilize this world, Terriak?” Yonnoik said, looking intently at Terriak for an answer. “You know very well what happens to Humans that use honoi energy, Terriak! Yet you have allowed one to enter this world and gain access to its power! And does the Grand Reaper even know of what you have done? You know that Humans are especially not allowed on other worlds, Terriak! And they are especially not allowed to use their honoi energy!”

“I was just about to tell our boss,” Terriak lied, “but as you can see, we ran into a bit of trouble with theses harpies.”

Terriak knew that Yonnoik knew he was lying. But Yonnoik knew that was how Terriak was. Terriak understood that Yonnoik would have to tell the Grand Reaper the moment they all returned back to the rift. But Terriak was not in the least bit concerned. Even though there was a feeling deep down inside him that wanted to make him worry, he could not. He knew why he did this—they would not understand. No one would.

Lezura had picked up on a point in the discussion the two reapers were having. *Why can Humans not use their honoi energy?* She thought. *Why? What will happen to them?*



She thought about asking the reapers why this was so, but she doubted she would have gotten an answer. It was a matter concerning Humans, so they would most likely not tell a Nycarman.

Joey, however, was not paying much attention to what they were saying. He was more preoccupied at looking at the ghostly figures and the awe of their presence.

“Very well then,” Yonnoik said. He got closer to Joey and pulled the harpy blood off his body. He did the same to Lezura.

After Yonnoik was finished Terriak spoke, “So how is this Human fitting in, Nycarman?” he said to Lezura.

“I’m doing fine,” Joey answered, curious as to why the reaper asked. Terriak had spoken in Nycarman, but the translator in Joey’s ear enabled him to understand.

“Oh, you are,” remarked Terriak.

“My honoi teacher says I have a lot of power, but I just need to learn to control it. I even mastered the honoiburst in one try.”

Terriak’s tone went grim. “Is that so?”

Terriak was silent for nearly ten seconds. His thoughts went upon what the Rakai said. ‘He has a lot of honoi energy.’ *Which means that the process will take less time*, he thought, *this is not good*. Terriak dared not to make a remark about the situation at hand. He would have to leave, and indeed would have to speak with the Grand Reaper.

“Good luck to you, Rakai.” Terriak finally said.

Joey nodded in response. And with that Terriak and the other reapers flew into the air in a group. The one at the front slashed open a portal and they all flew inside in a single file.

When it closed Joey stood looking up into the sky. The portal had vanished, now only the colors of the sunset and bits and pieces of clouds were all that was there.

The Nycarmans were quickly coming out of the war state of mind and returning to their normal lives. Already there was the laughter of children, companions running jokes with each other and people getting back to their jobs.

Murbella walked up to Joey’s side. Her movements indicating she was exhausted from the brief conflict. But her voice still had its usual intensity.

“Are you fine, child?” she said.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” Joey answered without shifting his gaze from the clouds. “Does this kind of thing happen often?” Joey looked around, observing

how relaxed everyone now seemed. “It looks to me that this kind a thing’s regular.”

“There is no specific time when there are dimensional rifts,” Murbella replied. “But on average it may take place up to eleven times in the four hundred and twenty days of the year on this world.”

“So, this is natural on this planet?”

“No,” she said. “This all happened ninety six years ago. It was common through the ages in every nation, and on almost all of the other known planets to send convicted prisoners to another dimension. This place is called by many names, but the reapers named this world Wuharah. The reapers allowed planets to send murderers who were sentence to death to Wuharah in order for aliens to not engage in the activity of the killing of sapient beings. Every planet had a portal that linked to Wuharah. It was those many years ago that the incident occurred. On this planet, the Faleetian government was about to send a racial murderer of Raizean to Wuharah. But when the rift was open it instead lead to the world of Deton; the home of the Barakies.”

“And ever since, this kind a shit has been taking place,” Joey assumed.

Murbella replied with a nod.

“So what kind of a world is Deton and Wuharah?” said the Human, the unsettling feeling of killing a Baraki being replaced by his curiosity.

“We do not know. No one who has been to Wuharah or Deton has ever returned. The reapers made sure of this in order to not cause anyone to abuse the use of the rift for illegal travelling.”

Joey sighed loudly and hung his head. He looked up back into the sky that has now darkened, marking the approach of the night. “So not only do I have to worry about the Orderrans, I also have to worry about Barakies,” he said.

Murbella could sense that the boy was thinking very hard. She placed a gentle hand on his shoulder. “I wish that we could have fought this war without having to bring you into it, my dear child.”

Joey touched his suit where he thought the key was, and looked at Murbella. He smiled. “You don’t have to be sorry about that,” he said to her, and then he smiled wider to show his teeth. “If you hadn’t brought me here I wouldn’t have seen this all of this cool shit!”

Murbella looked at him in disbelief. So did Lezura, Halirit, Mulena and the other wyassies who had overheard Joey.

The ghastly bird robot finished recording the battle between the Human and the Barakies. It was peeping from behind a lelam tree not too far from the entrance to the Ixian village. With sufficient information on how the new alien looked, fought and used honoi energy, the robot could now report back to base with valuable data.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Lezura didn't let the brief conflict with the Barakies interfere with her class with Joey. They immediately started Joey's Naasi language class when they went back to his room.

The first few minutes were difficult for the Human. He couldn't properly focus, because the thought of taking the life of that Baraki was too heavy on his mind.

"Why does it bother you?" Lezura said when Joey told her about it.

"I can't really explain it," Joey said. "Maybe it's because I never actually killed anyone before."

"Do you have regrets about taking the lives of those beings?" Lezura said.

Joey leaned back in his chair, folded his arms and looked up in the ceiling. He pulled himself from his thoughts and said, "I kind a got the feeling that I was goanna have to kill people when I signed up for this mission." His tone was slowly hitting against the sandy shores of sorrow. "But I never knew how to come to grasps with doing something like that." He looked at Lezura with a steady gaze. "I know in my heart that I killed that Baraki to protect you, Lezura, and the Rakai should probably feel proud about that. But..." Joey shook his head "...by *I* feel like a murdered someone."

Lezura tried to speak as easily as she could. "Why do you think that? Is it because the Barakies look like us-in terms of sapient design? Or is it because you fear taking a life...because it reminds you of your parents' death?"

Joey eyes birthed and intensity Lezura had never seen. Joey said, "I'm not a murderer like those men, Lezura! And I don't want to go around killing people when I don't have to!"

"You are not a murderer, Joey," Lezura said. "You killed that Baraki in self-defense."

Joey got frustrated with a topic that had been on his mind. He forward and unfolded his arms. "But why Baraki come her through the rift? What do they want? What do they usually do when they come here?"

Lezura sat back in her chair and crossed her legs. Shaking her head, Lezura said, "To tell the truth, Joey, I do not know. Those creatures just come through the rift, and just...run! That is all we ever see them do. They just start running; and attack anyone that tries to stop them."

Joey leaned back in his chair and sighed. “I don’t know Lezura, I don’t know. I don’t know if I can just get up and say I’m gonna kill someone. To me...those Barakies look too much like people for me just get up and kill.”

Lezura understood Joey’s point, but nonetheless, she had to bring him to a topic that the Rakai had to be familiar with from now. “But if that is the case, Joey, then what will you do when you encounter your enemies? What will you do when lives are at stake and the Rakai has to do something drastic-kill! What will you do Joey?”

Joey snapped, “I don’t fucking know, okay!” Joey rocked back and forth slightly in the chair. He shook his head and cried tears. “I don’t know...but I don’t wanna be a murderer.” Joey crying turned his voice into a whimper. “They kill people’s parents, Lezura...they kill people’s-”

Lezura just held Joey’s head and put in her lap. Joey wrapped his arms around her waist and silently cried there. Lezura couldn’t bear to see Joey like this. There was enough crying for tonight.

Lezura shook her head. *How ironic*, she thought.

Lezura wasn’t unhappy with herself, but with all of this.

*This damn war!* She thought. *Why could it not have happened somewhere else? Why here? Why now? Why when I met someone like Joey? Why?*

Lezura kissed Joey’s head, and patted him gently on his back. “Do not worry, Joey,” Lezura whispered to him. “I will not leave you. I already told you last night. I will not leave your side.”

Lezura wasn’t expecting to hear Joey’s voice, but the boy said like a whisper, “You promise?”

Lezura looked at him long and hard. “I promise, Joey.”

The following day, after a good night’s rest from his language class with the ever more appealing Lezura, Joey was fit like a fiddle for his honoi class with Mulena.

First on the list was the revision of the honoiburst. All the necessary test obstacles were prepared in the field; the ring on the stump and the smooth, round stones as the targets on the other stump behind the first. But this ring was way smaller, meaning that Joey would have to practice accuracy in today’s lesson.

After nearly an hour of disgruntled shouts and snaps at misses Joey made, things started to pick up as they usually did. With focus, calm nerves, and a

few whacks in the head from Mulena for him to stop swearing so much, Joey was making progress.

The last few times Joey shot honoi through the small ring were quite smooth. The stones were knocked clean off into the air.

“Phew!” Joey said. He fell on the grass and flashed his aching hands. “I know what you mean now by using too much honoi, teach; my head feels a little woozy!”

Mulena knelt beside Joey and gave him some sweets to eat from a jar. Attempting to speak while chewing a mouthful of sugary food Joey, pulled his mask back over his face and said, “So, Mulena, what’s this honoibeam we’re supposed to be doing today?”

Mulena said, “It is basically just honoi you release in the form of a destructive beam.”

Joey nodded at the word “destructive”.

Mulena added, “But, unlike the honoiburst, the honoibeam requires more honoi, and that honoi has to be maintained in order to form a beam.” Mulena decided a demonstration was in order. She got up. “Let me show you.”

Joey got up and watched her with his arms folded. Mulena considered a perfect target. She spotted a lelam tree to the right of the field and gestured for Joey to follow her to it. Once they reached there, Mulena raised her hand at the tree.

Mulena said, “Unlike the honoiburst which is designed for explosive power, the honoibeam is designed for *piercing* power. It also uses accuracy as its source of power as well.”

Mulena built up honoi behind in wrist. “You build up honoi in your wrist,” she said, “but you also follow up by packing more honoi behind it to increase the amount that will be released. So in truth, it is actually your entire forearm that has to store and release the honoi.”

Joey nodded. “Okay.”

Mulena fired a glowing, thin beam that whizzed through the air with a faint electrical sizzle. In a flash it popped through the lelam tree’s trunk, leaving a neat hole all the way through that had honoi smoking out of it.

Joey nodded and smiled. “Now that’s what I’m talking about!” He applauded Mulena

Mulena dropped her hand and patted it against her thigh. Joey saw what she was doing and stared at her with confusion.

“Wait,” he said, “teach, how comes that hurt you?”

Mulena looked at Joey with a wan smile and said, “You see, Rakai, the more compact the honoi beam, the more power it has, and the more the recoil in the form of burn. Our bodies are still of flesh, even with the honoi flowing inside us. Plus I am old!” Mulena touched Joey’s shoulder. “Joey, you will soon find out that some honoi techniques, if you are not ready to use them, may have terrible side effects...including death.”

“Shit...” Joey droned. “So...I guess there’re only a few things that you can teach me now?”

“Honoiburst, honoibeam and honoisensory,” Mulena said. “These are the three techniques that you will learn for now. We could teach you more, but we do not intend to keep you here for too long. The world needs you.”

Joey nodded.

“Well then, Rakai,” Mulena said on a steadier note, “Tell me how to prepare a proper honoibeam?”

Joey felt as if he could even show her how to do a back flip! He boastfully went and lifted his hand at the same lelam tree, but aim under the hole Mulena made.

*If I could the honoiburst on one try, Joey thought, why not this one too?*

Joey said, “You just build up some honoi in your arm at let it loose!”

Honoi popped out of his hand with a nasty fart sound and a smoky stream that dropped towards to the ground.

“What the—”

Joey tried again, and instead of the beam, a honoiburst fired from his hand with honoi smoking like the exhaust vent from a car. The honoiburst missed the lelam tree and went further into the forest.

Joey fired again and this time a plume of smoky honoi shrouded himself and Mulena. Joey felt the back of his head throb and he winched and crouched.

“Dammit!” Joey growled. “This shit’s harder than I thought!”

Concerned for Joey’s health, Mulena said, “Take a break before you attempt this any further, Joey. Come and sit down with me.”

Joey stretched out flat on the mat beside Mulena. Joey folded his arms behind his head and said, “How long do you think it will take for me to get this thing right?”

Mulena said, “It could take days; three days at the least.”

Joey hissed disapprovingly through his teeth.

Mulena chuckled. “Looks like the Rakai met upon a technique he cannot just learn and whisk away.”

“Don’t laugh Mulena,” Joey said grumpily. “It’s goanna look stupid that I can’t fire one damn *beam*.”

“The gods never created the universe in one day, Joey,” said Mulena.

“That’s because they never had anyone pressuring them to do it,” said Joey.

Mulena seemed surprised. She gestured to herself. “Are you saying that I am pressuring you, Rakai?”

Joey eyed Mulena and pointed at her. “Don’t use that defenseless old lady tone with me, Mulena,” Joey said, “you might not be kicking my ass like Halirit, but I know you’re pissed when I don’t get things right.”

Mulena threw her hands in the air and laugh. “Oh, Joey Sadowski,” she said, “we only want the best for you!”

Joey looked up at the moons in the sky. “I know,” he said. He looked back at Mulena. “How long do you folks plan on having me here?”

“I do not think the wyassies want to let you stay over twenty days,” said Mulena with a thoughtful expression. “But if you learn all the techniques before that time, you could possibly be leaving earlier.”

“Aren’t you guys goanna miss me?” Joey asked with an unreadable expression.

Mulena lay beside Joey and rested her hands on her abdomen. “It depends on if we have fostered that much fondness of you. But in the end, you cannot stay here. But do not worry, Joey, we will make sure you leave here with happy memories to cherish throughout the rest of your days. And we will give you a little pocket money too!”

“You guys got money?” Joey said.

“Our community is not completely cut off from the rest of the world,” said Mulena. “There have been visitors to this place long before Lezura. Our kingdom is recognized as an independent nation, and not some stick and stone settlement of bush people. Therefore our old currency does have standing power in the rest of the world.”

“Will Lezura be coming with me?” Joey just felt like asking.

Mulena faced cracked into a wide smile.

“Why’re you laughing?” Joey said.

“Are you afraid someone else would be groping Lezura’s bottom?” Mulena sniggered.

Joey sat up so fast he seemed near breaking his back. “Who the hell told you that?”

“Marina...” Mulena laughed.



“Look, just because I made a little comment about Lezura’s butt, doesn’t mean I’m drooling over her, alright?”

Mulena raise her hands in surrender. “Fine, if you say so, Rakai!” Mulena chuckled.

Joey folded his arms and lay back down. He complained how he didn’t like Lezura like that, but that didn’t explain why his face was flushed.

After the rest they attempted the honoibeam once more, but met with the same results as before. Soon the class ended, and student and teacher said goodbye and Mulena left. Joey watched her walk off the field. When she did he turned around with the intention of walking over to one of the benches for some rest; only to see Halirit standing directly in front of him.

“Man what the f—”

Joey staggered back like a wild drunk and almost tripped over his own feet. “Dude, don’t you make noise when you walk?”

“So are you going to alert you’re enemies of your presence when you desire to kill them?” Halirit said testily.

Joey was about to complain when the statement forced him to think; looking toward the sky and scratching his helmet. He did so for nearly ten seconds.

“Let us just start the blasted class!” Halirit bellowed in frustration, startling Joey and making trip over his own feet.

Joey did better than yesterday in Halirit’s class. He managed to last seven minutes with Halirit in the first round. In the next rounds that progressed through the class, Joey went a full half an hour without rest, and even landed a few blows on Halirit. But it ended the same way it did yesterday, with Halirit beating Joey to the point where he couldn’t continue. Joey lay on the ground rubbing his bruised shoulder and left thigh. Halirit offered him a hand and helped him up.

“Some teacher you are,” Joey eyed him and remarked dryly; “beating up your student like this.”

“Would you stop complaining,” Halirit said. “When you go to war do you expect your enemies to take pity on you and just slap you in your face?”

Joey actually didn’t ever think about that. “Well...no,” was his response.

“Exactly,” his teacher said. “They will not fight you simply to just beat you up; they will fight you to kill you. In war every person should be in a frame of mind to kill. If you are not ready to do so, then you should not even be saying the word war, fight or kill. The moment you declare war upon someone, Human, be prepared to take their life. You are going to go war, Rakai, and people will want to kill you. You should be thinking the same.”

Joey’s class ended with him learning how to wield the ve’ran with quick decisive strokes. When Halirit left Joey splayed himself across the grass. Sweat formed dark blotches about his clothes and damped his hair. Soon he sprung up and went to put on his Atmos suit. He manipulated the atmospheric converter to circulate cool air inside the suit. Once that was done he allowed himself to rest.

But Joey couldn’t ease his mind so easily. The thought of the whole situation was boiling to brim of his mind. He sat forward and wondered to himself what the hell he had really done. He wondered if he had blindly walked to his death by agreeing to help these aliens.

Had he foolishly thrown his life away by the prospect of gaining recognition, fame and glory? Or had he lied to himself in believing that such things could be achieved here?

The thought of a gruesome death by the Orderrans taunted his belief in victory. That thought made his body grow nervous and his hands tremble.

*Death!* The word gnawed at his beliefs until it reached his soul. Joey held down his head in his arms, depressed, confused. His sigh was long, and carried with it the weight of the world as his body carried the weight of the planet’s gravity.

He felt a hand on his shoulder and looked up in response. The first thing he saw was two bright eyes. His eyes focused more and saw that it was Marina.

“Is something troubling you, Joey?” Marina said.

Joey looked to her ears for a translator. When he saw it he said, “No, nothing.”

Marina took her hand off him and seated herself beside him. “You cannot lie to me about your emotions,” she said. “I can sense the type of emotions you are displaying in your honoi energy.”

Joey gave her a surprised look. “You can?”

Marina smirked and nodded. “So it is better you tell me what is troubling you instead of lying.”

Joey wondered if he should share his feelings with someone who was not Lezura. He knew that Marina was a closer friend to Lezura than he was, and so thought getting closer to Marina would bring him closer to Lezura.

But before he could answer, Marina gave him a mischievous look and spoke, "What is the matter? Missing your girlfriend already?"

Joey choked. "I don't like her... like that. I consider her as a friend!" Joey said quickly. But guilt was all over his face like a bad rash. "What are you talking about?"

Marina's smile widened. "Are you sure, Joey; I mean, she looks very beautiful. And as you said," Marina pushed her head closer to Joey's, "*she has a very nice bottom!*"

Joey felt cornered. "Why're you asking me all of this, Marina?" said the Human.

"Because everyone is saying that there is some relationship between you and Lezura," Marina said without sounding as if she were playing. "And I just want to know what is really going on, so I can clear up any rumors spreading around," Marina folded her arms and said seriously, "I do not like it when these people here try to pick Lezura just because she is not a native."

Joey got very curious. "Did they?" he said with searching eyes.

"They used to," Marina said. She frowned, "especially that one Karit!"

Upon hearing that Karit used to pick on Lezura Joey's fists clench tightly as if he had Karit's neck in them. "He did, huh?"

Marina smiled. "But he stopped it when Murbella spoke to his father about it." She laughed giggled. "I wish you were here when it happened!"

"What happened that day?" Joey now leaned closer to Marina.

"One day Karit insulted Lezura to the point where she almost cried. When Murbella heard about it she ran out of the temple straight through the village and barged into Karit's house, demanding to know where he was. Telkit and Dunit were even running after her. Karit was lucky he was out in the forest with his friends; Murbella saw his father instead and warned him that she would slap his son if he did not leave Lezura alone." Marina began to laugh out of control, exposing every single tooth in her wide mouth and her yellow gums. Joey was so excited that his legs were folded in the chair and rocking back and forth. "Then Karit's mother came into the argument and was cursing Murbella. Her husband had to pull her away from Murbella, and Dunit and Telkit had to pull Murbella out of the house. After

that she had to do three straight days of solitary praying to relieve herself of the bad energy inside her.”

Joey flew out of his seat and rolled in the grass in laughter. Marina was constantly trying to shush him so other people wouldn't hear.

Joey stopped on his belly. “*Man!* I always had a feeling that Murbella was a badass!” he said as he got to his feet.

After the humor of the discussion had gone Marina got back to their previous topic.

“You have not given me an answer as yet, Rakai,” she said.

“For what?” Joey said.

“Do you have strong feelings for Lezura?”

Joey felt like he couldn't hide it from everyone much longer, especially from Marina; who was so pressing. “I think... I kind of do,” said Joey, sounding unsure with himself.

Marina wasn't about to accept that answer, and asked, “What do you mean *'kind of'*? Either you love her or you do not!”

“I'm not really sure I do, Marina. I mean; I don't think you can just fall in love with someone after two days of being with them. I do like Lezura, I'll admit that, but I'm not certain if I can say I *love* her.”

“Have you ever heard of the expression love at first sight?” Marina eyed him and asked.

“Yeah-but...”

“But nothing, Joey!” said Marina like a queen dismissing a mediocre statement from a commoner. “Either you love Lezura or you do not. Which is it?”

“I really don't know Marina! I've never been in love with anyone before!”

Marina instantly sat up in her seat and cracked a toothy smile. “Are you a virgin, Rakai?”

“I don't need to tell you that!” Joey answered with his face flushed.

“Joey I am not trying to dig deep into your private life,” Marina said seriously. “I just want to know the kind of person you are; so if it does happen that you and Lezura ever become more than just *friends* I can know you will not hurt her.”

But it was Joey who was hurt and shocked by what Marina just said. He looked at her with a scowl. “I would never hurt Lezura! I love her!”

Marina clapped her hands three times in quick succession at Joey's response. “Hah! So you do love her!”

Joey fumbled to find the words that would say he didn't. But he was already caught and decided to accept it.

He sighed and looked down on the ground. "Alright, so I do *love* her," then he looked at Marina and spoke defensively, "But there's nothing wrong with loving someone."

"I never said there was." Marina replied. "But to how you were acting when I asked you about it you made it seem as if it were."

"Well...that was because...I thought that if everyone knew I liked Lezura they would be against it."

Marina was confused. "What do you mean?"

"Well...I'm a Human, and she's a Nycarman. I thought people would look at us all weird; like we were a monkey and a purple squid!"

"Because you are from two different races," Marina remarked.

"Exactly," Joey replied, then sighed once more and rubbed his aching shoulder from where Halirit hit him. "Don't get me wrong Marina, I'm not a racist. I love all kinds of people no matter how they look. But because I am on a different planet and living in a place where the culture of the people are different; I thought that I would go against one of their laws."

Marina closes her eyes and sighed in sympathy at how Joey thought. "I know what you mean." She said in a sullen voice. Joey looked at her with keen interest.

"Pardon me for asking," Joey said, "but did something like that happen to you?"

Marina gave him a guilty look. "Yes it did; with Karit and I."

Joey's face turned into an angry frown. Joey said as if he had tasted something bitter and sour, "You...and *Karit*?"

"You might not believe this, Rakai; but Karit was not always the way he is now." Marina said. "He used to be a sweet young man. He did not mind being around Tyhunies, even though his father did not approve of it. He would even come to our temple in the mornings and spend time with us.

"And that's how you and he met?" Joey assumed.

Marina could only nod. Joey realized that she was deep in her inner emotions. But she eventually spoke. "We were so happy with each other, even the wyassies said we would make a beautiful couple."

"I find that very hard to believe," Joey remarked with his arms folded across his chest.

Marina managed to let out a laugh. "He even spoke of us getting married one day and bringing together the Bloodliners and the Tyhunies."

Joey sat up in surprise. “Whoa; he *really* sounded like a good guy. Then...what the hell happened to him?”

Marina scowled. She said, “Karit’s father did not approve of his son; the future village headman, being with a Tyhuny. So he told him that if he wanted to become village headman he would have to end the relationship with me. If he did not he would deprive Karit from the family fortune. Karit listen to his father and ended the relationship.” Marina shuffled in her seat to make herself more comfortable. “I hated him ever since; and he hated himself for it too. He took it out on the people around him, Lezura was one of them.”

“So it’s his father’s fault he’s like this,” Joey said, and was already thinking differently about Karit. “But how did this whole Tyhuny Bloodliner thing come about?”

“Originally, we were all Bloodliners,” Marina said with a happier tone. “But there was a woman named Milhena, who wanted to find out about how we Nycarmans came to exist and the meaning of existence itself. So she decided to venture out into the wider world.

“After years of travel she came back to Ixia with this new religion named Tyhunism; which is the belief in the holy trinity, that meditation is the way to obtain contact with the gods and that only the holy trinity can lead us to salvation. Nearly half of the population took it as their religion. And from there their descendants have practiced it until now.”

“I get it,” Joey said.

Marina slowly shifted her stare on him and said, “Joey...if you really love Lezura; do not let anyone or anything tear you two apart.”

“So...” and now Joey looked almost worried “...are you going to tell her?”

“I think it would be best if you told her yourself, Joey,” Marina said.

And with that Joey sighed in relief. He never had a girlfriend, and was not sure that Lezura would be willing to accept someone like him for a boyfriend. Plus it had only been three days. He thought it would be best if he gave her more time to get use to him; probably then if he told her she would be interested.

“So...what are you going to do with the rest of your day?” Marina said.

Joey thought for a brief moment, and remembered, “I promised Lafit I would let him teach me how to ride of those monster-horse things.”

“Oh, I remember.” Marina said.

“So where’s Lezura? I’d like her to come with me.”

Marina smiled and said, “So you can try to impress her?”

“That...and I want someone I know to help me,” Joey answered, knowing he was not able to hide it from Marina any more.

“She is checking on her solar panel and her Thwopter to see if they are still operational. I think she should be finished by now.”

“Then let’s go get her.”

Lezura sat in the pilot seat of the Thwopter and looked at the fuel gauge.

“Only 39% of fuel is left,” she said to herself. She leaned back in her seat and ran her fingers through her golden hair. “That will only last for a two and a half hour flight. But that will be sufficient enough for me to reach Suride town for more supplies.”

Suride Town was Lezura’s last stop before she came to Ixia. It was a city-town that was populated by Nycarmans, Yautgans, Raizean, Rapturans and Lazhinians. It was not really an enjoyable place to be either. Suride Town was a settlement where immigrant aliens to the planet lived. Most of what took place there were crimes, crimes, prostitution...and more crime.

But that wasn’t what Lezura had on her minds right now. What was bothering here was what happened last night with her and the Human.

When he asked her about her father, she reacted so emotionally that she showed a different side to her that she didn’t want Joey to see. And the worst part was that afterwards Joey cried in her lap!

*We showed too many emotions, she thought. That is not good. I am sorry Joey, but you and I cannot form a bond. Our lives are too complicated.*

Yet apart of her felt a hold onto Joey. Something about him, his background, held onto her pants like a child onto its mother and wouldn’t let go.

*Blast, Joey! She thought. Why did you have cry too? Why did you have to touch me like this?*

Like a saving grace, Lezura heard someone call to her, pulling her out of the annoying thoughts that wouldn’t give her any peace. She looked to see that it was Joey and Marina coming through the door to meet her. She got out of her seat and stood to meet them.

“How was your training today?” Lezura said to Joey.

“I’m learning this new thing called the honoibeam. It looks *so* freaking cool...but I’m having a shitload trouble learning it.” Joey stated in different emotions.

“That is a very difficult one to master,” Lezura remarked, rubbing her finger underneath her chin thoughtfully. “I am sorry, I wish I could help.”

“That’s okay,” Joey stated. “Right now I’m meeting Lafit right to learn how to ride one of those big monster-horse things.”

Lezura looked puzzled at what he said, but remembered yesterday. “Oh, you mean the mynamather?” she said.

“That’s what I just said,” Joey said, sounding a bit irritated that Lezura was slow to understand. “But let’s get something to eat first!”

Lezura and Marina looked at him amusingly.

*And he is even funny as well,* Lezura thought.



## CHAPTER TWELVE

Lezura, Joey and Marina walked down the path in the village towards the forest. Near it they saw a second large walkway that lead to a wide field near the trees bordering the forest. They got closer to the pasture where they could see mynamathers spread all across the area; grazing on the grass and bushes that grew there. Each one was tied to a short stump in the ground by a length of tightly woven vine that allowed them a reasonable distance to move without getting into the way of other mynamathers.

On their backs were little flying creatures with pink bodies, black rounded heads, two membranous wings and a small green fin on their backs. They had long tongues which they used to lick off the parasitic insects off the backs of the mynamathers. The strange birds would lick a mynamather and fly to another and begin licking there. The mynamathers didn't seem to mind; in fact they were welcoming it.

These single eyed, hole-mouthed birds were called tyhics.

There were Nycarmans tending to the animals. They were checking them for overnight injuries and pulling up bushes out of their reach to bring to feed them. The Nycarmans also removed their excrement, intending to use it as fertilizer for the plants they grew. The size of the pasture and the strong winds removed all the fous smelling odors of the animals' leavings.

There were even a few mynamather calves that stayed close to their mothers and suckled when hungry. They were not as muscular as their parents as yet, and the males hadn't grown their tusks as their fathers have. But in four years' time they will reach the size where they could hardly be an easy meal for a gufder or bieduvel.

Around the pasture was a high fence of wooden poles and crossbeams that bordered the pasture from the forest. It was high enough to prevent even a fully grown mynamather from leaping over. A few women were there with machetes chopping the wild vines that entangled themselves in the spaces of the fence. The Nycarmans also built stables near the edge of the fence. They were simple constructions of black-brown wood that made roves over wooden walls of compact posts.

The three companions came into the pasture and looked around for Lafit. The tall, wide-chested man spotted them first, and called them over. He was standing next to three mynamathers.

Joey cautiously approached him as he stared at the monsters around him.

“How are you Rakai?” Lafit said.

“I’m here so you can teach how to ride one of those monster-thingies,” he said. Lezura translated; also correcting it to mynamather.

“In that case I have a mynamather waiting right here for you,” Lafit said.

And there was a wide childish smile on Joey’s face when he saw Lafit bring one of the mynamathers closer to him. This one had a very bright red crest and was about seven feet tall at the shoulders. Its saddle and harness were made from a thick rope and a piece of wood carved into a seat. It had little pockets on its hind legs attached to its saddle; made for someone to put their foot in and climb up.

Joey slowly raised his hand to touch the creature on its snout. He tipped on his toes to reach further, feeling the wind that washed his hand each time the animal exhaled.

The mynamather dressed back as it saw the strange looking Nycarman getting closer. It made a quick husky bray and reared up on its hind legs. Joey quickly vanished, but Lafit managed to bring the animal under control very quickly.

“Did I do something wrong?” Joey asked from seven meters away.

“It is a young male that has never been ridden before,” Lafit replied. “It is natural for the males of this age to be a bit fidgety. But try talking to it while you get close.”

Joey stepped from behind the safety of the two women and approached the animal again.

“Don’t be afraid of me, pal,” Joey said in a soft voice as he went to touch its snout once more. The animal watched him cautiously, but it was more in tuned to picking up the sounds the pale Nycarman made; which distracted it a bit from the approaching man. “I’m just a little Human, that’s all.”

Joey touched its snout without it reacting in defense. Its skin felt tough like a leather bag. He rubbed its snout up to its head. The mynamather’s bioluminescent spots glowed in short episodes.

“Why is it glowing like that?” Joey said.

“It is pleased with you rubbing its snout,” Lafit said.

“It likes you,” Marina added.

“Try hopping onto its back while it is still calm,” Lafit stated.

“*Hmm*,” Lezura eyed Lafit and remarked.

Lafit saw her looking at him funny. He was confused as to why, until he remembered. He smiled helplessly at her and looked away. A pain in his groin stirred up.

Joey went around to its side and climbed up using the pockets. He fixed himself into the saddle and smiled at his accomplishment.

Lezura applauded him with soft claps.

“So what will you name it?” Lafit asked.

“I thought you said they weren’t pets,” Joey remarked with a puzzled look.

“They are not; but it needs a name so it can respond to you when you call it. So...what will you call him?”

Joey looked up with a smile of pleasure at the thought of owning his own mynamather; or monster-thing, as it was easier for him to remember. He thought of a name, and came up with one. He looked back down on the Nycarmans.

“I’m goanna call him...Redbolt,” he said.

“And who is this Redbolt, if I might ask?”

Joey was confused. “What?” he said.

Lafit realized that his method of naming the animal was not like his peoples’ own. “We give our mynamathers names that are similar to the ones our ancestors had before the new era. Was this Redbolt a member of your family?”

“Well, no. I just chose it because its sounds cool!”

Lafit shrugged and said, “Well, I guess it is your choice.”

Joey looked at Lezura and Marina. “So do you guys have a mynamather?”

“I do,” Marina said. “Why do you ask?”

“I was thinking about having a race.”

Lafit gave him a surprised look. “How can you be thinking about racing when you have not even learned how to ride the animal yet?”

“I just want to have some fun, that’s all.”

“Well if you are looking for a race, I can give you one Rakai,” a familiar voice said.

Joey instantly grimaced and clenched his fists. So did Lezura and Marina. They all slowly shifted their gaze to the right to see Karit slowly riding towards them on a mynamather that was highly decorated in ornaments. Close to Karit’s side were two of his friends, also on mynamathers, but they were less decorated as Karit’s own.

The first thing Lezura did was to look at Joey to see what he would do. He was staring at Karit; though with less intensity as expected.

“How do you even know that we are talking about a race?” Marina asked, because she was sure Karit couldn’t understand the Rakai’s language.

“I could not help but overhear Lafit mentioning a race while he was speaking to you a while ago,” Karit said smoothly.

“Actually, you could have gone and mind your own business, Karit,” Lafit said with a glare at him.

Karit knew better than to argue with an elder. “Forgive my intrusion, Lafit, but I would like the opportunity for me and the Rakai to test our skills in a way that is less violent than before.” Karit looked at the Human with a wry grin. “Would you not like to do it as well, Rakai?”

One of Karit’s friends suddenly spoke to him, “Karit, remember your father said-”

Karit quickly silenced the black haired man with a backhand slap, still keeping his gaze and smug smile on the Rakai.

“Never mind,” the man whispered glumly. He patted his cheek to get rid of the sting.

Before Joey could speak Lezura said, “I will tell you this from now Joey, I will not translate to Karit anything that would lead into a fight between the two of you.”

“I will be willing to do it for you, Rakai,” Marina told Joey. Joey looked at her and they both smirked accordingly. Then they turned their stare at Karit.

Lezura and Lafit were surprised by the sudden switch from Lezura to Marina as a translator.

“Does anyone else want to race?” Joey asked Karit with a grin.

Lezura closed her eyes and shook her head in disappointment.

Karit was pleased. “I can round up a few others who will be willing to participate,” he said, “I will be back shortly.” And Karit rode over to a few other Nycarmans and their mynamathers.

“Why can Joey not just ignore Karit?” Lezura asked in despair.

“Because they are young males, Lezura,” Lafit said to her with a reassuring smile. “It is their nature to be competitive.”

Lezura scoffed. “Always the ‘we are males’ excuse,” she remarked.

Lafit chuckled.

Karit soon came back with eight other Nycarmans on their mynamathers; six men and two women.

“I have all the competitors here, Rakai,” Karit said.

“So where’s the race goanna be?” Joey said.

Karit looked around him for a suitable place to begin. His eyes caught the forest.

*There are a lot of ferocious animals in the forest, he thought. The Rakai could get lost; or even hurt!* Karit smiled. *Perfect!*

Karit turned to the Rakai with a grin on his face and said, “How about the forest?”

Lezura marched forward to Karit. “Are you insane? It is dangerous out there for someone like him!”

“Don’t worry Lezura, I can-”

“Joey this is not the time for your foolish inner child to get ahead of himself,” she quickly cut him off. Joey hung his head and frowned. Lezura turned to Lafit. “You cannot possibly condone this, Lafit! If you do this the wyassies will hold you responsible for anything that happens to Joey!”

For a moment Lafit thought about the factual outcome. But he also thought of something else and told Lezura. “Lezura, do you not think that it would be best if the Rakai was made aware of the dangers on this planet instead of hiding it from him? Yes, it might be dangerous out there in the Yuxu forest, but is he not going to face even greater dangers in the future?”

Lezura did not have to think about it too long. She knew Lafit had a point. But she could not help but worry for the boy. “I guess you are right...” she said with reluctance in acknowledging the truth.

“We cannot protect him forever, child. Sooner or later he will have to become a man and understand these things for himself.” Lafit could clearly see that this young woman cared very much for the Human. “Look, if it makes you feel any better, I will personally see to it that no harm comes to the Rakai.”

Though Lezura didn’t know Lafit personally, she knew he was a responsible man. She decided to relinquish the protective grip she had on the Rakai and allow him to go ahead. She looked back at Joey; who for some reason looked as if he needed her approval to proceed with the race.

“I will not argue with you if you go Joey,” she said, and Joey instantly smiled. “But you all know that I will have to inform the wyassies of what has taken place.”

“No objections from me,” Lafit said.

“Me either,” Joey replied.

“Then it would seem that we have a race,” Karit confirmed with a clap of his hands. “Shall we all proceed to the forest entrance?”

Lezura told the wyassies about the race that was about to take place, and they all came to the forest entrance along with a few other Nycarmans. A group of seven Nycarmans on mynamather-back rode into the forest along the forest path into its depths to mark the finish line. These were elder Nycarmans that could take care of themselves very well against any of the native threats.

The ten riders were lined across the starter line; all wearing shirts and trousers and a wooden helmet with a cushion interior for protection from head injuries if they were to fall off their mynamathers. They also carried knives in holsters round their waists and had on a thick, wooden armor vest.

The entrance to the forest was decorated with painfully bright, purple flowers that grew at the sides near two trees. The stone tiles vanished about nine meters inside the forest. There were lankers, tyhics and other birds flying overhead with their distinct chirps and squawks. Other creatures could be heard in the depths of the forest. The path itself was a river that had dried up thousands of years ago, leaving a river bed that now sprouted short grass and a few flowers.

Everyone stood behind the riders and encourage who they wanted to win with cheers. Joey was the only person who was riding for the Tyhunies, all the rest were Bloodliners. So all the Tyhunies present cheered for him.

“I still do not see why you let him go along with something so dangerous,” Lezura said to the wyassies.

“Because, he needs the experience, Lezura,” Murbella said.

“But it has only been three days,” Lezura argued.

Murbella was getting annoyed. She gave Lezura a stern look. “Remember why he is here, child; not to make friends or enjoy your company, but to fight a war,” Murbella said.

Lezura couldn't argue with Murbella and hope to win. She submitted. “I guess I am being a bit too overprotective.”

Dunit, who was nearby, rested an assuring hand on her shoulder. Lezura looked up at him. “At least the Rakai has someone that cares about him,” He said to her. She managed to return a smile at Dunit's pleasant face. “Now why do you not go and wish him good luck.”

Lezura walked over to Joey's mynamather. Murbella looked across at Dunit.

“Why do you always do that? Threat them as if they are little children?” Murbella said to her fellow wyassy.

Dunit turned to her with a clueless look on his face. “What do you mean?”  
“You always allow Lezura and the Rakai to spend time together, though you know it can interfere with his training,” said Murbella.

“Murbella, I allow them to spend time together because they need each other,” Dunit replied calmly.

“And how can Lezura help the Rakai with his training?”

Dunit smiled and spoke, “It is not just training. Lezura and the Rakai are not Ixians. They are unfamiliar foreigners to our people; except themselves.”

“But are they not from different worlds themselves, Dunit? How could they possibly relate to each other?” Murbella questioned.

“Do you remember why Lezura came here?” he asked her; knowing Murbella, he, Telkit and Marina were the only four people that knew about Lezura’s past life.

“How could I possibly forget what that child told me, Dunit?” Murbella’s voice suddenly became cold.

“And do you remember what she told us about the Rakai’s life back on his home world?”

Murbella was beginning to understand. “I see your point, Dunit.”

“If you ignore the fact that they are aliens; you will see that they are two people from similar backgrounds. They had no parents, and were forced to live horrible lives for children of their age. Only they can understand what the other one feels. They will need each other if they are to survive in this world.”

“Now there are three kinds of predators in the forest you should keep an eye out for, Joey” Lezura was telling Joey before the race began in the next three minutes. “Gufders are four legged predators with green skin and yellow stripes. They hunt in packs.”

“All right,” Joey nodded.

“Trinnoks have bright brown skin with bioluminescent spots on their backs and four legs. They have four finger-looking hooks around the end of their snouts; the large blue finger at the top contains paralyzing venom. Never let it bite you, once it has paralyzed you it will inject digestive fluids in your body which will turn your organs into a liquid pulp, then it will suck you dry.”

Joey's face grimaced in disgust when he pictured how that creature could kill him.

"Bieduvels are the largest pack hunters in this region. They have two legs, brown skin and bright pink feathers top of their heads. If you ever see them; run! Do you hear me?"

"Loud and clear," Joey replied.

"And do you remember how Lafit told you to get your mynamather running?"

"Give it a little kick in its side and call its name. You know Lezura; you sound like some bossy, nagging wife!"

She smiled at him. "I will take that as a compliment."

The two of them were locked in a brief stare. Then Marina; who was watching them from the side spoke, "So when is the wedding?"

Lezura and Joey gave her a startled look. Joey quickly looked in front of him and Lezura said "good luck" and quickly walked back. Marina laughed at the two of them.

The race was about to begin. A male Bloodliner walked up behind the racers and raised his hand and counted down from five to one.

"I hope you can keep up, Rakai," Karit looked across at Joey and said with a cocky grin.

Joey scowled across at him, and then looked ahead at the narrowing path before him.

When the man reached one he released a loud honoiburst from his hand; and the mynamathers went off.

Joey kicked Redbolt two times (not to hurt it but enough to get it moving.) and called his name. The beast sprinted off so quickly that Joey was bouncing uncomfortably on its back. He was holding on the strap around the creature's head for dear life.

The other riders were more experienced and were getting further head of the Human. Joey struggled to balance himself on Redbolt's back. Redbolt leapt over an outgrown tree root. Upon landing Joey bounced up and landed on his crotch. His eyes widened and he made a tight yelp.

Karit was in fifth place but moving up quickly. When he looked back and saw that Joey was lagging behind he smiled in satisfaction.

*Pathetic!*



Lafit got onto his mynamather; Yasi. He told Lezura that when the Rakai was a few minutes into the race he would ride along into the forest to see how he was doing. Lafit road from the mynamather pasture and took a different route into the forest. It was a path, more densely packed with vegetation, but Yasi managed to burst through the thin outgrowing tree limbs and vines in its way.

The thundering footsteps of the mynamathers alerted every animal close to them in the forest of their presence. A few animals knew that mynamathers were only found in the open plains; and that these ones in the forest must have the purple itikrats riding on their backs. The purple itikrats were a very tasty meal for most animals; especially for the gufders. Though the purple itikrats could shoot out their blue defense mechanism, they could be easily outmaneuvered by the agile gufders.

Apart from their green skin and yellow stripes, the long-snouted, gold eyed creatures called gufders sported bright blue bristles on their backs that stemmed from the back of the head to their rump. The males of the species had the bristles on their chins and under their necks; some sort of flamboyant beard for attracting the gufder babes during the mating season.

But this wasn't the time for mating; it was a time for feasting. A pack of gufders, resting under the gloomy shade of a pihok tree, had picked up the sounds of the mynamathers. Longing for something to sink their teeth into, their nerves quickly prepared for action. They went after the mynamathers.

"Aw! Don't quit on me now, Redbolt!" Joey said to the mynamather. They had just gotten to sixth place, but Redbolt started to lose his speed.

Joey gave Redbolt one more kick in its side, it sped up with a grunt. Redbolt was now tied with the fifth place runner; a woman. Karit was already at third place. Joey looked across at the racer beside him; he could see determination in both the eyes of the rider and the mynamather.

*That's what I need! Joey thought. I have to win, I'm the Rakai. I can't let the nyassies down, I can't let Lezura down. Not her!*

"Come on Redbolt!" he shouted. And with one more kick Redbolt plowed the ground even harder with its feet and pick up speed.

*I have to win this. I have to beat Karit!*

It will be seconds until the gufders close in on the mynamathers. Once they were close they would have to single out the weakest one and try their best to bring it down; a task that could mean the lives of one of their pack members. But wild mynamathers were fierce and lived in large family groups which made them more difficult to hunt. So did gampadons, gersheeps and nossils. And a basurel would not be a large enough meal to feed a pack of this size (ten). Only a mynamather and its purple itikrat would make a substantial meal.

Joey and the woman rider beside him were battling it out to get a head of each other. Joey suddenly stood crouched on the back of Redbolt and spoke to it as if were a sentient being. "We got to win this shit Redbolt or else Lezura, Marina and the rest of the guys will think I'm just slaking off around here!"

Redbolt grunted in frustration at how its body was being pushed at its rider's command. But for some reason Joey took the grunt as an agreeing reply to his command. And as if there was some connection between Joey's will to win and the animal's instinct to run faster, Redbolt flew past the mynamather beside him.

"That's it Redbolt! That's it!" shouted the exited Human as he closed in on the fourth place racer.

The woman beside Joey was shocked nearly to death when she saw him pass her.

*My word!* She thought.

Karit looked back and saw that the Rakai was getting closer. A cold chill ran up the Nycarman's spine.

The gufders were now running alongside the mynamathers under the cover of the bushes and plants that bordered the path. Their yellow stripes breaking up the color of their green skin so they could blend in more with the vegetation. Their two gold eyes were searching for the weakest member of the pack. Their four wide nostrils sniffed strongly, savoring the scent of the meal to come. The three clawed toes on their feet gave them traction as they increased their speed to get closer to their prey.

There! They spotted it! It was the smallest mynamather in the herd; one that had a strange, pale skinned Nycarman riding on its back. Not only was the mynamather slightly smaller than the others, but the itikrat had a different skin color. It probably did not have the blue defense mechanism as the others. They found their target and attacked.

Redbolt made a sound Joey had never heard him made before; almost as if it was in pain and saying *ouch*. It went off balance for a split second, causing Joey to almost fall off.

“What’s the matter boy?” Joey asked with building concern. He looked around him and saw the problem.

“Holy shit!” he said so loudly that he made the rider next to him look across at him.

Joey saw green dogs nipping at the legs of Redbolt. Redbolt kicked out one of its hind legs at its attackers, but it missed and nearly threw him off balance again. Joey aimed at one of the creatures and shot a honoiburst at it. The guffer was struck in the shoulder. It tumbled and rolled violently, uttering low pitched doglike whimpers.

The racer beside Joey quickly raised his voice and notified everyone of what was happening around him. All the riders heard and they struggled to bring their animals to a stop. But Karit kept on riding.

*It would appear that the Rakai gotten into some trouble with the local animals*, Karit thought as he blazed to the finish line. The riders who were in front of him had already stopped and turned back to help the Rakai. When Karit saw this he smiled to himself and said, “Just what I need to win this race.”

From as far as the distance as the starters’ lines the Nycarmans there heard the Rakai shout in his language. Lezura was familiar with that curse word and knew Joey used it when something was wrong.

“Oh no, Joey is in trouble!” she said.

“We know,” Telkit replied.

Lezura spun around to him with a worried look on her face. “What should we do?”

“We are too far away to reach up to him,” Telkit said.

Then Murbella said, “We can only hope that the others are close enough to help him; or the Rakai can help himself.”

Lezura was not satisfied with that answer. She turned to Marina and gave her a look that seemed to indicate some kind of order or previously devised plan. They both left the area.

“What kind of predator do you think he has encountered?” Mulena asked.

“It would have to be a bieduvel or a gufder to make him react that way.” Halirit answered.

“You do not sound so worried, Halirit,” Dunit remarked.

“I have a feeling that when his survival skills are put to the test his fighting abilities will be more efficient,” Halirit explained.

“But is that not the case with anyone who is put in a life or death situation, Halirit?” Mulena said in a tone that dared him to come up with a suitable answer.

“I am speaking in terms of learning,” Halirit said. “If he is put in a situation where his survival is at stake; his mind will be pushed to increase the effectiveness of his senses. Things that he had trouble learning might be done quickly and easily without him thinking about it. He might even discover some untapped power he has. Is that not why we agreed to the race-to put him to the test?”

While they were there talking a mynamather blazed past the group of Nycarmans and into the forest. On its back were Lezura and Marina; wearing casual clothes, armor and pistols around their waists. Lezura had her hands tightly clutched around Marina’s waist.

“What are those girls doing?!” Murbella demanded an explanation. “Are they foolish? I thought they were told to stay here!”

Dunit laughed heartily. Telkit turned around and gave Dunit an annoyed look. “What could you possibly find to be funny at a time like this?”

“Did you really think that Lezura would listen to us and just stand here while the life of her friend is in danger?” Dunit said humorously, looking from person to person to see who would answer.

Indeed they never thought of that. They had difficulty finding the right words to respond.

Dunit shook his head slowly. “You all should have realized by now that Lezura has dedicated her feelings and attention to the Rakai in ways that might surprise you.”

They all gave Dunit a startled look and looked at each other for an answer. They still couldn’t find one.

Joey and Redbolt were forced to stop. Joey pulled out his knife and held it in a thrusting manner. Redbolt kicked at the gufders and waved its horned snout at them. The growling predators kept their distance, waiting for the right moment to attack. The other riders quickly came to his aid. A section of the path was now cramped with mynamathers, gufders and Nycarmans.

A Nycarman's head was throbbing with the amount of loud noise around.

They all shot at the gufders with bursts and beams. A gufder was struck by a thick honoibeam that bored a bloody hole in its side. It squealed and sprawled onto the ground.

A gufder leapt up at Joey and nipped at his shirt. It fell to the ground before Joey could strike it with his knife. The other gufders jumped onto Redbolt's back. Joey knocked off one of them with his elbow, but another bit Redbolt on his tail and began to pull on it. The animal ran off the path and into the dense overgrowth.

The gufders trailed after Redbolt, now that it was in the bushes the gufders would have the advantage of camouflage. They quickly dispersed and blocked off the mynamather from turning off the way it was running.

Lafit saw Redbolt riding into the cluster of bushes with the gufders right behind him. He gave Yasi a kick, and the beast went faster.

"Redbolt slow down!" Joey shouted. But the animal was more concerned with moving faster away from its attackers. Joey pulled on the strap, struggling to bring the crazed animal to a stop, but it was useless. He had not yet fully mastered control over the animal.

He looked around him and realized the strange setting he was in. Around him he saw huge shapes that were like houses. But they had no visible element of someone keeping them intact. They were all a mess with an overgrowth of vines and other plants. The plants completely devoured them from the inside out. Most of them looked as if explosions had occurred on them; saplings growing from nothing more than piles of rubble.

Ahead of all the skeletal remains of the building, he saw an even more startling structure. Judging by its size and the amount of rubble that lay around it, Joey assumed that this building was similar in size to the temple. But by some destructive force it was reduced to three stories, with purple

leaved vines investing its corps. The orange glow of the sunset penetrated the canopy and lent hundreds of beams that lit up the inside through its hollow top. Inside was a large tree that grew from the floor inside and straight into the air as if it were a parasitic creature that had burst through the body of its host.

In that instant the Human had unknowingly stopped his animal and stared at his environment, completely forgetting that he had a horde of predators chasing him for a taste of his flesh. It was the sound of leaves crushing under feet from behind that alerted Joey and Redbolt. A gufder leapt on top of Redbolt and nipped at Joey's head. He managed to roll off in time and landed on his back. But he had to scurry to his feet as Redbolt madly tried to get the gufder off.

The stomping feet of Redbolt nearly smashed Joey's head into the ground. He fired wild bursts at the gufder, and by some miracle it struck the animal, blowing away a section of its shoulder. The other pack members arrived on the scene and swarmed them with a frenzy of claws, teeth and hunger.

Redbolt kept them at bay from him with his swinging tusks. Joey fired all the honoibursts he could, but in a wide space like this the gufders were easily evading the attacks.

This scared the Rakai out of his wits.

*They probably attacked enough Nycarmans to know how to fight against them!* Joey thought.

Completely encircled by the animals Joey panicked alongside his four-legged friend. With his knife in a sweaty, trembling hand he watched the gufders move in close for the kill. The blue bristles on their backs ruffled with excitement. Thick strands of saliva oozed from their mouths. Their gold eyes locked on to the meal that was just a bite away.

"Ah shit!" Joey snarled.

And suddenly the thought of his eminent death flashed in his mind like a streak of lightning. Then it became a creeping wave that slowly melted away at his mind. There was the thought of failure at his mission, and never being able to see Lezura and the other Nycarmans again. It would be death by teeth and claws.

"Like hell!"

Moving purely on his survival instincts Joey lunged at the gufder in front of him, screaming at the top of his lungs. The gufder went forward with its attack and the others following the lead of their leader. With a heavy fist Joey knocked the animal in the mouth, receiving lacerations all over his

hand from the teeth. With the animal momentarily stunned he swung the knife up underneath its throat. Once he yanked it out gold spurted onto his hand.

Joey spun with elbow into the other gufder. It bit onto the joint successfully. It yanked on Joey's arm and brought him to the ground screaming helplessly. The others instantly swarmed the Human. They tried to bite but Joey denied them with kicking legs and a wildly swinging knife.

With a swing of his tusks Redbolt cleared two of the gufders in front of him. One was impaled in the ribs and stopped moving. A gufder leapt up at the beast and bit him on his neck. As the teeth sank with the murderous intention of hitting the jugulars Redbolt leapt back and staggered, falling onto his side. He kicked off the gufder but the persistent predator kept on coming.

A gufder bit hold of Joey's other and brought his sharp weapon under control. The others swarmed at his feet and commenced the shredding. The fabric of his clothes tore and the predators reached his flesh. Soon all his limbs were being gnawed. He closed his eyes and screamed in vain at his oncoming end. He felt a piece of the skin around his forearm lift off and the muscle tissue being chewed on.

Suddenly there were thunderous footsteps and a man's roar. From between two of the old houses charged a mynamather and its Nycarman rider. The beast kicked out with its front leg and knocked one of the gufders unconscious. Lafit released a burst that tore apart another's side.

It freed Joey's knife-held hand, giving him the opportunity to plunge the blade into the eye of the gufder biting his arm. He twisted and pushed the blade in further. The gufder went limp and he pulled his hand out of its mouth. But then there was still one that tried to leap on top of him to get at his face. He held the animal at bay with his forearm under its throat. He strained with all of his being to prevent the teeth and foul breath from getting closer. He held his breath against the foul stench of the gufder's breath.

Before Lafit could get off his beast and come to his aid, there were three pops that startled every one of them. When Lafit looked in the direction from where the sounds came. He saw two women standing side by side with a mynamather behind them. In front of them lay a gufder with blood streaming from a hole in its head. Redbolt stood over it with his tusks inches away; as if thinking it were going to get back up.

But a shot from a lance-pistol in the head was nothing that could be recovered from.

The man then heard Joey's voice straining as he pushed the dead guffer off him. It had two bloody holes in its back.

Lezura and Marina ran passed Redbolt towards the Human. Even though Lafit was just a few feet away Lezura had already reached Joey before him. She knelt over him and threw the goggles off her face to inspect him with her own worrying eyes.

"Joey!" she called. "Joey can you hear me?" she placed two fingers on his neck. His pulse was very weak, but it could still be felt. She saw the gruesome sight of the blood from both his wounds and the guffer's all over him, and her eyes began to glisten. She took the bag off her back and ransacked inside until she found the first-aid kit. By the time she did so the other Nycarmans had arrived on the scene.

*Joey please do not die! Not like this! No!*

But the young man was unconscious and couldn't hear a word of what she said even if she spoke it aloud.

One of the Nycarmans took Redbolt by his harness and brought him under her control. Marina was near Lezura and at the torn Human. She too was frantic about what had happened, but most she felt was guilt.

*If only I had not been so foolish and urged Joey into this race, she thought. She sighed. I guess we all have our off days...*

"I am so sorry Lezura," she said to her friend. But Lezura was too busy cleaning Joey's wounds. Even with the alcohol from the swabs seeping into this torn flesh he didn't respond.

Marina noted how Lezura's hand trembled as she took her time to cater to him. Her clothes had already been dabbed in a few areas with his blood from close contact, the smell was even thick in the air and made Marina feel as she were about to vomit. But Lezura was completely oblivious to everything around her except the Rakai.

Marina was not certain if Lezura really loved Joey, but looking at her now Marina wondered what would become of Lezura if the Rakai were to die. What would become of *all* of them!

Lafit watched intently as Lezura dressed the Human. He didn't want to interfere a bit in the process. He knew that with Lezura's knowledge she was more medically skilled than any of the Ixians. When the others came to help Lafit gestured for them to wait until Lezura was finished.



Lezura was finished with the bandages on the Human. She went inside her bag pack again and took out a clear plastic box with a pink label sheet on the front. From inside she produced a needle and a tube with a plastic covering and a thick, pink liquid inside.

This liquid, was blood, specifically the processed blood of a Lazhinian. What was so special about this type of blood was that it contained the regenerative properties found in the cells of Lazhinians that allow them to rapidly restore lost body cells in any kind of ailment. It was a unique and special fluid that was very hard to obtain unless you were to draw blood from a Lazhinian. And unless you were a licensed professional doctor who had gotten the permission from a Lazhinian citizen to do so, it was illegal to have the fluid in your possession.

Back in any main city before a judge Lezura would be looking at least fifteen years behind a force field and bars in a sickly white room.

She found one of the veins in Joey's arm; most of which were torn, and injected the fluid. The cells of the Lazhinian blood would copy his blood cells and then begin to duplicate themselves, hence replenishing the amount of blood he lost.

After she had finished dressing the Joey's injuries she allowed two Nycarmans to pick him up. One of the women placed him on her mynamather before her and rode off back to the community.

The Bloodliners did not immediately leave. They realized that they were in the presence of the surrounding old home of their people. They all faced the ruins of the temple, placed their hands across their chest and whispered, "*Cin uolk*"- "*Thank you*".

"Are you alright, Lezura?" Marina asked as she watched her pack up the last of the medical items. But she could already tell by the look in her eyes that she was definitely not feeling well.

Lezura spoke without taking her gaze off the split blood of the Human on the grass, "I am alright, Marina. I was just afraid of Joey's death like this."

"We were all," Marina said. Then Marina thought about changing her friend's mood. "It is a good thing that the gufders did not get his penis! You will get the chance to use it!"

Lezura was almost head deep in the thought of losing Joey. But she could not ignore that statement made by Marina. She looked up at Marina with smoldering eyes. But she realized that Marina was not implying anything when she spoke. But the statement was just too irritating for Lezura to

ignore. She attempted to grab Marina, but she twisted out of the way and ran. Lezura allowed herself to smile despite what had just happened.

“Marina, come back here!” she laughed.

As Lafit got up on his four-legged friend, he smiled at Lezura’s relief of grief and two girls playing.

*At least she is not so attached as to be completely devastated,* Lafit thought.

Halit and the six other Nycarmans behind the finish line were one the edge of their nerves when they heard the screams up ahead. What in the world could have happened? And they hoped that whatever it was didn’t reach the Rakai.

As they debated upon if they should go and check out the situation they saw Karit coming up the path.

*Thank goodness! Maybe he could provide some answers!* Halit thought.

But instead Karit stopped in front of his father with a wide smile and said, “I am victor father. I have won the-”

“What happened?” his father asked.

The question stopped Karit in his speech like the Wall of Nonshon. He looked puzzled for a moment. The young man clearly didn’t expect that kind of welcome.

“Well? What happened boy?” his father asked again. “Talk up!”

As if Karit was speaking to the devil herself he said in a weak voice, “T-the Rakai was attacked b-bye a pack of gufders.”

“So what are you doing here? Why are you not with the Rakai to protect him? You blasted idiot, if he dies this it will be the fault of your race and your stupidity!” Halirit gestured for the others to follow him, and said in a low voice, “If only your brother had not gotten killed by those Barakies, I would have had a much more worthy heir.”

Those who heard him agreed with *“Indeed”* and *“Blasted right”*.

Karit squeezed the straps in his hands until his light purple skin burned and turned paler. He gritted his teeth to hold back his frustrated scream, but the tears could not be held back.

He wondered how long he would have to bare all of this from his father and the rest of his people-this unfair treatment. First he had been forced to give up Marina and the hospitality of the Tyhunies in order to secure his position as the next village headman. Now he had to give up his identity in order to portray the poster boy obedience to ones father for an heir.

But was it all worth it? Was losing Marina and the respect of Murbella all worth ruling over a dying civilization? Over a few people so ignorant to change that they had refused to take the advice of building proper bathroom facilities from the Tyhunies, and had once called Lezura a *witch* because of her knowledge and technology?

*Why me?* He thought. *Why did it have to be me? You have it damn easy, Rakai!*

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Vemlel was the name of the Orderran community in the remote regions of the continent of Jonui. To be more specific; it was a military base built where the Balion kingdom once was; an area surrounded by thick forests and high mountains. It was the perfect concealment for a base of this size.

The Orderrans built huge circular buildings with flat and dome shaped tops. From above it would seem that Vemlel was like any other city on Sangetsu, with billboards, streets and vehicles driving all about. Most of the buildings here were in a dark grey or black color. The vehicles hovered above the ground on many antigravity orbs, many of which were transporting Orderran soldiers and war machine to the various buildings that littered the place. Some of the machines were robots that could move on their own.

It was the 25<sup>th</sup> of the 28<sup>th</sup> hour of the planet; it was late in the night. The black color of the city buildings would have made it virtually unseen in the night if it were not for the many different color lights it possessed. In the center of the city stood the main building, at fifty stories tall it was the tallest building in Vemlel. It had six sides with large diamond shaped windows and a walkway going around in a ring, bordered by a black irregular shaped column. The walls were made from huge sections that looked like the pieces of some bizarre puzzle. On the outside of the building on the angles were elevators that lead up and down to other walkways.

The top of the structure was a wide dome with solar panels going around the edge. The Orderran flag stood in its center. On it was a picture of a round, Orderran head that had large red eyes, a little patch of hair that swirled in the middle of its forehead and a little mouth made into a frown. It was almost like a cartoon in appearance, and on a black background with silver edges and a more ornate, pink symbol in the back.

This was the Jinkai military command headquarters of Vemlel, where all the different Orderran military groups were converged to have their meeting on Sangetsu.

The meeting took place on the top floor in a large, circular room. It had huge, black tiles with white creases lining off the floor, wall and ceiling. In the center of the ceiling was the design of a giant, blue demon with six wings and white lines running all over its body. Whoever designed the

demon was artistic enough to have placed red bulbs for the eyes to let glow fiercely over any onlooker. The tiles were of cold, smooth metal with an Orderran knight, decked in ancient armor and posing with two daggers across her chest.

In the corners of the ceiling were large bulbs that gave off a low white light; not too intense to damage the sensitive skin of the Orderrans. To any other species the room would be considered as dark and cold.

There were eight white chairs with black edges and high backs placed around a large, computerized table with a screen built into the top. Seated in these chairs were the Orderran Jinkai's of the eight different nations of Veheculon. Each wore a different color that represented the different nations they were from.

A Jinkai was the highest military rank in the Orderran military force, and all Orderran military had at least three Jinkais in power. All Jinkais wore a cape that match the secondary color of their uniform; which was a close fitting black trousers and a black, long-sleeved shirt with white at the edges of the collar and white seams. The material was similar in texture to cotton, but with a sheen that was like silk. Every soldier in the Orderran military wore a uniform of that design, but the secondary color differed with each nation.

Along with it they had badges on their chest to identify their military group, class and rank.

Jinkai Borros Onn wore dark brown body armor and cape. He was a large built Orderran with a round face and a rigid jaw line. His cropped, glossy hair was comb all the way to the back of his head. Beside him was his Yelkai; an officer second in command in the Orderran military, and answered only to the Jinkai. Borros Onn sat with a heavy scowl, nibbling at his finger nails so briskly that it seemed he would bite off a finger.

Yelkais wore a black frock coat over their uniforms, where the hems and collar had the color of their nation. So this slim short haired Yelkai wore brown. He and Borros were from the nation of Keeltio.

Jinkai Bunar Buuton was a tall and handsome man; but not as tall as the females, and with face that was small and fragile. His hair was kept messily. He wore gold, and so did his Yelkai to his right. Both he and Borros had thin lips like that of a Caucasian Human, which meant that they were Uola Orderrans.

Buuton also had a gold structure that covered the sides of his head and his forehead. In the center of it was an oval sheet of glass, but beyond that no one knew what purpose it served.

Buuton sat with one hand resting beneath his chin. His eyes looked watery as if he had not slept in days. In fact, he often kept dozing off, and had to be kept awake by shoves on his shoulder by his Yelkai.

Jinkai Doix St. Deflenoix was a very strange Orderran for a number of reasons. First off all he was eight feet tall, nearly as tall as a female Orderran. His name had an 'e' and an 'I' in it; not something associated with any Orderran culture. He was medium built and muscular. The only thing formal in military terms he wore was just his pink cape, but beyond that he wore a glamorous, long sleeved belly shirt that exposed his well-toned abdomen. The shirt was tightly fitted over his body, light blue colored with dark blue patches and with huge, yellow fluffs around the collar and hems. His shiny, black tights reached just below his knees and exposed his smooth but muscled calves. For some reason Doix had his tights below his waist, showing his straight pubic hair that reached up to the very middle of his abdomen. The hair there was shaved into the pattern of some serpentine creature. At least the hair on his head; trimmed and with a short crest in the center, was less flashy.

He sat laid back in his chair with his legs crossed. His toenails were polished pink and his feet were fitted in slim high heels with a pink base. His arms were crossed across his broad chest. He stared idly at his polished toenails behind the red rims of his oval glasses. He wiggled his toes and admired the work of his beauticians. His lips; slathered in green lipstick, widened into a smile.

He had two women for his Yelkais standing at his sides, who wore very close fitting clothes. Their hair was tied into a ball at the top, with a long white ribbon with pink stripes flowing down the back. On closer inspection one could see that they were twins. They stood in the same posture with their hands folded behind them.

Jinkai Utura Kadda wore purple, and was nine feet tall. She had a rounded, beautiful face, mesmerizing scarlet eyes with long lashes above them and lustful lips. She had huge breasts and long black fingernails that grip the arms of her chair like the claws of some night creature. Her hair was tied into two puffs at the side. She was a Uola Orderran but her Yelkai, a woman equally as tall as her with short hair, was a Lalu.

Besides her height what really made the woman stand out were her very huge, round breasts. They seemed to devour her entire chest. Her shirt had a split in the middle which showed the insides of the organs. The men in the room would occasionally sneak a quick look at them, then turning away before Kadda's gaze caught them.

But she expected them to, that was why had them in the first place.

Beside her to her right sat Jinkai Rashak Garabass. A slim man, who wore bright orange, had an oval face with a jutting chin and a large afro on his head. He sat with his feet up on the table and his arms crossed behind his head. As an Outo Orderran he had full lips. His crazy looking eyes were fixed on Kadda's breasts. He savored the thought at having one of them in his mouth.

The thought was so sweet that it triggered him into a smile. And inside his mouth Kadda saw huge canines.

Next to Garabass stood his huge, monster of a Yelkai. He was a Uola male with very broad shoulders and a height of eight feet. His obvious size made everyone question whether he was a sapient being, a machine or an Orderran that had a little Norverran blood in him.

To Garabass' right was Jinkai Tankada Tahah, a muscular female who significantly outsized her male Yelkai. She wore dark green and had her cropped hair combed over the sides and back of her head. But her body was not completely turned over to the masculine side; she still had her firm breasts and attractive waist line to attract the attention of any male of any species.

But everyone thought in their minds that Jinkai Kadda could do a much better job at that than she could.

And at the end of the table was the man who had organized the meeting; the man who ruled over the entire Vemlel military base and was from the largest nation on Veheculon. Jinkai Kuta Apuna.

He was from a nation of Uola Orderrans, but no one knew how he really looked, for he always wore his masked helmet; with the Orderran face at the front and a blue top with white horns scattered all over. A length of his short smooth hair could be seen coming out the back, but other than that no one has seen his face. He even had black gloves over his hands.

His Yelkai was an eight feet tall Outo Orderran, with short hair and a round face. She was the only the person in the room that anyone could speculate had seen Apuna's true face.

Apuna sat with his hands folded underneath his chin, looking at the empty seat that was across the other side of the table; where Jinkai Tono Podo should have been seated an hour ago so the meeting could have begun. But he was not thinking about Podo's absence, his mind was fixed on the plan he had been working on for so long now.

Positioned around the room were Apuna's own soldiers; wearing a similar helmet to his but with only two white horns at the front. They had on blue body armor made from oval plates, and in their hands were the standard Orderran assault rifle—called the Orderran-battle-rifle; or OB-rifle for short. It had a smooth appearance and a sleek design as if it were just one object. The body was in two segments; the first being black in color along with the narrow black barrel, and the other half being blackish-grey in color with an ejection port on one side and a silver handle. The clip was placed in a hollow at the base of the upper half, and it had a small rectangular scope at the top with a red-tinged lens.

The soldiers had been standing there in the room completely motionless—even before the Jinkais entered the room. People wondered if those soldiers were machines. If not, they had tremendous discipline to be standing so long without even moving a muscle. They hardly even blinked as if they didn't need to. They couldn't even be heard breathing. They just stood there like decorative statues. If the Jinkais hadn't picked up the scent of their natural hormones they would have speculated if the soldiers were actually real.

“Are you sure, Apuna, that Podo received the same message you sent us?” Borros asked in a demanding tone.

“I am certain he did,” Apuna replied in a calm voice. “Seven hours after he received the message he replied that he would be able to attend. As a matter of fact; he was the first person to reply.”

“Yet he will be the last to arrive,” Borros remarked with a scowl on his face.

“Did he tell you of any delays he might encounter during his arrival to this planet?” Tahah asked him.

“No, he did not,” Apuna replied without turning to look at her.

“Well, he could have at least had the professionalism to tell us that he would be arriving late,” Onn. “He must think we have nothing better to do and time to waste.”

Jinkai Buuton yawned without covering his mouth. “Being in this room is a waste of time,” he remarked at Onn's statement. “Why, Apuna, could you



not have just told us what you wanted to tell us now in a message like the one you sent us instead of us coming all the way to this wretched planet?"

Jinkai Tahah laid an irritated stare on him. "And how formal and sensible would it be to exchanging views and ideas by email halfway across the solar system?" she asked.

The question was rhetorical, but Jinkai Garabass took it upon himself to answer, "It would save us the cost of fuel!" he said it with the intention of annoying Tahah, and smiled with pleasure when he saw her clench her fists.

Borros pounded a heavy fist on the table and made a long crack. It startled Buuton, making him flip his head up with his worrying eyes looking all about. "Huh? What?"

"I have had enough of this nonsense!" Borros snapped. He got up and turned to Apuna; who was not in the least disturbed by his outburst-still deep in his thoughts. "Apuna, either you begin the meeting or I will be back on my way to Veheculon this instant!"

"Oh shut up, Borros," Jinkai St. Deflenoix said, his voice was a soft tenor with the undertone of always aroused humor. "You aren't making a difference with your loud blabbering. Plus, I smell your *unglamorous* breath. "

Borros turned his dreadful stare on St. Deflenoix. He had just been insulted by a Jinkai in front of others. "You better watch how you speak to me Deflenoix!" he snarled.

"Oh shut up indeed, Borros!" Garabass shouted, and smiled widely when he saw Borros give him a murderous look. Even St. Deflenoix's twin Yelkais made a smile.

Kadda looked over at Apuna to see if he was not going to put an end to the meaningless blabbering taking place. It was clear to her that Apuna's mind was occupied with something else. The man was completely motionless; except for the blinking of his red eyes which she could see in the sockets of his mask.

For some reason she felt that this man had not called this meeting to discuss trivial matters involving Orderran military politics. It was something much more serious.

"Why do you not just let us proceed with the meeting and send Podo a verbatim of what took place, Apuna?" Buuton asked, rubbing his flaky eyes. "I really need to sleep."

"You can rest your head on Kadda's huge breasts," Garabass said. "They look really soft."

Buuton turned his weary eyes upon Kadda, who wore an enticing smile that dared him to do so. Buuton then looked at her enormous breasts, and back at her and said, “Can I? Please?”

Garabass let out a loud, uncontrolled laugh and reared in his seat.

“Would you two idiots just shut the hell up!” Tahah said. She turned to Apuna and said, “But indeed, Apuna, why can we not commence the meeting without Podo’s presence?”

“Because I need every Jinkai on our planet present,” Apuna calmly said. “This mission will require a great amount of our planet’s military forces if we are to succeed.”

The other Jinkais became both intrigued and shocked at what Apuna just said. He said that Veheculon’s military force was needed, as if they were going to war.

There was a large double door with blue edges that lead into the conference room. The two doors slid open into the walls and through it ran an Orderran with another one trying to keep up with his speed.

“No need to worry anymore everyone!” the man said in a loud voice, “I am finally here.”

Jinkai Tono Podo swung his empty chair out from beneath the table, and took a disinfecting wipe out of the inside of his shirt to wipe the seat of any germs present.

When his Yelkai, a slim Uola Orderran like Podo, ran and stopped by his side, resting his hands on his knees while he brought his breath under control, Podo handed him the wipe, and his Yelkai tucked it into a plastic bag and inside his coat.

Podo sat in the chair and straightened his cape alongside his body. He proceeded to taking off his red boots and socks and placing them underneath the table neatly together. He swung and wiggles his toes so they could breeze properly. His hands were clothed in pink medical gloves, and the fingers of the hands he had interlaced and on his lap.

The rest of the Orderrans in the room immediately picked up the scent of alcohol and disinfectant on him. The scent caused some irritation to their nostrils.

Jinkai Podo wore dark red. His hair was very short and he combed it all the way to the back of his head. His face was oval and narrowed to a square chin.

The other Jinkais looked at him with furious eyes. Podo knew they did so because he was late, but he was not paying them any mind. He had other important matters to worry about.

“Well,” Borros began, staring at Podo with disgust. Then he looked at Apuna, “now that we are all here, can we proceed with the meeting?”

“Indeed we can,” Apuna said, and sat up in his chair. “Now, as you all have known by now, I have called this meeting without the knowledge of our queens and kings, as they would have objected to the ideas that I am about to propose here. I have called upon all of you, my fellow Jinkai and Orderran brothers and sisters, because you all possess the military power which I require for my plan.”

“And just what is your plan, Apuna?” Tahah asked.

“My plan is simple, really. Something all of you here should be able to understand in a split second...I plan on eradicating all the Nycarmans in the solar system.”

All whom were comfortably seated in their chairs sat up with shock on their faces. Even Garabass took down his feet and Buuton lifted his head.

“What?” Kadda asked. “You want to kill every Nycarman in this solar system? Are you serious about what you have just spoken?”

“Yes,” Apuna said, not sounding disturbed by the disbelief on the faces of the Jinkais around him. “I plan to do so starting with this planet, Sangetsu.” He leaned his head out slightly and spoke in a stone cold voice, “And believe me, my dear Orderran brothers and sisters, that I am dead serious about my aim.”

“Are you mad?” Borros yelled. “Are you planning on starting another Solar War?”

“If that is the consequence of my goal...then it would certainly seem that way.” Apuna said, sounding a little smug.

“And what force in the universe compelled you to sit down and think about something like that?” Kadda asked, really wanting Apuna to explain and willing to listen. “Do you know the political and racial backlashes that could happen if Orderrans launched an attack on any race in the Solar System?”

Apuna paused for a moment and closed his eyes. Apuna said, “Because, my dear Jinkai...” he opened his eyes “...it is my mission to do so; *our* mission to do so.”

The Jinkais gave Apuna confused looks.

“What?” St. Deflenoix said. “Apuna, have you not had sex in a while to be thinking about such things?”

“What in the universe are you speaking about Apuna?” Kadda asked, clearly perplexed.

Apuna leaned back in his chair. “Ever since we lost the first Solar War to the other sentient beings in this solar system, our people have become reluctant to try and reclaim their lost glory and clear their name of the title of the most evil race in the solar system.” He stood up and slowly paced around the room with his arms folded behind him. Each step was slow, neat, and coordinated to match in line with the next step. “We are a powerful race; us Orderrans. We are the leading species in technology in the solar system; our planet is the largest and the most diverse. We have managed to regain our freedom from the Norverran species that once had us as slaves. We were gods in this universe, and we still are.

“But ever since we lost the war we have also lost our Orderran pride. We have accepted the lies and the treachery that the Nycarmans have brought upon our name, all because we want to live in peace. But what peace is this, I ask? Where on this and every planet and Orderran cannot walk on the street in peace without having the authorities check them for lethal weapons, our children are denied proper education because they fear they may grow up to take over their businesses. And no matter how qualified you may be lucky to be, you will be given a job of the most demeaning nature.

“Our race did not go through five hundred years of slavery just to be betrayed by the Nycarmans and have slip back into the system of oppression! And I will be damned if I let such injustice continue!”

The other Jinkais blood boiled with passion at the thought of getting revenge at the rest of the solar system. The thought of sinking their teeth into the flesh of the treacherous Nycarmans was enough to make them nod in approval.

“So you see, everyone,” Apuna continued, “my reason for wanting to wage war with the Nycarmans is not out of just pure vengeance and a lust for war, but because I want to free all the Orderran people in the solar system, and instill inside them the Orderran pride they all lost.”

“And how do you plan to go about this plan of yours?” Deflenoix asked. It was clear now that every one of the Jinkais were willing to participate in whatever Apuna had planned.

Apuna walked over to his seat and sat. He explained the history of the Nycarman people and what took place during the first Great War of Sangetsu. He spoke of the Dielengann, Dranaki, the Rakai and the key of salvation. Then he all summed it down to him wanting the key for a purpose he didn't make clear.

"So you are telling us..." Borros said "...that you based your plan on the fairy tale story of an inferior race?"

Apuna smiled slightly behind his mask. "I thought one of you would say something like that," he said, "which was why I had prepared documents to prove the basis of part of my plan."

Apuna accessed computer files using the touch screen table. The table itself was convenient divided into eight screens earlier so each Jinkai could see what he saw. After a few seconds a picture of a pale skinned alien appeared on their screens. They all leaned closer to look at the never before seen alien species. They all were in shock; if it was not the sight of the new alien species that got their attention it was the green sword shaped key around his neck.

"Unbelievable!" Kadda gasped.

"Is this image authentic?" Tahah asked, almost unable to speak.

"Indeed it is, Jinkai Tahah," Apuna said, pleased with himself but concealing it.

"When was this photograph taken?" Kadda demanded.

"It was taken nine days ago by one of my scouting robots that I had keeping an eye on activities taking place in that area; the Ixian kingdom. As you can see, this is an entirely new sentient species; a *Human*, who calls itself *Joey Sadowski*. But beyond that we do not know anything else about its species; which galaxy, solar system or planet it is from."

"And why is this?" Onn asked. "I mean; this alien must have come to this planet in some kind of spaceship that could have been easily noticed."

Apuna then accessed a video file. It showed a group of Nycarmans wearing purple robes, one in modern day clothes and one in a red robe that floated in the air on a blue cloud. All were on a balcony. Then the hands of the red-robed Nycarman glowed, and with a ripping motion he tore open a portal. Apuna put the video on pause and spoke.

"The Nycarman that ripped open the portal is called Donnowarru," Apuna said. "He has the ability to open portals into other dimensions. And that was how the Rakai entered our section of the galaxy."

“But how is this Nycarman able to use his honoi energy to open a portal?” Borros asked. “We would need an Ion-Ring to do something of such a magnitude.”

“I am not one hundred percent sure, but just as how an Ion-ring works, he is able to combine his honoi particles with the atoms in the atmosphere and manipulate them to move apart and reveal a gap in the fabric of our universe-the dimensional portal, a rift.”

“We only use such a process to create wormholes to make space travel quicker,” Garabass remarked, then for some reason smiled, “these Nycarmans have taken it to a whole other level.”

“Which is why we need to get rid of the Nycarmans,” Apuna stated. “It was their knowledge of honoi energy that enabled them to thwart the Orderrans from taking over their planet during the first invasion, not to mention that they had that god machine at their disposal. With them gone, it will be a simple matter to take over this solar system.”

The other Jinkais were beginning to see Apuna’s point very clearly. They were already beginning to imagine a solar system free from meddling Nycarmans and under total Orderran rule.

“But...” and everyone turned to Podo; who had not spoken the whole time until now. “...how did you know that the Rakai would be where he is now? How could you tell? And what do you have planned with the key when you get it. You still haven’t told us that. Do you really expect us to join forces with you when you’re not telling us everything?”

They were all surprised that; though Podo had been a nuisance to the commencing of the meeting, he brought up a very good point, indeed! They all looked at Apuna with expressions that told they distrusted him.

Apuna looked at Podo with some anger at first, then simply chuckled and said, “All will be revealed in due time, my fellow Orderran Jinkais. All will soon be revealed.” He leaned back in his seat and relaxed, then crossed his legs and rested his gloved hands on the arms of his chair. He looked at the expressions on their faces and smiled. “I can understand if you do not trust me; I myself would not trust a man who I did not know much about. But believe me when I tell you that I will explain the finer details of my plan at a later date. Right now we must focus on retrieving the key of salvation.” He leaned forward and looked at the faces of the Jinkais. “So, are you all a part of my dream, or are you not?”

“I’m in?” Borros answered strongly, and then he looked around at the others and said, “If you all do not help in this mission you have all betrayed your fellow Orderrans all across the solar system.”

They would not have that on their conscience.

“I,” Buuton answered with a gush of pride.

“I as well,” St. Deflenoix said.

In the order that the response were going Podo was next to answer, but he looked reluctant to do so.

“What is the matter, Podo?” Borros asked dryly, “afraid to serve your planet? Uh, must have been the reason why you were late.”

Podo gave him such a disgusted look that the rest of the room got ready to separate a potential fight. Apuna’s soldier where there for that purpose. Garabass’ Yelkai got ready to release the projectiles in its hand incase Podo got near to him. St. Deflenoix’s twins turned their attention to him and got ready to pounce and tear him to shreds with their claws.

Podo’s Yelkai quietly slipped his hand onto the holster of his pistol as he eyed every Orderran in the room.

“If you all must know...” and Podo looked at everyone with his eyes glowing like bulbs with rage “...my wife, who I have loved for so many years, has now become seriously ill with an incurable disease. A disease our planet does not have the kind of medicine to treat her, and she had to be sent to a hospital on another planet. She had a seizure four days go and I had to make a stop on my way here so I could see if she was still alive! So if you all think that I am going on some mission out of patriotic love for my planet, which by the way if forgot to tell you, couldn’t take care of my wife, you are all sadly, *sadly* mistaken!”

Podo spoke with so much rage that for that brief time he became the most feared man in the room. Not even Borros could speak again at him. Borros could only scowl at him and sit quietly in his seat.

Apuna and his Yelkai were the only persons who manage to control their fear and remain calm.

“You are worried for your wife; that she might die,” Apuna stated.

“What else should I be worried about; a key?” Podo replied, irritated that Apuna had to point out the painfully obvious.

“I can assure you that this mission will be short. We will only need to retrieve the key from the Rakai in the Ixian kingdom. Once it is done you can leave. No one here will think of you as a coward.”

“If you haven’t realized by now, Apuna, I don’t care what the rest of you think,” Podo said stiffly. He laid a glare on Borros, “Which was why I came here when I felt my wife did not need me by her side.”

“Your military force is very valuable to this mission, Podo,” said Apuna, ignoring Podo’s insult to his authority here. “We cannot proceed without your assistance. I am asking you; will you help me to create a better world for Orderrans, my Orderran brother?”

Podo wasn’t in any way affected or impressed by Apuna’s begging or his reference to him as a close comrade. Podo only wanted to get back to his wife. But he knew that she herself was once a Jinkai, and she wouldn’t approve of him ignoring his duties for his planet. He only said yes because of her.

“I,” Jinkai Kadda said.

“Me too,” Garabass said, smiling at the possible destruction and chaos that was going to take place.

“I as well,” Tahah said as the last.

“Excellent,” Apuna replied with pleasure and with a clap of his hands.

“Operation ‘Capture of Salvation’ is now operational.”

“So when will be the capture of the key, Apuna?” asked Garabass with a wide smile, eager to know.

“The mission will begin in four hours,” he answered. And he was instantly met with surprised stares.

“Four hours?” remarked Garabass, “Why should the mission begin so suddenly, Apuna?”

“Because, Jinkai Garabass, the Rakai’s powers are growing stronger,” Apuna said. “As we speak the Ixians are teaching him how to use his honoi energy and also how to engage in hand-to-hand combat. We must strike before he has the chance to improve on his abilities and becomes a formidable force. We still do not know what his species is capable of, and we should not allow him to unlock the full extent of his honoi power.”

Garabass was disappointed that he wouldn’t get to relax and enjoy the free meals like that he had this morning anymore, but at least he might get to participate in the capture of the Human and the key of salvation. Maybe he could even get a few of the young native girls for his men, and blow their homes to dust and vaporize the flesh off their bones with the new vaporizer he had developed.



Garabass smiled maniacally as he relished the thought of the possible prospects. He displayed the largest set of canines anyone has ever seen on an Orderran.

“So, who will be assigned the task of retrieving the key?” St. Deflenoix asked, paying Garabass a disgusted glance at his ugly smile before turning his attention to Apuna.

Apuna thought about which one of the Jinkais would be up to the task of the first part of plan. He considered a number of other factors which would influence his choice. Who could he trust to carry out the task and bring the key back safely to him? He certainly wouldn't send Garabass-unless he was to let his Yelkai accompany the wild bastard. But she was needed here by his side.

There was the thought of sending Podo, but he seemed reluctant to follow any orders because of his attitude. And Apuna didn't really feel one hundred percent with himself about sending St. Deflenoix.

So there were the options of Kadda, Buuton, Tahah and Onn.

Then there was another factor. The Jinkai would need to have a sufficient amount of soldiers that would be able to take on the Ixian kingdom. Thought it was a relatively small community, the Ixians were still highly trained fighters who could use honoi energy.

“I mean no disrespect,” Apuna said, “but excluding Garabass, Podo and St. Deflenoix, how many of your soldiers have you brought with you?”

But Garabass and Doix did take offence, but did not voice their crude opinions. Podo only shrugged and snorted.

“I have brought one hundred seventy of my soldiers with me,” Onn said. “And I have two thousand more aboard my starship.”

“I have four hundred on this planet and fifteen hundred more above,” Kadda said.

“Two hundred on the planet, seventeen hundred in space,” said Tahah.

Buuton yawned. “I currently have two hundred and eighty soldiers on this planet...and twenty seven hundred more aboard my starship.”

Then there was a snort from Podo, who then said, “As if that compares to the seven thousand I have floating over this little city.” He folded his arms and sat back.

If all the other Jinkais were surprised by the statement made by Podo, they hid it exceptionally well.

Apuna looked at Podo with keen interest, “If what you say is true, then you could be of good use to my cause after all.” And Podo grimaced at the

notion of Apuna thinking he was worthless in the first place. “But not for this current task, though. Your army’s size will be of good use to us in the future.”

Then Apuna got back to the matter at hand without paying Podo a second thought. He then decided upon another factor which would influence his choice; commitment to the cause. That was something that he could almost sense coming from two persons in the room; Onn and Tahah.

He looked between the two of them intently. He leaned forward and interlaced his fingers underneath his chin as he always did when he was deep in his thoughts.

He had done some research on the back ground of Onn. Borros Onn had been one of the top officers in his military, which then led to him being nominated for the position of Jinkai. He had an impressive three stars under his title (which he had gotten from winning a war against the many Norverran resistance groups and rescue of captured Orderrans) a feat which Apuna knew could not be easily accomplished.

In comparison Onn was more qualified than Tahah with one star more.

He finally came to a decision, “Jinkai Borros, you will be assigned the most important task at this moment of securing the key of salvation.”

Borros released a tense grip on his trousers he didn’t realize he had made. He smiled wryly in satisfaction and in triumph over the prospect of not being able to show his strength, intelligence and military skills to the other Jinkais.

Before anyone could speak about it Apuna rose to his feet and said, “I have made my final decision, I expect every one of you to respect the decision I have made without objection. And if so, I will not tolerate it.”

And with that everyone heard the soldiers standing at the sides cock their rifles, further cementing Apuna’s voice into their minds.

The other Yelkais quickly reached a hand on their pistols, though they knew it would be unwise to challenge Apuna on his own domain. One by one they lowered their hands and resumed their casual stances.

Jinkai Garabass leaned over to Jinkai Kadda and whispered, “I have a strong, strange feeling about this man.”

“You are not the only one,” Kadda said.

The both of them stiffened for a mere second when they saw Apuna staring at them. Then he turned his attention away.

They relaxed and exchanged worried glances at each other.

Apuna gestured to the guards at his left. As if he knew he was the one Apuna was directing his attention to a soldier walked forth towards Jinkai Onn. “This data-pad has the co-ordinance of the location of the Ixian kingdom programmed inside it,” Apuna said. As he did, the soldier produced a small, silver data-pad from the inside pocket of his shirt and handed to the Yelkai of Onn. “Upload the co-ordinance into your ship’s computer and it will lead you straight to the Ixian kingdom.”

Onn’s Yelkai pressed the sensor button of the palm-sized data-pad at the bottom of the screen. The screen winked to life with a surge of light that made him squint two times in rapid succession. Being familiar with these electronic devices he accessed the different application of the pad until he came to section labeled ‘recently added data’. He opened it and saw a map of a great stretch of land. All the high grounds; mountains and hills, were in a blackish grey color and had estimated and calculated heights. When the display got down to lower ground, the gray of the landscape got lighter. Areas of vegetation were in green, water blue and rocky areas a dull brown.

He came to notice a yellow line running across the displayed landscape that led from two red markers; the city of Vemlel and the obvious destination. The total distance between each point was fifteen miles away.

He showed the display to his Jinkai. Onn looked at the screen for a few seconds, then nodded and smirked in approval. His Yelkai placed the data-pad in the inside pocket of his coat.

Apuna sat down and relaxed into his chair. “We will be leaving soon to escort Jinkai Onn to his airship,” he said. “If Onn is successful in retrieving the key and bringing it back here, then we can proceed to the other phase of our plan. In the mean time you can all take the remaining few hours to enjoy what my city has to offer as you did earlier. My officers will assist you with anything you need if you so wish it.”

Jinkai Garabass smiled, “Yes! More ice-cream!” he said to himself.

Jinkai Kadda couldn’t help but overhear Garabass’ comment and shook her head. Then she was alerted by her Yelkai leaning close to her ear and whispered, “Are you certain that you wish to partake in such a rebellious feat, my lady?” the woman said.

She answered in a similar low tone, “Now is not the time or place to discuss such matters, Horras. When we have the time, and privacy, I will discuss with you my true feelings on this fiasco.”

And with that Horras respectfully nodded and stood up straight to survey the room once more.

Apuna's Yelkai, Vuharo, spoke to Apuna while eyes her attention on the exchange of suspicions amongst the Jinkais and their Yelkais. "It would seem that everyone is thinking of ways of how to get their own gain out of your proposed plan, my lord," she said.

Apuna didn't seem to be set off in the least by the statement, or the thought of the other Jinkais turning against him. "It may be so," he said calmly. "But they forget that I am a citizen of this planet, and here I have more rule than they do. Plus, I have my ways of keeping them in check."

"So you do, my lord," Vuharo said.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Joey awoke in an unfamiliar setting. He looked up at the ceiling and noticed it was wider than that of his room, with more fans lined across the surface. He squinted two times in the bright light that flooded the room. It was morning.

He wondered how long he had been asleep, and what had happened...the *gufders!*

Joey remembered. He was almost torn to tiny pieces by those animals. He remembered having one of the alien dogs on top of him, fighting to bite the skin off his face. The next thing he remembered was that the animal suddenly went limp and he managed to push the animal off. The last thing Joey remembered hearing was Lezura's voice calling his name.

Joey realized that his breathe was creating a mist in front of him. He was breathing against the mask of his Atmos suit. Someone had put him inside it. He could also feel a soft surface beneath him and realized he was lying on a bed. He tried to speak, but encountered some difficulty at first, his words gargled in his throat. He swallowed two times and managed to pronounce his words. "Is anyone there?" he said.

From his lying position he saw the most beautiful image pop up before him. It was Lezura's face. She was sitting at his bedside, wearing an entirely pink tunic and a pair of shiny, black tights. She had her golden hair in a ponytail. It hung over her left shoulder and dropped onto Joey's chest.

He was looking up into the slits of her nostrils, but shifted his idle gaze to her eyes. They looked at him with intensity and brightness that made him think Lezura just took these from Marina.

He enjoyed looking at her soft, lovely lips as they formed words into speech. "He is awake!" she said energetically. Soon Joey's bed was surrounded by other figures, the three wyassies, Halirit, Mulena, Marina, the village headman and his wife Mitithra.

Joey was pleased to know that so many people cared about his well-being.

"Are you feeling fine, child" Mitithra said.

"He looks splendid!" Dunit said merrily.

Mitithra gave him an annoyed look. "Did he say to that he was fine, Dunit?"

"He did not have to," Dunit said happily, "I can sense a surge of power within him."

“Quite, both of you,” Murbella said dryly. “You are both making unnecessary noise at the Rakai’s head.”

Lezura ignored the chatter of the others and spoke slowly to Joey. “How do your muscles feel?”

Joey tried to move his arms and legs. The muscles were stiff, reluctant to obey his orders. But he did not feel any pain. After applied effort the muscles finally heeled under his command. He lifted his arms over his chest and flexed his gloved fingers.

Lezura was watching his movements carefully. “Do not try moving as yet, Joey,” she said. “I do not think your wounds have fully healed. You might pull out your stitches.”

But Joey was feeling absolutely no pain at all, nothing. As Dunit said, he was really feeling splendid.

Without warning to the others Joey sprang to his feet in the bed. Lezura shuffled out of her chair in shock.

“What are you doing, boy?” Murbella shouted.

Joey jumped up and down on the green bed spread and leapt off. The others quickly scurried out of the way and Joey landed on his feet in a perfect crouch.

“Man,” Joey said. He stood up on bouncy feet. “I feel like I can take on the world.” Then he frowned and said, “Or those damn *demon-dog* thingies if I ever see them again!”

Three women came from out of the blue and held on to Joey’s arms and shoulders. Joey looked at them confused. “What are you guys doing? What’s wrong?”

“You are in a hospital, Rakai,” one of the women said. “You should be more quite. And sit down before you hurt yourself! You might open your stitches!”

Joey sighed heavily. “Why is everyone so worried? I feel fine, really!”

Murbella marched over to Joey. The Human saw the displeasure on her face and instantly began worried.

“Lay down this instant, young man,” she said roughly.

“Leave the boy alone,” Dunit said in an unusually rough voice that startled everyone. They all looked at him and saw the displeasure on his face. It was something rarely seen in the man. “If the Rakai says he is fine, then he is fine.”

Dunit gave the three nurses intent stares. The immediately released the Human. He looked at his surrounds upon remembering that he was in a

hospital. Beds were placed at both sides of the room, covered in the similar green bedspread. Between each of them were small dressers with glass jars on top containing various kinds of medicines? At the ends of the room were huge cabinets. They had more glass than the reddish wood that made their frame. Through the huge oval sheets of glass anyone could see jars of medicine. But not all of the containers were jars. A few canisters were oddly standing amongst them, leading anyone to believe that the medicine in those were of a very different quality and origin.

From the row of beds from where he got up, Joey saw windows overhead with thin, orange curtains. The sunlight pierced the fabric, lighting the room up in a warm, hazy orange glow.

Joey realized he was the hospital's only patient. "Looks like I'm the only one the gufders got," he murmured. He looked to the others and said, "How long have I been out, exactly?"

"Almost two days," Telkit answered.

Joey stuck his neck out. "Three days! I missed out on a lot of training then!"

"Do not worry," Mulena said. "We will continue right where we left off. That is, if you are willing to start today."

"No," one of the black haired nurses said. "Though he might seem fine, I still think it is best to wait a while before he resumes his classes."

"Wait a moment," Lezura said. She gestured with a flicking finger at Joey. "Joey, come here for a moment."

Joey walked over to her with a thoughtful expression. "What's up?"

"Take off your suit," Lezura said. "I want to see your wounds."

Joey looked around at everyone intently. "Wait, I'm wearing clothes underneath my suit, right?"

"Your underpants are clothes..." Dunit said.

Marina smiled and licked her lips at the prospect of seeing the Rakai in his underpants.

Joey figured that what Lezura wanted to see was important. But he delayed for an instant. He thought about the reaction on the faces of the others if they were to see his scars. He frowned even before he took off the suit. He held his breath and pulled down the zipper in the middle of the suit.

He detached his helmet and placed it on the bed, still keeping in mind that the air on this world was a bit toxic. He was holding the loose suit by the chest. He released his grip and the suit fell down to his ankles.

He saw Lezura's eyes widen into pink marbles. He wondered why she was overreacting for something she already saw.

"It's gone!" she said.

"What?" Joey said.

"The scar on your chest, it's completely gone!"

Joey immediately looked down on his chest and felt the skin there. He was dumbstruck to feel smooth skin and see his bare chest. "Holy shit!" he said. "It is gone!"

Lezura's eyes darted all across his body to the areas where she remembered seeing scars. Those areas were squeaky clean. The others looked at his body in amazement as well. They had seen the wounds when he was brought into the hospital after his attack by the guffers and stripped down to his underwear. They were marveled by the huge slash across his chest, but were now even more marveled to see it gone.

"What in the world happened?" Telkit said. "Did the medicine really work that well?"

"That is not possible," one of the nurses said. "We have nothing that could regenerate lost tissue at such a speed!"

Lezura took Joey's arms and looked at them. She clearly remembered the flesh there being stripped down to the muscle tissue, and even that was in shreds. But there was skin there, no doubt about what they all and felt. The stitches seemed to have just been being idly sowed into his skin now for no reason.

Lezura went further as kneel down before Joey and move the suit from around his feet.

New flesh there as well!

Lezura looked up from his feet up to his face. Her forehead for a split second brushed against his penis. But Marina was the only one to notice.

Lezura stood up and spoke, "Do Humans have accelerated healing capabilities?" she asked.

"Lezura," Joey said, "if we did then I wouldn't have had scars in the first place."

"Maybe it is *your* medicine, Lezura," Marina said. "Remember you told me that the Lazhinian serum helps to replicate lost cells?"

Lezura rubbed her neck. "I am not so sure, Marina," said Lezura. "The amount I gave him should have only been enough to replace the amount of blood lost, not heal scar tissue!"



“Who gives a shit what happened!” cheered Joey, pulling up his suit. He reached for the helmet. “I’m just glad I don’t look like a piñata anymore!”

“*Piñata*...?” Dunit heard the word in his translator in his ear. He whispered to himself, “Is that some kind of fruit...?”

“I guess that is what really matters,” Lezura said in a low voice, but the inside of her head was searching all the file cabinets for documents to explain Joey’s recovery.

Joey pretended he was fighting someone, throwing punches and kicks. “Joey Sadowski’s back in action!”

Joey made a wondrous spin kick...that nearly cleaved off Lezura’s face. Her head was slapped to the side, shocking everyone in the room.

Mitithra covered her gaping mouth, knowing well that she would soon be smiling. Dunit fell on his back, kicking and clutching his gut in a laughing fit.

Halirit rested a hand on his forehead, hung his head and shook it.

Marina said, “Joey how did your foot reach up there? You are so short!”

Lezura clutched the left side of her face and glowered at Joey. “Joey you blasted little idiot!”

Joey lifted his hands in surrender. “Chill Lezura! I’m sorry!”

But Lezura wanted him dead! She lunged at the Human. Joey narrowly got out of the way and ran through the door with Lezura right behind him.

They could hear the screams and shouts of the two aliens in the hallway.

Murbella shrugged. “I guess the boy really is feeling fine to be running so fast.” She heard Dunit laughing, looking at him on the ground she didn’t think he would be stopping anytime soon.

With one kick in Dunit’s ribs she silenced him.

The day Joey woke up from his gufder attack he hadn’t been allowed to have classes that day. So he had gotten himself a day of rest, but still had to undergo his Naasi class with Lezura, which she took the opportunity to do the whole day, alone with questions about Human culture and civilization.

Joey told her what he could about the culture part...remained blank about the civilization part.

The next day, sprinting down the stairs in wild gleeful strides, startling those coming up and going down into almost falling, Joey reached the first floor of the temple, merry as ever from a revitalizing session in the gym.

He was getting quite use to the gravity on this alien planet, and starting to love his training as much as he loved suku and being around Lezura and Marina—except when he had to fight Halirit in class—but at least he got to punch him back!

The Rakai waved good morning to the Tyhunies before looking for his teacher in the usual place she sat in the mornings. Joey spotted Mulena, along with Halirit, Marina, Lezura and the wyassies.

Lezura and Marina were seated on a bench to themselves, right behind Halirit and Mulena. The wyassies were standing and conversing with each other; Telkit and Murbella at least. Dunit had in his ears some small headphones. In one hand was a small device on which the headphones were attached.

Dunit was completely in a world of his own, singing the song he was listening to himself and doing a little dance which consisted of jerky steps and moving the arms close up to his side.

Joey wanted to burst out laughing. He didn't image that the wyassies would have such technology in their midst, or maybe Dunit got it from Lezura—she did have a lot of fancy gizmos at her disposal.

But it had crossed Joey's mind that if they could make a giant robot all those hundreds of years ago, why not an mp3 player, or 4, or 5, or possibly an mp10!

"What's up guys?" Joey said, "Why are you all here?"

Everyone had given Joey their attention, except Dunit, who was still dancing and singing. Murbella tapped Dunit on his shoulder. The wyassy flashed around startled, he saw Murbella and everyone looking at him. He took the headphones out of his ears and put it up inside his yota, replacing them with a translator in his ear. He aligned himself with the wyassies and said, "Good morning, Joey Sadowski. I trust that you plan on maintaining your high spirits throughout the rest of the day?"

Joey was curious as to the reason for the gathering. He idly patted his thighs while glancing at everyone. "I plan to," Joey said. "You guys mind telling me what you're all up to?"

"We have something special for you today," Mulena said.

The first thing to come to Joey's mind was a brand new honoi technique. Second was that he would get to fight Karit while the Nycarman had both hands tied to his ass. Third was he would be flying in a spaceship. He reconsidered the spaceship part as just being wishful thinking and dropped it.

“Enough with the suspense guys,” Joey said. “What is it?”

“You will be going out today,” said Murbella. “You will be joining a few Bloodliners and Tyhunies on a hunting expedition.”

Joey’s smile dropped dead on his face for everyone to see, but they didn’t react in anyway. Joey said, “You mean out there,” he pointed out the front door in the sunny outside, straight through the village and into the forest, “where those green dog-thingies almost killed me?”

Everyone heard the seriousness in Joey’s voice, but Joey’s serious manner did arouse some amusement in most of them.

Telkit said, “Yes indeed, Rakai. Out there, in the wilderness.”

“What about my classes?” said Joey, looking at Mulena and Halirit.

“This is a part of your class,” said Halirit frankly. “Learning how to hunt wild animals and survive in the wilderness is a part of being a full-fledged warrior.”

Joey tried his best to produce a good argument against going out there. “But come on guys, do you really think all that’s necessary?” Joey smiled innocently. “I mean...I’m the Rakai! I am supposed to be saving the world, not bonding with nature!”

No one answered, allowing Halirit to deal with that remark. Halirit said, “How do you plan on saving world while facing bullets and bombs, when you cannot save yourself from teeth and claws?”

Marina made a loud, high-pitched sound like a laugh, or something close to it, quickly covering her mouth to silence herself.

Joey looked to Lezura. She was looking quite radiant this morning; wearing one of her own, bright pink blouse under her yota, and letting her hair loose over her shoulders as how Marina did. “Come on, Lezura,” said Joey. “Tell them that based on your scientific research, it aint a good idea for me to go out there. I can’t get the suit damaged. I won’t be able to breath anymore!”

Lezura smiled at Joey, a smile that Joey sensed brought ominous news. Lezura said, “Actually...Joey, I thought of a way you could move around freely without the suit. I have canisters of chemicals that when inhaled coats the surface of your lungs in a substance that allows you to filter the toxins in the air for about twenty minutes. I think it would be of good use!”

Lezura smiled and showed her teeth at Joey. Everyone did.

Joey folded his arms and twisted his mouth distastefully. “Is this because I kicked Lezura across the face the other day?”

The canisters Lezura spoke about were called sessellic; the name of the chemical in the canisters that when sprayed over the face and inhaled into the lungs provide the surface for filtering the nitrous-felluxide from the air.

Lezura had in her stock three canisters. Not needing the use of any of them at the moment, she gave two of them to Joey when they got to her room. The canisters were about seven inches tall, red with grey writing in Nycarman Naasi, and with a capped top.

While Lezura prepared her things in her room to accompany Joey, the Rakai was in his room. He changed into a dusty colored trousers and black and white shirt. Feeling like a free man in ordinary clothes, he put on his red and white converse and paced around in the room, trying to get back the good vibe of wearing them.

He tested one of the canisters. He sprayed just inches from his face, the chemical having no apparent effect on his eyes. It was a salty, shuddering substance for him to inhale. It was more like shoving a sword covered in broken glass in his nostrils.

“Oh shit...!” Joey screamed. He fell to his knees and rested his head on the bed. The chemical was not necessarily affecting his body; it was just that the smell was awful and had an equally unpleasant taste in his mouth.

Joey regained himself and stood up. He hoped he would get use to the smell of the sessellic—hopefully the next time he had to use it!

Since the incident with the gufders, the Human decided to get his own personal hunting knife, giving to him by Halirit. He was not feared for his life from any Nycarmans, so he never did see it needed to walk with it. But today, if anything gufder were to greet him, he promised himself he definitely will be wielding that weapon.

The blade was almost as long as Joey’s forearm, tapering to a point, and the edge was bright silver compared to the rest of the dull colored blade. The handle was sleek and auburn colored. The texture was extremely dry, so Joey had it wrapped with some moist vines he found outside on the temple wall.

Joey went to the armory where a Nycarman woman, who had the duty rotated onto her to clean all the equipment inside, supplied Joey with a vest and a ve’ran. In the holsters on the vest Joey place the knife and the canisters.

Just as he was coming out he heard Lezura call to him from behind.

“Would please wait on me, Joey!” she said. She had a leathery, black bag pack slung over her left shoulder.

Joey made note of Lezura’s attire, a glossy, long-sleeved white blouse with black arms, tight grey pants and neat black boots with three straps on the top and metallic padding on the bottom.

“What’s all that luggage for, Lezura?” Joey said.

Lezura said disputably, “Do not be so dramatic, Joey. It is only one bag.”

Lezura and Joey walked with each other.

“One *big* bag,” Joey said.

Lezura said to Joey, “A woman has to have her resources.”

“Just make sure you have some food and some mosquito repellent in there,” said Joey.

“What is a mosquito?” Lezura said.

Joey found everyone waiting for him outside in the warm, sunny morning. Near the front of the temple were gathered Nycarmans in light armor and mynamathers. They engaged in conversations until the Rakai arrived.

“Yo!” Joey shouted to them as he and Lezura approached.

The talking quickly died down and everyone seemed to be getting themselves in a working frame of mind.

The next thing Joey realized upon walking on his straight path out of the temple was a face with big bright eyes just magically appearing before him.

“Damn!” Joey screamed, “Marina where to hell did you come from?”

Marina’s mouth made that eerie enormous smile. “If you are already startled by me, what will you do when you see the gufders?”

Joey looked at her scornfully. He said, “Yeah, really funny Marina.” Joey playfully pushed her out of his way.

Marina was wearing a black tunic with light brown markings on the top, and trousers that reached just above her ankles. She wore just an armor vest and padding on her thighs. Her long hair was tied into two pony tails and flopped behind her each time she moved her head.

“Before it escapes my mind,” Lezura said, “how is the sessellic working for you, Joey?”

Joey tried to put it the most humble way he could, “Lezura that stuff smells like shit!”

Lezura said with disdain, “You do not have to be so blunt when you talk, Joey.”

“It smells like poop, then,” Joey said with a hint of unpleasant attitude.

“I’m already missing the suit.”

“Just remember to take it every twenty minutes,” Lezura said. “Gosh, you are so immature at times, Joey.”

“Like you’re any different,” remarked Joey.

Marina came between them and put her arms around their shoulders.

“Come now,” she said, smiling none stop, “do not tell me the relationship is already going downhill?”

Both Lezura and Joey said, “Shut up, Marina!”

Out of the crowd of Nycarmans walked Halirit, his posture erect and sharp as ever. Not only did he wear an armor vest, but he wore the helmet that casted a shadow over his imperious eyes.

Joey stopped in front of him and said, “Wait on me a minute, teach. I have to go and get Redbolt.”

“He is already here,” said Halirit.

Joey looked where Halirit pointed and saw his noble steed. Before he ran off Halirit stopped him with a hand on his chest.

“Do not think that you will be accompanied by your mynamather for long,” said Halirit.

Joey nodded nervously. He went and gave Redbolt a brief checkup. “Did they give you breakfast, buddy?” he said. Joey patted Redbolt’s stomach and felt how hearty it was.

“I wonder if you have any experience using a crossbow, Rakai,” said a voice behind Joey.

Joey sighed and shook his head. He thought about unsheathing his ve’ran, but reconsidered, remembering that Karit was one of the people he had to protect...*sadly*.

Joey turned to see Karit standing behind him with his arms folded and wearing that irritating smile. Karit wore a black and green shirt and silver-green trousers along with his vest and leg paddings.

Joey wondered why Karit was talking to him and knew he wouldn’t understand his Human tongue. He probably guessed Karit just had to say something to get under his skin.

Joey walked up to Karit and said, “You know, I don’t know why they want you to tag along, but if you do, I’m goanna put you to good use.” Joey pressed his finger against Karit’s chest. The Nycarman looked at the finger expectantly, then back at Joey with a smug expression. “If anything chases us I’m goanna chop you in your foot and leave you for them to eat!”

Karit put one hand to his ear and tilted his head down t Joey. “What did you say, Rakai? You will have to speak up...I cannot hear you *all the way down there!*”

Joey was about to unsheathe his weapon when out of the corner of his eye he caught Halirit and Lezura staring at him intensely. Joey slowly took his hand off his sword and patted Karit on his chest.

Joey said dryly, “Catch you later...” Joey turned back to Redbolt “...*dick!*”

Karit’s friend, Bahit, came to his side and ushered him away from the Rakai. Bahit said to Karit in a cautioning voice, “You really need to stop pestering the Rakai, Karit. If you have not realized by now, everyone is willing to back *him* up instead of you.”

Karit frowned. “And that is really something funny. I have been here my whole life and never got the respect the Rakai is receiving now.”

Bahit said, “Karit, try earning it for once.”

Bahit walked off to his mynamather. He left Karit staring at him angrily and confused. Karit hissed through his teeth and waved Bahit away, going back to his mynamather.

Halirit said at the top of his voice, “Listen up, people, enough with the stalling and get yourselves ready!”

Even though there were Bloodliners in the group, they still listened to Halirit’s orders; partly due to the fact that he was the son of a wyassy, but mostly because he was the one to orchestrate the even today, and the Bloodliners had asked to join because they wanted to see the Rakai hunt for the first time.

When everyone was up on their mynamathers, Halirit mounted his beast and rode to the front of the group. He looked to make certain that Joey was at the front as he ordered.

The Rakai was scratching his cheek where some bug had flown on and bit him. As expected, next Joey was Lezura and Marina on Marina’s mynamather, and not too far on Joey’s right were Karit and his entourage, whispering with each other and passing glances at the Rakai.

“We will work in this manner,” said Halirit, “we will offer only our protection to the Rakai from the animals he is not to hunt. Any other animals that he has been instructed to kill he will have to do on his own...or die trying.”

“Boy,” said Joey grimly, “I guess Halirit’s still pissed off about the punch I gave him. On my *own*...?”

“Worry not Joey,” Lezura whispered over to him. “I will not let you die. Marina and I are here to protect you. And do not listen to Halirit; he is only trying to scare you.”

“He’s doing one hell of a job!” Joey said.

“The Rakai will hunt for animals,” Halirit continued, “two game animals and two predators.”

*Hunt predators?* Joey thought. *They really want to get some good laughs out of this.*

But even though Joey thought Halirit was sending him to his death, he was not feeling deterred by the danger. He knew Halirit only did this to make him stronger.

Halirit said to Joey, “Rakai, you will hunt a basurel, then a nuta. That will complete the list of game animals. You will move on to hunting a carspi,” that name provoked some negative chatter amongst the crowd. Joey saw that as proof that a carspi was more dangerous than a gufder, “and a bieduvel”—If the name of the last animal didn’t spark outrage, it were the next words Halirit said that was sure to do it—“without using your honoi.”

“Damn madman!” said a Bloodliner man.

“You definitely are mad!” said a woman.

Joey was drawn into the hysteria. “Wait, just how much danger am I goanna be in?”

Lezura said, “Joey, carspies are large enough to eat a mynamather. But they are solitary animals, so you would only be facing one. But bieduvels are as large as a mynamather and travel in packs. If you were to kill just one bieduvel, you would still have to face the pack of them—which can be up to twelve!”

Joey gaped. He made a sardonic smile. “Lezura, I think you should’ve left me back on Earth.”

But the outcries didn’t cancel the hunt. It still commenced anyway; even with Joey attempting to get off Redbolt and head back to the temple.

Something inside Joey compelled him go on ahead with it. It was either that or proving to everyone that he was indeed not the Rakai they were looking for.

The group’s trek into the forest by mynamather wasn’t very long. As soon as they saw that the smell of lush plants, rich soil and the plants got thicker and hindered any fluid movements, they made a stop in a surrounding of lelam, pihok and pomeg trees and bluish-green bushes. Only two parts of the area had any sunlight, the rest blocked off by the dense network of tree limbs above them.



The birds and insects utter high pitched and annoying sounds at the presence of the group. Halirit hoped that the birds didn't scare away the animals they intended to hunt right now.

Everyone got of their animals and readied the necessary items they would need. What the group intended to use was a kind of angular crossbow with a rotating barrel that was fitted into the center of it. The barrel housed eight arrows that could be fired repeatedly. In respect to the small size the Nycarmans wanted of the crossbow, the arrows were made with a length no more than ten inches.

Along with the crossbow they carried their knives, spears and a strange kind of eyewear that looked like a V-shaped lens attached to a piece of wood and strings at the back. Due the poor eyesight of the Nycarmans over long distances, the lens would enhance their vision a couple of meters.

Halirit was busy showing Joey the mechanics of the crossbow, while Lezura took out a small data-pad from her bag and prepared some images to show Joey.

She went over to Joey and Halirit. "Excuse me," she said. "Joey, I have prepared visual information of the animals you will be hunting, so you know how they look."

"Okay," said Joey, lowering his crossbow, which was quiet hefty, to look at Lezura's data-pad.

He recognized the basurel, he saw it once before. The nuta, however, was a little shorter than the mynamather, but had massive bulk, built more like a bison. Its skin was a combination of green, brown and blue stripes, with dark-green bristles running down its back. Its head was large with a short snout. Its eyes were small and orange and with three, blunt horns on the top of its snout. On its head was a bright orange colored sack with some green and black markings. The screen was divided in two to show the image of the sac deflated and other with the sack inflated. When inflating, the pattern was revealed to be that of a two large eyes and a wide, scraggy mouth.

The carspi to Joey was in essence a giant, chubby, deep blue colored lizard. Its head was massive with a set of white, pointed teeth like a hundred of spikes, and with two tongues extending out of its pink mouth. Its eyes were bright yellow, small and looked crazed. Six, thick muscular legs supported its weight, and somehow seemed to match the design of its body. It had three tentacle looking things at the sides of its head that Joey didn't really care ask what they were for.

The bieuvels were something of giant, flightless birds with a little of tyrannosaurus-rex thrown into it; due to its small front limbs. It walked on two, lean legs with widely splayed, four-toed feet. Its tail was flat with blue feathers at the end. The bird's beak was large, narrow and serrated at the edges. Bright blue scales on its toes, the single claw on its front limbs and its feet stood out on its dark brown skin. Its sinister pink eyes were shadowed by a head of large feathers that were yellow at the top and the rest pink.

"Damn," Joey said with an unhappy expression, "they look a lot meaner than the gufders!"

"That is because they are," said Halirit over Joey's shoulder.

Joey turned around and said to him, "I really can't use my honoi, teach?"

"No," Halirit said. "Not even if your life is in danger. If you can learn to fight without honoi, then you can fight ten times better with it. If you use your honoi, I will know; it leaves a trace. And if you do, you will have to start the process all over again. If you refuse to do so, then a portal can be opened and you will be sent back to your homeworld."

Joey abruptly dropped the crossbow and went up into Halirit's face, tipping on his toes to reach further, though Joey was still inches beneath Halirit. "Hey, don't get all cocky like you run this show! You people are the ones who called me here, so don't think you can have me as some come around idiot! I leave when I want to leave. Got that?"

For a second there everyone thought Joey was really bold, stupid and brave enough to fight Halirit. Then Joey took up his crossbow and said, "Now where's that damn basurel?"

Halirit said aloud to the group, "We will set up camp here until further notice from me. I want five persons to accompany me and the Rakai on the hunt." Halirit quickly turned to Lezura, who had already slung her bag over her shoulder. "Not you, young lady."

Lezura suppressed her shock of disbelief and said, "Why not?"

"The Rakai does not need a distraction," said Halirit.

Lezura allowed her displeasure to show on her vexed face. "Halirit with all due respect, I am not some fan-girl following behind Joey because I want to kiss his rear-end in praise to the Rakai. I am the only one here with the proper medical skills and equipment in the case Joey gets into serious harm."

Halirit reconsidered. "Fine," he said. He then added slowly and sternly, "Just make sure that you keep out of the way, Lezura."

Lezura said, "It will be as if I do not even exist."

Halirit chose the next four persons; Bahit, Karit (who Halirit thought would have most likely argued till night if he wasn't chosen), a woman named Mecina and a slender, black haired man named Sorit.

Joey frowned at Karit and turned away from him. At least he would have Lezura by his side. Just her presence alone would be enough to make things go well, he thought.

Halirit said to the group, "Gather your weapons and come with me. We are going by foot."

Joey took a quick spray from the canister, shuddered and cursed at the awful smell, and walked with the others away from the group.

It was travelling by foot that Joey realized just how massive the forest really was. The trees especially, made everything else look meaningless and minuscule. But at least the trees weren't a pest like the insects flying around his head. With each step Joey made in the tall grass bugs flew up, probably in bug terms attacking Joey for destroying their home.

Over his head Joey heard the lankers squawking like mad.

Halirit stopped Joey. Everyone else, who was eighteen to twenty meters behind, stopped as well. Halirit leaned close to Joey and pointed up at the birds.

"Keep in mind," said Halirit, "that lankers are like the forest's early alarm system. If they see you, they will start to make noise that will alert the other animals. When stalking prey, ensure that the lankers do not see you first."

"How?" Joey said.

"And that is your first lesson," said Halirit with some level of enthusiasm, "camouflage." Halirit gestured to the bushes around them. "The forest has plenty of material that you can use to disguise your appearance to blend into the environment."

Joey figured that Halirit wanted him make himself look like a bush. Joey let the crossbow hang by its strap over his shoulder and search for some branches he could easily snap off. He noticed that the plants on this world came in a variety of colors other than green, so Joey made sure he didn't choose just one color. He snapped off the branches and stuck them under his vest, inside the waist of his trousers and bent some along with some vines and wrapped around his legs and arms. He twisted some more to form a something like a bird's nest, and placed it over his head.

Halirit's also prepared his camouflage, and soon after he and Joey were covered in blue, green, and green-yellow bushes all over.

The others behind them had taken on camouflage as well. They didn't want to stand out while trailing behind Halirit and Joey. Lezura had some difficulty preparing her adornment, and got assistance from Mecina.

Bahit struggled to fit the crown onto Karit's head.

Halirit crouched, Joey automatically following his teacher's lead. The bushes were irritating Joey's skin, but not to the extent where he would have to be scratching like a dog with fleas.

"Make sure you move slowly," said Halirit, "preferably to walk, when wearing camouflage."

They did so until the lankers above apparently figured the Nycarmans vanished out of sight and stopped squawking.

"Next you will learn to track trails," whispered Halirit.

"Like poop and that kind of stuff?" Joey whispered as well.

"Exactly," Halirit said. "You have experience in tracking?"

"No," said Joey, "but I use to watch Animal Planet with my parents."

Halirit didn't know what Animal Planet was and didn't care; so long as Joey understood.

"Basurel dung is a light green or brown color," said Halirit, "usually in the form of a puddle about as wide as your hand."

Joey didn't voice his displeasure at having to fiddle with basurel dung, but did show an unsettling expression.

Halirit and his student searched through the trees and bushes until they finally located a basurel dung pile. It was brown colored and still moist, with some seeds and other matter sticking out of it.

"This one is fresh," said Halirit.

"I can smell that," Joey said.

Halirit pulled down the lens over his eyes and looked around. "One has to be close by."

Joey walked off a few feet from Halirit and looked around for himself. Joey walked under of the many dusty, craggy outgrown root of a ville tree that made arches about the forest.

A long insect fell off the root and unto Joey's ear. He frantically brushed it off and looked up. Red segmented insects, about three inches long, were squirming in a huge cluster under the arch. Feeling uncomfortable Joey hurried his pace and moved from under the root. In his haste he tripped over a smaller, mossed covered root. He landed in the grass and sent scores of insects flying into the air.

"Crap..." Joey said.

Joey put one hand on the ground to push himself up. He heard something snap and froze like a picture. His eyes darted madly about in search of the source of the sound.

*Basurel...?* He thought.

He heard something snap again. This time he was able to pinpoint the location—to his left.

Joey looked in that direction and saw an animal between two lelam trees. But it was not a basurel; too much bulk and two extra legs. Joey could tell by the horns on its snout that it was a nuta.

“Just my luck,” Joey whispered. He thought, *This is ten times better than killing basurel. I wonder if I’m supposed to kill the animals in any order. Who cares?*

Joey slowly rose to his knees like he feared to wake a slumbering dragon. He took a quick glance behind him and saw that the others were not there, not even Halirit.

“I guess this is it,” Joey said.

The nuta bit off another mouthful of leaves from a bush. Joey figured the animal was more interested in eating than any Human. Or probably it hadn’t noticed the Human as yet.

Joey stopped his rambling thinking and got to work. He went flat on his gut and crawled closer to the animal. Joey went up to a red bush and crawled just a few inches into view of the nuta. He took aim with his crossbow, but his hands were shaking.

“Cut it out, you damn douchebags!” he snarled silently to his hands.

Joey aligned the iron sights on the crossbow with the head of the nuta. He was already smiling victoriously, thinking of the praises he would be getting for killing the animal.

Then a small, rodent-looking animal walked into Joey’s view. It was dark yellow colored with a brown coloring on its short feet and two, small floppy ears. It noticed Joey and stopped, large blue eyes blinking at the Human.

Get out of the damn way you rat! Joey wanted to say, but couldn’t risk alerting the nuta.

The tapike must have sensed Joey’s anger. It crouched and arched its back. It pulled back the lips of its short snout and exposed large, chisel like teeth. It hissed at Joey.

“Shut up!” Joey whispered.

The nuta grunted. It stopped chewing. It made a low bellow and moved its head from side to side to locate the sound it just heard. It turned around, a kind of sinister look in its eyes, and spotted Joey and the tapike.

“Oh...shit...oh shit!” Joey chanted.

The nuta grunted again. It made a loud mooing sound that vibrated the ground Joey lay on and shook its head harshly. The tapike ran off as the beast came closer to Joey. Little larger than an African rhino, the nuta could easily reduce Joey’s head to a pulp with one step of its foot.

Joey’s trembling shook the crossbow out of line when he fired. The arrow stuck into the nuta’s shoulder, apparently only making the animal more enraged. It inflated the sack on its forehead and showed the ghastly face pattern.

Joey flew off his gut with some kind of electrical speed and was already screaming and running. The nuta charged after the Human like a truck speeding out of control. The running bush that was Joey wove his way between the trees and through the bushes. A thin tree no thicker than Joey’s body was knocked clean out of the ground by the nuta’s head charge.

Joey dove under some nearby root arches, and crawled out from underneath it like an animal built to run on all fours. He saw a tree with light dark blue leaves and low lying limbs and made for it. In one bound Joey got three feet off the ground and onto the trunk. Wrapping arms and legs around it he crawled up and grabbed the first branched. He pulled himself up and was already reaching for the other branch. And before he knew it he was way off the ground and looking down at the nuta.

The beast hit into the tree with its blunt horns. Joey felt the tree shake and his body almost fell off. He gripped on the trunk with both arms. He quickly freed one to shoot down at the nuta with his crossbow. They were inaccurate shots, but somehow one managed to hit the nuta in the upper back. The animal grunted sharply. Its enraged breathing sounded like a deep rasp.

The animal’s rage was beginning to subside. With no way to reach the threat above it decided to run. But perhaps it was too late.

Joey took careful aim at the nuta’s neck and fired. The arrow hit the animal right in its cervical vertebrae. It collapsed with a loud thud into the grass.

Joey bit on his lip to hold back his scream, but he did chuck his hand with the crossbow victoriously in the air three times. He did it. Who could say he wasn’t a hunter now? Who could say he was a good for nothing?

But Joey didn’t lose focus. He took one more deep breath of the canister’s contents and descended down the tree. Quarter way down Joey released the limb and fell to the ground in a crouch.

It was then Joey realized that the nuta was still breathing. Its eyes still looked at him with pain and despair. The arrow had not killed it, but severed the spinal cord in its neck and crippled it.

Joey didn't let the animal suffer another moment. He unsheathed his hunting knife, walked around to the nuta's front and said, "Sorry, but I got a job to do."

Joey held the knife with both hands to apply enough force, and ran it into the base of the nuta's neck. The animal stopped breathing and its eyes rolled over into its head. Joey withdrew his knife and wipes the yellow blood onto the grass. He was about to sheathed it back but decided upon another course of action. He went to the nuta's head and cut off its inflatable sack. When he did it exposed a yellow patch on the nuta's head with two small tubes.

Joey put the sack into a pouch on his waist and grinned. *That Halirit might not believe that I killed one, but this will prove it, Joey thought. I wonder how Karit will react when I show this to his ugly face?*

Joey checked his crossbow and saw that only one arrow remained in the barrel. He took the arrow out and replaced the barrel with another from his waist. Only one barrel remained. He had to use them more carefully now.

He stilled look around in search of the others. With no sign of anyone he wondered if they could have really left him out here? Even if he did manage to kill all the animals, how would he find his way back?

No, he thought. They wouldn't do something like that. They're probably watching me right now!

He picked some more bushes for his camouflage and went in search of the basurel. But he wondered if it was really worth it; now that he had killed an even bigger animal?

Crouched, he sneaked through the growth in search of...a carspi...?

*Yeab,* thought Joey. *I might as well hunt the predators now.*

Lezura and the others were huddled together under the darkness casted by a ville tree above. On the trees near them the moss creatures scurried off the trees and into the growth of bushes on the ground and under stones and rotting logs.

Lezura was observing something on her portable radar while she dictated to the others.

“I only see Joey by himself,” she said. “I did not plant a tracker on Halirit; I only hope that he is nearby.”

“He should be,” said Mecina.

There was loud whistle not too far away. It sounded three times.

“That is Halirit’s signal,” said Sorit. “The Rakai has made a kill!”

“He has?” said Lezura delightedly.

“But that was three whistles,” said Mecina, “the signal for a nuta.”

“That means he killed a nuta!” said Bahit.

“All by himself?” said Lezura. At first it was disbelief to her, and then she found the news pleasurable. She laughed. “Joey is going on well!”

Bahit turned to Karit and said, “Hey Karit, Joey—”

Karit’s frown was ugly enough to scare away potential predators. Possibly if some of the other animals could have adopted that face it could increase their chances of survival.

Lezura felt pleased enough to say to Karit, “What is the matter, Karit? You seem as if someone spoilt your day...”

“Shut up, woman,” snapped Karit. Lezura didn’t even have to respond. The bitterness in Karit’s voice was satisfying enough for her. “That nuta was probably already wounded.”

“Do not be so ridiculous, Karit,” Sorit said with an irritable face. “Halirit would not be so unprofessional to let the Rakai get away with an easy kill. Stop being so jealous and give the Rakai respect where it is due.”

Karit folded his arms and leaned back against a tree. “Very well,” said Karit smugly. “I will let the Rakai enjoy that meager taste of victory, but it will not last long. I doubt when he confronts the bieduvel he will last even a minute.”

All the Jinkais, accompanied by their Yelkais and a few security personnel from their own military, were escorted out of the main building of the city of Vemlel and out into the lights of the city.

There were huge factory buildings and warehouses all around them. Hovercars drove in all directions before them, and airships flew overhead leaving dazzling trails of lights in the star-lit sky. Soldiers accompanied by a variety of robots with Apuna’s blue insignia walked the streets in packs, some maintaining order in the city and others acting as security personnel’s for the buildings they were assigned to.



The night was cold to the bone, but the Orderrans had an internal heating organ that vibrated to produce heat and nullified the cold.

They all stood on a red tiled sidewalk in front of a hover car track, and within seconds of Apuna calling for a transport in his comlink on his wrist a large hovercar came to a stop before them.

It was a wide vehicle with a black color, grey base and a large blue tinted glass dome over the entire interior. Beneath the hovercar were antigravity orbs where wheels would have been. The orbs gave off a wave off pulsating blue rings.

As the vehicle stopped before them a door pushed out slightly and pulled back along the side of the vehicle. As the Jinkais and Yelkais all entered Jinkai Podo shuddered and frowned at the thought of being amongst so many people and their bodily odors in such a confined space. He quickly pulled out a white handkerchief and held it over his nose and mouth.

Podo was about to board inside the grey colored interior of the car when he saw the seated Garabass idly picking his nose. Podo instantly stepped back into his Yelkai; who then bumped into Borros, his Yelkai Gadsa, Jinkai Tahah and Jinkai St. Deflenoix. Everyone cursed in irritation.

“What the hell is happening up there? You all better talk up or else I will spank you all on your little bottoms!” St. Deflenoix shouted to the top of the line.

“Apuna leaned his head outside and saw Podo looking furiously at Garabass. “What seems to be the problem, Jinkai Podo?” he asked in the voice that did not hint that he had to urgently get where they were going.

Podo pointed at Garabass, who was looking at Podo and still picking his nose. “That nasty man won’t stop digging his nose for treasure!” Podo said fiercely.

Garabass took offence to the attitude of Podo, “What? Are you telling me that you have never picked your nose in public before?”

“Never,” Podo said dryly with his Yelkai nodding in approval.

“Would you please stop wasting time Podo and just get inside,” Jinkai Buuton said from his seat.

“Not unless he stops picking his nose,” Podo said. “The same way he picks his nose is the same way he digs out his ass for shit!”

The other Orderrans were confused and disgusted by Podo’s statement. Finally, they got fed up with his personal beliefs and dislike for nose picking, and they all tried to push him inside the vehicle.

They were met with great resistance as Podo held on to the door frame with all his might. Even the muscular Onn and a usually stronger female like Tahah were straining and grunting under the pressure to get him inside.

Podo's Yelkai, Botop, stood aside watching what was taking place. He knew the reason for Podo's behavior very well, and wondered if it would be appropriate for him to tell the others about Podo's obsessive-compulsive-disorder.

Before Botop could open his mouth they finally managed to haul Podo inside. Botop quickly followed him inside the vehicle. The interior was lit with a soft whitish green light, with the silver cushioned benches arranged up against the side and back walls of the vehicle. Up at the front where the two drivers, who paid no attention to what was happening around the back. They were assigned to be drivers, not referees.

Podo sat on one of the benches a few inches away from Jinkai Kadda's Yelkai. Podo shuddered at the experience of being handled by so many people. Luckily his Yelkai was there to spray him with a disinfectant. The smell was so strong that all the other Orderrans inside started coughing.

Jinkai Kadda said, "My goodness! Podo, could you not have done that outside?" Kadda pulled out a handkerchief and coughed violently in it.

Without concern for the silly incident that had just taken place Apuna instructed the driver to take off to their destination.

The vehicle hummed to life and floated along the road. The passengers were treated to a short, though not intentional tour of the city of Vemlel. They were all impressed by Apuna's ability to create a fully functioning military city in a remote area such as this. There were also huge transport vehicles on the road that roared past the hover car, and even a small traffic lane bordered with glowing blue lights above them in the sky that extended to around half the distance of the city.

After a few minutes they all came to a stop at a familiar building. It was the port where the arriving Orderran Jinkais and their military force had docked when they had arrived on the planet.

It was a six story tall building with four sides. Its color a like rusty metal, and had a flat mechanical roof that could be pulled apart to the very end of the building to accommodate a docking airship. It was even wider than it was high, reaching nearly six hundred meters, and had three large doors on the first floor that lead inside the building. It was pasted with searchlights between every interval of each floor, and it was surrounded by a ten story high mesh fence with two large guarded gates on each side.

As soon as the hovercar drove off the road and onto the path that lead to the gate, there was a voice from the radio at the front seat in the vehicle. The voice was clear from static over the radio and sounded somewhat male.

“Identify yourself and any passengers aboard,” they voice ordered.

The driver on the right, specifically there to answer any calls over the radio spoke, “Personal transporter officers Mort and Uon; transporting Jinkai Apuna and the other visiting Jinkais also; requesting permission to enter on behalf of the lord Apuna.”

Upon hearing that it was Jinkai Apuna inside the vehicle the gates automatically opened inward with a soft metallic creak. As the vehicle moved inside the other Jinkais noticed that the guards there were actually robots.

Their bodies were grey colored muscle fibers that peeked from beneath the corners of the black, metal amour that was their skin. Their hands and feet were a whitish-silver color. Their shoulders and chests were blue and on the upper side of the left arm was the blue insignia of Apuna’s army. The robots were six meters tall with slimly designed bodies, and as usual they had the slim white face and red eyes of an Orderran, but the nose was straight. These were the standard issue guard-machines, or g-mechs for short.

The g-mechs held down their OB-rifles at their sides and saluted the vehicle as it passed with the right fist patted against the chest, and then the hand held straight out with fingers unfolded to the tips. The robots closed back the gate by entering the code in the built-in computers on their left forearms.

The grounds of the docking yard was abuzz with shipping vehicles carrying crates, tanks of fuel and mechanical parts for either robots or vehicles. Their mechanical hums, beeps and wails were the key sounds of the night as they drove across the yard to the various parts inside the docking bay, but they were all extremely careful not to drive on the path of the hovercar carrying the Jinkais.

The hovercar stopped at the front door of the bay, where through the window they could all see about thirty of Apuna’s officers awaiting their arrival. Apuna exited the car, then turned around and gracefully took the hand of his Yelkai and helped her out. When they walked off the other Jinkais followed then with their Yelkais close by, each keeping keen eyes on Apuna’s guards.

Once all exited the vehicle the soldiers suddenly stiffen their bodies and gave a respectful salute to all the higher ranking officers that passed. Two g-mechs at the door to the elevator lifts opened for the Jinkai's. As they all walked into the blackish brown interior of the building seven officers of each of the different Jinkais military force who at the sidewalls saluted their Jinkais and escorted towards the elevator lifts at the back.

Each Jinkai took a separate elevator that could accompany his and her soldiers too. The inside had grey walls with white in the corners, and a floor made from a single white structure and glowing blue corners. They all exited the elevators upon reaching the top, and made their way towards Jinkai Onn's airship. It was between the airship of Jinkai Kadda and Podo.

Just like the others it was a giant machine; nearly five stories tall and one hundred and fifty meters long. It was shaped like a large oval with a large rectangular structure at the end that housed the black rockets.

At the upper sides of the machine were two half-crescent shaped wings with massive antigravity orbs at the tips and in the center. At the lower sides of it were short wing-like structures which housed its primary weapons; black high-powered plasma canons and 300-calliber machine guns.

At the front of the ship was a white face with two huge camera eyes, a thin lipped mouth and a flat nose. On the top of the airship were several rows of air vents, and automatic plasma torrent guns at each end. The airship was dark brown at the top and with red wings, but the base of it was a jet black, and it stood on four feet.

This was the basic design for an Orderran airship, though were slight differences with the airships of the other Jinkais.

All the airships were spaced at a distance off twelve meters amongst each other. Each was being guarded by g-mechs and a few soldiers of each military. They all stopped and watched as Onn went towards his airship. His people inside were notified of his approach by those outside, and the entrance ramp at the base of the ship slowly lowered with a mechanical hiss and creaking.

As it touched the floor with a loud thud Jinkai Onn turned around to face the others with his officers following his lead. They straightened themselves and gave the others a salute. They then returned the same salute; though some did it without much care or respect.

Borros Onn walked up the ramp with the rest of his military force and disappeared into the body of the giant vehicle.

Everyone immediately stood back from the airship, and soon the engine of the ship began to hum and siren loudly to life. The antigravity orbs began to pulsate and give off blue, beating rings of light, and a fairly strong wind gushed from beneath it.

The top of the hanger pulled apart, and like a whale surfacing from the deep, the Skymera ascended into the cold night.

Inside the black and silver interior of the airship Borros Onn walked up to the command deck of his airship and looked at the large rectangular screen that displayed what the eyes of his airship saw. High mountains were like colossal black figures until the airship got close enough for its occupant's eyes to probe deeper into the terrain. Above them the star-speckled sky seemed too beautiful, and looked as if its presence was of another existence.

Before Borros was the ship's main control panel, where four officers sat evenly spaced across the panel and operating various parts of the ship. Lights beeped and flashed on the panel. There were images of the fuel gauge, the map of the terrain, a three-dimensional replica of his airship and its various compartments, and a screen which showed the energy of detected life forms no smaller than a rat, or tapike.

He called to the pilot nearest to him and handed him the data-pad. "Make certain that you also run a check for viruses," he told the pilot. "We are not sure what that Apuna might be up to, and see if you can retrieve any other files from the data-pad regarding the Rakai and the key of salvation."

And given the circumstances Onn had a point; one not just accepts an offer from an unknown man without checking further into the situation. And if he was indeed successful in finding anything else of great importance about the key, then he might be able to get something out of it for himself, alone.

Apuna and his Yelkai turned away from the ascending airship and walked back to the elevator.

"Do you really trust Jinkai Onn to bring back the key for your desired use, my lord?" his Yelkai, Vuharo, said.

"Of course I do not," Apuna promptly replied. "I simply do not wish to risk the lives of my soldiers when I can just simply send someone else. Besides, our army has a more important task at hand that I am to later discuss with the others."

They entered the elevator. Apuna watched his Yelkai punch in the number of the desired floor and they descended.

“But what if Onn fails, my lord?” she said.

He gave her an amused glance. “It will matter not,” said Apuna. “So long as people die; so long as Onn’s soldiers kill and are killed, we will be on the right track.”

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Joey applied the same unsavory dung hunting method to search for the carspi. He figured that the carspi would leave a bigger load of...filth, and that it would probably have the bones of some of the animals it ate.

Brilliant red flowers and blue ones with spiky petals grew on bushes all around him. Insects buzzed across his face, and birds flew overhead from tree to tree. Joe made sure he moved at snail's pace in his camouflage so nothing picked up on his presence by speed.

He saw three tapikes scurry under a tree root close to him. Joey wondered if these little critters had good eyesight to see through his camouflage, or if they smelt or heard him. They almost ruined his last kill. He had to watch out for them.

Before him was a fallen tree that had rotten into a huge log with a vast hollow in its trunk. The surface was brownish-green colored, flaky and craggy and with pink and white mushrooms growing out of its corpse.

Just by curiosity, Joey walked around to the end of the huge log and peered inside the hollow.

*"Whoa..."* he said.

The hollow was wide enough to hide an elephant, leading him to assume that this must have been a young ville or yelm tree. Inside the dark and gloomy space he saw pieces of things hanging out of the roof. Bright blue insects with rounded bodies, buzzing, green wings and as large as a small bird inhabited the trunk. Joey noted that their wing casings had the pattern of leaf-veins on the surface.

He also saw one of those red worm thingies burrowing into the wall of the trunk.

A smell caught his nose, other than the cardboard and mustard scent of the log. It smelt like flesh...rotting flesh. Either something died by old age or was killed.

The last possibility triggered Joey into looking more keenly into the log. His focus was shifted to the floor of the log. It was vast with muddy muck, plant matter; mostly the lining of the hollow's surface, and...bones!

Joey saw a dirty skull peeping at him from out of the muck. He saw a skeletal paw sticking out as well, with the skull of a gufder not too far from it. He could tell it was a gufder based on the long snout and the sharp teeth.

After beginning to discover more bones in the trunk, he came to the realization that this place was a graveyard. He found the source of the stench. A decaying basurel; only its head and neck and feet distinguishable on the rest of its carcass that had been stripped clean of flesh. The basurel's innards were being feasted upon by the leaf looking bugs and the red worms.

“The hell...?” Joey squeaked, putting one hand over his mouth and nose. “Damn that looks nasty!”

The slayer of these creatures was not too far away. In fact, it had been stalking the Human, hoping to make a meal out of it as well.

Above in the trees, moving like an assassin on the branches, a lithrike was closing in on the Human. A lithrike was a quadruped that hunted on the ground and also in the trees; the large branches provided support for its weight and stable footing. Its head narrowed to a sleek looking snout, giving its head a “V” shape when viewed from the front.

Its body was slender, but also defined by fine muscles and smooth skin. Its ears were large and patterned like a green leaf, the skin at the tips formed into long swirls. Its snout was dark green colored at the top with a pink nose, and bands of yellow surrounded its large red eyes and ran down to the tip of its snout. Sensitive, yellow whiskers of flesh stretched two feet from its snout. Its skin was a mint green color with bands of blue and dark green on its sides and around its feet, and large scales that looked like bright green leaves were flexed up and down on its back and shoulders. Topping off its design was a long tail with some leaf-looking scales to imitate some kind of vine, and brown feet with four, splayed toes on each for grasping tree branches.

A lithrike was a little larger than gufder and just as deadly. Stealth was its weapon, along with sharp teeth and fangs that contained paralyzing venom. One bite and the Rakai would be done for.

But luckily Halirit was close by. The Nycarman had vanished from Joey's side in order to hide himself in the forest and view Joey's progress from there. Halirit was currently in a tree opposite of the one the lithrike was in, concealed by the foliage along with his camouflage.

From his branch he kept close watch at the lithrike. If Joey didn't become aware of the predators presence by the time it attacked, then Halirit would have to intervene.



Joey knew that whatever crafted this mosaic of dead bodies was not too far away. He readied his crossbow and spun to look around his surroundings.

The lithrike realized the prey had become alert, possibly sensing its presence. Not waiting another moment the lithrike darted down the sloping branch and towards the Rakai. Joey heard the noise above and looked up, but the lithrike was already coming down on him.

Joey only managed to scream and get off a single shot with his crossbow before the lithrike slammed him to the ground. Quickly releasing the crossbow Joey grabbed the throat of the animal, keeping the jaws at bay. When he found the force of the lithrike too strong he put his head over the animal's shoulder, wrapped his arms completely around its neck and his feet around its trunk.

The annoyed predator, railed up with Joey pasted on to it. It couldn't bite him because his body was out of reach, snapping just behind Joey's back. It clawed at Joey's back to pry him off, scraping away Joey's armor piece by piece until his bare back was exposed.

Joey felt the claws dig into his flesh like a heated blade cutting under his fingernails.

"Shit!" screamed Joey.

The lithrike rose again and fell backward with Joey. It grunted and growled. It reared up again and fell down with Joey.

Joey yelped when his wounds hurt again on the impact with the ground. He freed one hand to reach for his knife. The lithrike tossed itself and rolled on the ground with Joey in its frantic efforts to free itself from this prey that fought back with a most unusual method. Joey touched the knife, he unsheathed it, "Piece a shit dog-thing!" he snarled, and plunged the blade awkwardly into the lithrike.

His aim was not perfect. The blade actually slide across the lithrike's hide instead of piercing any vitals. But the laceration was deep and painful enough to make the lithrike howl in anguish.

Feeling that he had mortally wounded the animal, Joey let go of the lithrike and dropped onto his side in the grass. The lithrike limped back, making a quick movement with its head to the wound before glaring at Joey.

The Human had risen to his feet. He held the knife ready in a defensive stance.

"C'mon you piece a shit! I got yours right here!"

The lithrike was an ambush predator, not a brawler like a gufder was. With the element of surprise gone it didn't wish to take chances with this animal before it. Maybe another day it would see if it could kill this kind of prey in a full-on clash. But not today, not with this wound.

The lithrike scurried up the nearest tree. Joey pointed to the last remnants of the animal before it vanished up the tree.

"You better run!" he screamed. "*Ab crap!*"

The wounds in his back stung him and took the cockiness out of him as well. Joey fell on his backside and fingered at the bloody claw marks on his back.

Halirit pondered upon taking a break and bringing Joey back to the others to have his wounds dressed. Thankfully Joey wasn't bitten by the lithrike, but those claw marks were nasty looking. Halirit didn't want them to get infected.

Joey tore the ravaged vest off his chest and threw it away. It seemed that it would have fallen off eventually. Joey took off his shirt. "And just when my skin was looking all sexy," said Joey bitterly, referring to the scars that had healed and vanished.

Joey took a deep breath from a spray from the canister. Already this can had reached nearly half way in its contents.

Joey searched through his pouch and took out a thick, plastic bag with a length of bandage and a bottle of antiseptic that Lezura had given him. He figured any good survivalist would have brought these items with him along with weapons.

With some difficulty and awkwardness reaching the wounds, Joey dressed them himself.

Halirit watched respectfully at the Rakai taking care of himself.

*Maybe he is not so worthless after all,* thought Halirit.

Joey put up his few medical items and put his shirt back on. Still feeling some stings in his wound he carefully searched for some more bushes and wrapped them around his body, but without the creases the vest would have made, the camouflage was a lot less dense.

Immediately Joey went back to searching for carspi dung, now learning to keep an eye out for the trees above.

Halirit waited for Joey to move off a couple of meters out of view before sounding off his whistle again.

Meanwhile Joey was having thoughts as to the source of the whistle he had been hearing.

*I'm hearing it each time I kill something. It's definitely Halirit.* But the thought offered Joey no comfort of protection. Judging by how that animal almost killed him, Joey realized Halirit really wasn't going to help him.

Meanwhile Lezura and the others were tracking Joey from over a hundred meters away. Lezura's sophisticated gadgets had usability even in these remote places. Then again, the Ixian kingdom was registered on the modern world map, so it was possible that a satellite was orbiting over this region.

"What was that whistle just now?" Lezura asked Mecina.

"Probably the Rakai met his untimely death," Karit said innocently.

"Karit..." Bahit said, looking at his friend disappointedly.

Mecina thought she saw something move near a tree next to her. She didn't hear anything so ignored it. "That was the signal for a lithrike," she said.

"That is not a part of the list," said Lezura.

"But that does not mean the Rakai will not encounter other animals," said Sorit. The lanky man leaped over a root. "That is what increases the chances of danger for the Rakai."

Lezura looked from her radar at the path before her. She looked back at it and said, "Stop here!"

"What is it?" Bahit said.

"Joey just stopped," said Lezura, "he encountered another animal! Blast! If only I could be there...I am missing out on vital notes!"

"Yeah baby!" whispered Joey, hiding below an outgrown, moss covered tree root. Standing before his sights was a basurel. Not a big kill as the nuta, but still something he was to slay.

Without any fierce horns, teeth or claws, the basurel was an easy target, though he had some trouble distinguishing it from the surrounding due to its camouflage.

It was eating some berries off a blue bush. Joey was searching for carspi dung when he came across a small dung pie with seeds...and an unpleasant smell that rivaled that of his canisters.

He laid low on his stomach in the leaf litter. He smiled devilishly like a wolf about to silence a lonely sheep. He made sure to look around for any

of those yellow cat-rat thingies. Without any around to spoil his kill, Joey felt assured of a perfect kill.

That was until a carspi burst out of nowhere, and seized the basurel in its massive jaws.

Joey only saw a big blue blur blaze pass him, but the animal stopped in its tracks like a truck screeching to a halt, snapping its jaws like a car crashing into a wall. Joey didn't even hear the basurel scream, he doubted that it got the time. He only heard the basurel's bones being crushed to powder in the monster's jaws. With a few chomps the basurel disappeared.

Joey bit on his lips and remained still. He figured that the carspi hadn't picked up his presence as yet.

He finally got to see the predator's size in real life, and part of him wished he hadn't. The animal was as long as a school bus from its massive head to stubby tail. And it was nearly twice as large as a hippopotamus.

*They want me to kill this thing? Joey thought. I don't even think arrows will work on this mother—*

The carspi snapped its head in Joey's direction, then in front of it, then in another direction and walked off.

Joey was timid, but not scared out of his mind. He got up and followed the giant lizard, as it was moving quiet fast on its six legs for something this huge.

Joey followed it through a maze of fern looking plants, wondering what the hell he was doing following something like this, and why when he thought about it he didn't stop moving.

He was led to a large log. The carspi must have crawled over it. Joey leaped and reached with his hand on the top of the log, pulling himself up onto his knees at the top. He saw the tail of the carspi slip through some bushes and went after it.

Joey was led to a huge hole under the mass of roots of a ville tree. It was dark; with cold air blowing out on him like some demon was inside laughing at him to come in.

After staring at the hole for a while now, Joey wondered if it was one of his best ideas to go down there.

*But how bad could it be?* He thought.

He went down the steep path inside. Immediately the light of the sun died, and cold, urine and rotten smelling air consumed him. Shivers ran all over his body, making the hairs on his hands and his nape stand needle stiff.

He had the crossbow ready to shoot at anything, even his own shadow if it looked to menacing.

“Hello...?” Joey said timidly. “Can I get some sugar...?”

The ground beneath his feet was soft, and the thought of sinking into it had crossed his mind. His foot hit against something in the ground that almost tripped him. He looked down, look closer through the darkness. He could barely make out the features, but identified it as an animal skull.

Something hissed in the dark before him. Joey looked up and juttred the crossbow further out. He saw many teeth glistening in the dark, hot, rancid breath blew from a deep throat and onto his body like a blanket.

Joey fired off two arrows before turning and running back to the entrance. Instantly the carpi bellowed and took after him. Both of them burst through the opening of the tunnel in a storm of dust and leaves.

Joey ran around the log, catching his crossbow into a mass of vines off a tree. It was snatched right out of his grasp, but Joey would’ve been out of his mind to stop for it with the carspi right behind him.

Without his primary weapon Joey felt huge pang in his gut. How the hell was he going to kill this thing without honoi and without his crossbow?

He screamed and dived beneath a low lying branch. He made a wild turn around the tree, just as the carspi snapped its massive jaws at his head. Joey took out his knife and chopped the bushes in his path. The carspi simply trampled and barged through them.

The jaws snapped at Joey’s behind and he screamed. He could feel the shockwave of the huge jaws hitting him when they chomped down.

He took through a field of reddish-purple bushes and through a tight space between two trees. The carspi hit against it with its entire weight. Shaking the trees and uprooting them just slightly.

Joey found a small crevice between a tree and a huge rock and wiggled in between them. There he waited with his knife while the carspi gnawed and pushed madly at the trees to get at him. Finally it bit off enough of the trees to weaken their foundations, and pushed its way through and bit at Joey’s hiding place.

Fortunately the carspi’s head was too large to fit into the space. But it had something else to use.

Joey felt just one percent safer in his space, with limbs folded up against his chest, until he saw the carspi gape and extended its twin, muscular tongues like two tentacles.

“The hell...?”

The tongues wrapped around one of his feet and pulled it with an astonishing force. Before Joey realized his body was already unraveled and heading towards the carspi's teeth. Joey chopped one of the tongues with his knife. The carspi shrieked and let go of Joey, one of its tongues sporting a huge gaping wound.

It backed off and moved through the growth noisily. The place was silently; only Joey frantic breathes and his startled heart pounding in his ears, and the squawking birds above in the trees was all Joey could hear.

He didn't move since then. He stayed there until he thought the creature was gone—or at least hoped!

"This shit is crazy!" Joey said. "Everything on this damn planet is so big and ugly...and hungry and just plain *mean!*"

Joey decided to go for it. Joey peeped out of his hiding place. He didn't see the *Big Blue Bastard!* As Joey had labeled the carspi, but he did see trails of destruction left in its wake; the torn down trees and the flattened bushes.

Regardless of what Halirit said, no way was he going to continue without a suitable weapon!

Joey made a mad dash out of the crevice and into the open.

"Halirit!" Joey shouted. "Teach!" Joey saw some long-legged, red insect-looking things the size of a rugby ball run out of his way. "Teach this crap aint fun an—"

The sight of dozens of large teeth, a huge mouth and crazy eyes, all on blue body, froze Joey in his tracks. The carspi made one step closer to Joey.

"Fuck you, man!" Joey shouted, and spun and hauled ass with the carspi at his heels already.

Joey just ran with the intent of escaping. He didn't know that just beyond that field of bushes and flowers was the edge of a cliff. Joey only realized when he stepped on nothing and started the fall. The motion sent his organs pushing upward in his torso.

He saw below at least three hundred stories between him and the nearest source of ground.

Screaming like a whistle Joey paddled with his hands wildly, feeling the hard tug when he caught something and gripped it. The vine bounced up with Joey and sent him up a few feet before hanging with him in the air.

The Rakai caught his breath before looking around. He was hanging on one of the hundreds of vines that had strung from the yelm tree into the side of the plateau he fell off. Not too far from him was the deep, dark depths of the branches and leaves that made the dome of the yelm tree.

Joey laughed. “Wow...whoa!” Joey said. “Joey you’re one lucky white boy!”

He looked up to the edge of the cliff and saw the carspi was nowhere in sight. It was not too long before he saw Halirit’s head looking down at him.

“Are you fine, Rakai?” Halirit shouted.

Joey frowned. “No, Halirit, I’m not hanging by a stupid vine for my life—*I’m doing just great!*”

Halirit obliged Joey’s sarcasm, “Very good, Rakai! Can you find your way up?”

“Maybe in the next two millions years when I evolve wings,” Joey snorted. “Doesn’t this damn key come with a jet or helicopter?”

Halirit ignored Joey and wondered to himself how he was going to get Joey up. Halirit never imagined a situation like this.

“Pahak...” cursed the Nycarman. He said to Joey, “Joey, just stay right there, I will be back!”

Joey looked at Halirit walking away, gaping in disbelief. “*Oh no*, it’s not like I had anywhere else to go...”

Soon Halirit returned with Lezura and the others.

Karit peered over the cliff and saw Joey’s condition. Feeling a rush of euphoria, Karit leaped around twice and laughed. He pointed down and Joey on the vine and laughed harder.

“How are you feeling, Rakai?” Karit teased him.

Joey growled. “You little prick! Just come down here and say that!”

“Whatever you are saying Rakai,” said Halirit, “I cannot understand you. Why not come up here and tell me what you said to my ears?” Karit ended that with a loud, forceful laugh.

Joey put the knife in his mouth and used the other hand to pull himself up on the vine, but he fell back into his hanging position. The vines coming from the yelm tree were about as thick as Joey’s arm, green and covered in fuzzy white hairs.

“Do not move, Joey!” Lezura shouted to him. “Stay there until I figure something out!”

“Where the hell do you all think I would be going?” Joey snapped. His eyes glimpsed below him. The distance he saw made him aware of his great height, and started to make him feel woozy.

“Lezura hurry up!” Joey screamed with a squeak in his voice, making Karit laugh until he fell backward.

Lezura said, “Do not rush me, Joey! Have some manners young man!”

Halirit said to Sorit, "Any ideas?"

"We do not have a long enough rope to reach down there," said Sorit.

"And any of us who can glide are back at Ixia," said Mecina.

"Maybe we could ride around down to the base of this plateau and down to the yelm tree," said Sorit, "and climb up, get the Rakai and climb back down."

Halirit shook his head. "Now only will that take too long, but it would be very awkward to climb across those vines with Joey. He and the person could fall. The vines only stretch from just where the branches are. Below that it is a two hundred story fall to the ground," Halirit looked over the cliff again, "and none of those vines lead up to the edge of the cliff." Halirit sighed. "I did not anticipate Joey to wildly run off and come in this direction."

"We cannot spend the whole night here," said Mecina.

Marina had appeared from the foliage behind them, riding on her mynamather. The sound alerted the others and they were surprised to see her.

"Why are you here, Marina?" said Karit, surprisingly without the cocky essence in his voice.

Marina said crisply, "You did not really think I would stay behind and miss out on all the goodness taking place?" Marina added merrily, "Plus I hoped to see the Rakai running around in his underwear while carrying a spear..." Marina relished the thought and said "...so cute!"

"I gave you a direct order to stay behind, Marina!" Halirit said.

Marina waved a dismissive hand at him. "Do not get so worked up, Halirit. The others are already on their way. It makes no sense we stay in one place while the Rakai goes further away." Marina leaped down off her beast and walked towards the cliff. "Wait...is the Rakai down there...?"

When she peeped over she saw the blotch amongst the vines that was Joey. She gaped. "My goodness Rakai...you look even shorter than me from down there!"

"Go to hell!" Joey blurted.

"I have an idea!" Bahit, who had been silently thinking up until now said.

"Let us hear it," said Halirit.

Bahit pointed to Lezura. "You can go back to Ixia with Marina, get your machine and fly him down!"

"It may take long," said Lezura, "but it is the safest way for all of us."

Halirit shrugged. "So be it."



“We should let him climb up!” said Karit. “It will be a way to test his skills.”

“Or see him fall to his death, you mean,” Mecina added.

Karit smiled innocently.

Joey suddenly said, “Hey...guys...?”

Lezura looked over the cliff and answered, “Yes, Joey! We have come up with a plan to get you to safety!”

Joey said, “Humph...regarding birds...what do the dangerous ones look like?”

His tone and question stimulated concern amongst the others.

“What do you mean?” Halirit said hastily.

Joey said, “Right now, I’m kinda seeing some bird-things flying on my level and coming at me. Are they just passing by or what—because there’re a lot of them.”

Sorit headed to another edge of the cliff and looked in one direction; Bahit went and looked to another side.

“Oh dear...!” Bahit said.

Joey looked up at him and snapped, “What do you mean “oh dear”; “oh dear” as in those birds look big enough to eat a donkey or “oh dear” because they look big enough to eat a donkey and are coming my way?”

Bahit understood not one word of what Joey said without a translator. The others came to Bahit’s side and looked over the cliff.

There were indeed large birds flying towards Joey over the canopy. Their size was half that of a tratali, but resembled more like an arcop, but with a back that was multicolored in blue, brown and green, and a pale blue underbelly. A large black beak with fine teeth sticking out was attached to their round heads; along with bright brown eyes and small ears.

“Avidactyls!” droned Lezura.

“Come on guys, talk to me!” Joey said with hysteria seeping to the surface. He looked from the cliff to the incoming birds nervously.

Lezura immediately took out her pistol and ran to the edge above Joey.

“What are you doing Lezura?” Sorit called.

“We do not have time for questions!” retorted Lezura. “We need to apply weight on that vine to increase the momentum to swing across to the tree!”

Bahit said, “How—”

Lezura leaped off the cliff, falling head first with her entire body straightened like a torpedo.

“Lezura!” Marina shouted.

Halirit had reached after her but failed. “That damn stupid girl!”

Lezura had calculated the alignment with herself and Joey’s vine long before she leaped off. She made sure to jump outward so as to fall some distance behind Joey on the vine. She reached one hand out and caught the vine, the force of her fall pulling the vine down and into a small bounce.

The motion almost made Joey lose his grip. “What the hell are you doing you crazy big-butt lady?” Joey screamed.

“Enough remarks about my bottom!” Lezura said. “Cut the vine!”

“What?”

“I said cut the vine!” Lezura fired her pistol at the flock of avidactyls. As if sensing the bullets flying past them, the flock dispersed in a messy order and flew above. But they reformed into their group and torpedoed down upon them. Lezura fired above her and dispersed the group again.

Joey found that sawing through the vine was a lot harder than creating the Noibeam.

“This damn vine’s too thick Lezura!” Joey shouted in vain.

“We need more weight...” Lezura whispered to herself. She shouted to the cliffs, “We need more weight!”

Bahit trailed an avidactyl along the sights of his crossbow and fired once. With expert precision the arrow went through the bird’s head, and it fell in a summersault out of the air.

“What the hell does she mean by more weight?” Karit said beside Bahit. He tried to shoot one of the birds but missed with each shot.

Everyone was trying to steer the ferocious predators away from Joey and Lezura—all except Marina.

“I know what she means!” Marina shouted.

Before Karit could turn around to remark at Marina’s comment, the young woman charged into him and Bahit, wrapping an arm around each of their waists and flying off the cliff with them screaming at the top of their lungs.

“This generation is on some sort of mind altering drug, it appears!” Mecina remarked coldly.

The avidactyls swarmed the two aliens on the vine. Pecking at them and yanking them off the vine with their talons. The others on the cliff couldn’t get a perfect shot at the birds, fearing a miss and hitting Lezura or Joey. The marksman Bahit would have had no problem, only he was falling and screaming like a girl alongside the other two.

Lezura struggled to free her arm with the gun from the talon off avidactyl, while another pull on her foot to drag her off.

Frustrated, Joey put the knife in his mouth and fired a Noiburst at the avidactyl pecking on his foot the other bird had stretched out in its talon. The blast tore off one of the bird's wings and sent it hurtling back and down to the ground in a long, loud squawk.

An avidactyl peck Joey on his hand and held on, ripping the clothes and the skin on it. Joey had to scream, he couldn't let go of the vine to shoot the bird.

Marina, Bahit and Karit came crashing down upon the swarm.

Marina fell into a bird and tangled with it. Karit gripped onto Bahit's foot, while Bahit grabbed onto Joey's right foot. The force from the sudden added weight finally did it. The already sawed through vine snapped like a rubber band.

Joey bared his teeth due to the strain to hold on with so much weight. Lezura freed her hand and bend her arm around the vine.

They swung with incredible force from the flock of birds towards the tree. Their screams of terror, soon became screams of laughter. It was a like a bunch of children playing on the world's largest swing; the cool wind blowing away wall their troubles momentarily, the swing bringing them just close enough to heavens to experience some joy.

*At least there's still something to laugh about in life!* Joey thought through all of this.

The laughter ended when they were coming into contact with the branches that chipped and scratched their bodies; wincing and "Ouches!" where all that left their mouths now.

The vine hooked onto a thick branch and cut their reach short. The vine tugged and jerked them all off. They landed on a huge limb that was almost as wide as a road.

Joey felt himself rolling off and splayed all his limbs out across the branch's surface and stopped himself from going any further.

Lezura hissed through the scratches and bruises left on her body by the birds and the pointy branches.

"Well, that went well...I think..." Lezura said.

Bahit got off his belly, lifted the lens off his face and rubbed his eyes. "I thought I was dead for a moment there." He looked around to see if everyone was in one piece.

Out of everyone Karit looked the most shaken.

"That damn Marina is going to hear from me about this!" Karit complained.

Joey got up with a burst of giddy energy. He threw his arms in the air and said, “All right! I killed a bird too!”

“With your honoi,” Lezura remarked with an unfortunate tone. “Halirit is not going to count that as a kill.”

Joey frowned and dropped his hands. “Dammit!”

Lezura suddenly had a worried face. “Oh my goodness,” she said, “where is Marina?”

Everyone juts realized Marina wasn’t here, and started to panic.

Karit looked wide-eyed. “Do not tell me she—”

Marina’s voice screamed throughout the tree. They heard the leaves above them crashing, getting louder as the sound came closer. They looked up, and beheld the spectacle never before seen by anyone as far as any of them knew.

“I wish I had thought of that,” Joey remarked.

Bombarding through the tree was an avidactyl—with Marina on its back. The young woman sat in the upper back of the animal with her legs splayed off. The Nycarman was laughing while the poor creature squawked in terror.

Marina steered the bird with the feathers on its head from the others and crashed landed into a small tree growing on one of the yelm tree’s own limbs. Leaves fluttered and limbs kicked out of the vegetation. Marina dropped out on her back.

Not knowing when his knife got lost in the entire ruckus, Joey reached for Bahit’s crossbow out of his hands. He aimed it at the tree of green leaves and waited for the avidactyl to fly out. When it did Joey shot it twice. It would have been three times but the barrel was empty.

The avidactyl slipped off the branch and fell to another one below.

“Now I killed one!” Joey ranted. “Halirit can’t tell me shit now!”

Marina watched her footing on the branch and went to the edge. She was a couple meters across from the others. Between them was a potentially fatal fall.

“Are you all right, Marina?” Karit said.

Marina waved at them. “The best I have ever been in a long time!”

“Now, *how the gufder’s backside are we going to get down?*” Bahit said.

Joey was looking above him. “Maybe we can find some more of those birds and fly down!” suggested the Human.

Lezura shot an annoyed stare at him. “You really do not get the extent of our troubles, do you?”

Joey turned his head to her with a saucy look on his face. “Well...girl-genius, do you have any other ideas?”

Lezura immediately went to work cooking up an escape plan. She shook her head, thinking how she intended to travel by her Thwopter but didn't want to seem extravagant amongst everyone else.

*Extravagance would have saved us all this trouble,* she thought.

Within the vast sea of purple leaves that was the yelm tree, Lezura noticed some oddities that really required her to make note. So she took the data pad from out of one of her waist pack, turned it on and videoed her surroundings with an appreciative nod.

There were actually considerable sized trees growing out of the yelm tree's branches. Not one tree alone; some trees had bright green leaves with their branches growing to form balls, while some had red, broad leaves with blue moss on their grey trunks. The trees grew on the largest branches of the yelm tree, like the ones the aliens stood on now.

Looking through the camera on the data-pad, Lezura swirled her finger on the touch screen, and the camera zoomed in on one of the red leaved trees; which she had decided to identify as *fauna parasitica*—parasite tree or red-leaf parasite.

Lezura noticed that the roots of the red-leaf parasite had infused with the branch of the yelm tree. The mint green moss on the branch crept all the way up the red-leaf's roots and trunk.

“Extremely fascinating,” Lezura said gleefully. “It seems that plant life in this region has truly adapted for optimum survival. Not only just vines, but trees have evolved to feed off other plants. In the case of these trees it seems that they steal nutrients from the yelm tree directly, or use it as leverage to gain more height to photosynthesize; seeing as how the yelm trees usually overshadow other plants and starve them of sun light!”

She also noticed that the roots of the parasite trees stretched from one branch to another, where from there saplings were sprouting. This interned formed what looked like networks of bridges to other trees across the branches.

*It appears these plants reproduce by cloning from their roots inside the yelm tree,* Lezura thought.

Another interest plant specimen she found was a tree that looked like a giant, round, bright yellow sponge on a thin brown trunk. These trees were four meters tall, and unlike the seven meter tall parasite trees that grew out

of the yelm tree's branches, these sponge-trees grew out of the yelm tree's trunk itself; sticking out and upward to the sky.

Someone cleared their throat loudly enough for Lezura to feel annoyed by it. Lezura turned around and saw everyone looking at her expectantly...and also with some confusion.

"You do know we are still stuck in this tree?" Karit said.

Lezura rested one hand on her hip (Joey liked the pose she made). "I am not the only one here with a brain!" she said. "You folks try and figure out a plan to get down as well!"

"So far my bird plan is the only good thing we have going," Joey inserted.

"Probably," said Bahit, looking around, "if we gather enough vines and tie them together, we can make a rope to get down!"

Marina raised an eyebrow questioningly, she said, "A rope that can carry us over two hundred stories down? Does that not seem farfetched to you, Bahit?"

"Not necessarily," said Lezura. She walked to the edge of the branch and looked down. "We do not need go down via this tree's trunk. It has no proper surface to climb down. But we can use other trees as stepping stones." She gave the others a wan smile. "It might just work!"

Joey scratched his itchy throat. He grimaced and coughed. Something was in his throat. He hunched over and started to cough violently. Gargling and gaping like he was choking.

"What is wrong with you Human?" Karit said.

Bahit patted Joey in the back repeatedly. "Are you fine Rakai?"

Lezura kept close watch on Joey, but she didn't seem as worried like the others.

Joey made one loud gargling that was so annoying and nasty they wondered if it was deliberate. Then out of Joey's mouth a small black ball popped out, landing on the branch with a wet, nasty sound.

Joey wiped his mouth and looked at the ball in disgust. "What the fuck is that...?"

Lezura approached the ball on the branch and knelt over it. After a brief examination she said, "This is all the toxins that you have inhaled from the air so far. The sessellic that coated your lungs collected it until it could hold no more and expelled it from your lungs."

Joey inhaled the fine mist from the spray of the canister. He placed it back in the space on the straps on his chest. "That's nasty...and cool at the same time," said Joey.

Bahit said, "So have we all agreed on my plan?"

"That sounds about as crazy as my bird idea," Joey said. "But okay. Let's split up and look."

"I think it is best we travel as a group," said Karit. "We wouldn't want Joey to get lost again."

"Kiss my ass man!" Joey said.

Karit had heard Joey use that phrase more than once to know that it was intended insult. "Go lick gufder scrotum!"

Lezura snapped, "Enough, you two! Now is not the time for this foolishness!"

"This place is also home to predators like lithrikes and wamins!" said Bahit.

Joey murmured, "I don't know what a wamam is but I can tell by that name it isn't cute and cuddly."

They hadn't split up in groups during the search, and they needed not to look far for vines either. All around them vines hung in abundance like the leaves on the trees. Getting from one place to another for vines was made a bit easier by the roots of the parasitic trees that connected the tree limbs together.

All these vines were found, cut and gathered back where they had landed. And they were gathering quite a large coil of vines indeed.

Lezura and Joey were together cutting down vines from a branch above them. No one specified who would go with whom. These two just decided to go in the same direction for some reason.

"Sorry I got you into all of this," Joey murmured to Lezura.

Without taking her eyes from the vine she cut and draped over her shoulder, Lezura said, "I have come to accept that my life will never be normal, especially with you in it."

Joey smiled. "You think off me as part of your life now?"

"We are friends, are we not?" Lezura said.

Joey nodded and looked away. "Right," he whispered, "just friends..."

"What is wrong with being just friends?" Lezura said.

Joey glared at her, embarrassed and frightened. "I didn't mean it in a bad way!"

Lezura gave Joey her full attention. "What is it, Joey? Do...do you think that being friends is not enough for you?"

The question seemed to be fighting Joey hard. He could tell by the expression on Lezura's face that she knew what he was talking about.

Joey looked to see if the others were looking; but probably figured that their Nycarman ears would listen to what he and Lezura were saying clearly anyway. Joey whispered to Lezura as low as he could, “Lezura, don’t get the wrong idea that I’m forcing myself on you or anything. What I’m saying is...” Joey felt nervous already “...that you are...very attractive woman. And that you shouldn’t be surprised if a man feels attracted to you.”

“So are you attracted to me, Joey?” said Lezura.

Joey smiled nervously. He dragged down more length of vine to cut it down. “Well...as a male, and you’re a female...I am...”

“Then it does not really mean anything,” Lezura said coldly.

Joey stopped what he was doing. “What?”

“As you said, Joey,” Lezura said, trying to hide her playful tone, “it is just male-female attraction. It has no romance or true love behind it. It is just raging hormones.”

“No!” defended Joey. “Guys aren’t all about sticking their salami in your cream pie. We can show affection too.”

Lezura tried to wrap her head around the “*salami*” and “*cream pie*” figure of speech. She gave up. She looked at Joey more seriously. “Are you saying that your feelings for me extend to more than just sex, Joey?”

Joey opened his mouth to answer but closed it. He opened his mouth and just gaped.

*Say something you moron!* He thought.

Lezura was hoping to hear no. She was hoping that Joey was just joking for the sake of making a conversation. But when she heard Joey’s answer she recoiled.

“Yeah,” said Joey, “I really do like you beyond that.”

Marina turned from her vines and said in Joey and Lezura’s direction, “Good going Joey!”

Joey snapped, “Marina shut up! Stop listening to what we’re saying over here, dammit!”

“We all know, Joey,” Bahit said.

“How do you even understand what I’m saying without a translator?” Joey questioned Bahit.

“We only needed to hear what Lezura was saying,” Marina inserted with a matter-of-factly tone.

Joey felt himself sinking into despair. “What the hell kind of friends are you to be listening on your buddy’s conversation with someone else?”



Marina said wanly, “Joey...we cannot exactly turn our acute hearing off. Anything we hear, we just hear!”

Joey waved them all away with one of the knives he borrowed from Karit. “You know what...forget I said anything. Let’s just get back to work...”

Joey yanked on a vine. It didn’t budge so he yanked some more. Frustrated with people knowing his business with Lezura, he yanked as hard as he could.

A loud nerve wrecking shriek seared into everyone’s ears. The lithrike withdrew its tail out of Joey’s hands and leaped from the branch above and onto him. Both Joey and the predator tussled on the branched, rolling and falling off the edge.

Lezura screamed after him, sticking her knife into the tree and reaching for her pistol.

Bahit ran across a small bridge of roots over to the other branch with a length of vine on his hands.

Joey had fallen with the lithrike on top of him. He kicked as hard as he could with both feet and pushed the animal off him. Without a moment’s hesitation Joey fired a Noiburst at the lithrike. Like a green flash the lithrike darted across the branch and leaped up into another tree not too far away.

Joey shot at the animal again, the burst barely grazing the lithrike’s head. It hissed at Joey before disappearing up the tree.

Joey figured that the animal was just startled by him and didn’t intend to make a meal out of him. Either way, Joey wasn’t pleased with being scared like that.

“Damn bastard!” Joey said. He winched at the wounds on his hand made by the avidactyl’s beak that had been stirred up by the fall.

He looked up and saw the others staring down at him. In particular, he noticed Karit smiling.

Joey said, “Well, being the Rakai and all, I am going to attract a lot of attention!”

“You sure are a quite the character,” Lezura remarked with a grin.

Bahit said to everyone in a hasty tone. “Let us just use the vines that we have. I do not wish to stay hear much longer.” He said to Joey, “Rakai, I will toss down a vine for you to climb up.”

Joey gestured for him to throw the vine down. As Joey was about to reach for it he felt something missing from him. He immediately touched the key around his neck out of concern, even though he knew that it was not the

missing item. He touched his chest and felt that one of the canisters had gone missing.

Looking around he saw the canister lying in a crevice between the roots of a green-leaf parasite. Joey swore at the trouble caused by the lithrike and went for the canister. He felt his foot slip just a bit by the wet moss under his feet. Now he carefully went for the canister by crawling on his hands.

With his fingers inches away from the canister, he was dumbstruck to see a blue hand take it up from his reach. His maddened eyes traced the hand all the way up to a dark blue, long limbed, monkey-like creature with a short, downward curving snout and a flexing tail.

The animal's hands had four fingers, even with a thumb, but two fingers were grouped and fused together by a membrane of skin. And in the palm of its hands had suction cups with little hooks around the edges. Its feet had the same design, along with black claws on the fingers and toes, and two fingers at the end of its long tail. Its ears were tiny and pointed. It had plain looking pink eyes and black studs on its elbows, knees and shoulders.

The itikrat was not too bigger than Joey, but most of its size was due to its long limbs rather than actual muscle mass.

"Give me that!" Joey told the animal sternly, really thinking that it would listen.

The itikrat grunted and made a hooping sound. It examined the canister, moving its head in all directions to get a view from all angles.

Joey crouched on the limb and pointed his knife at the itikrat. "Don't make me cut you open, bitch—give that back!"

The itikrat scurried back on its hands and feet. Using its tail to hang onto the underside of the branch the itikrat paused and looked at Joey. It crept closer to him.

"Yeah...that's it..." Joey said.

"Just leave the blasted animal and come back here, Joey!" Lezura said.

The itikrat gestured with the canister at Joey. The moment the Rakai came closer the itikrat abruptly used its other hand to pull the key from over Joey's head. It threw the canister away and leaped onto another branch.

"You must out of your *monkey-ass mind!*" Joey roared.

Joey shot into a sprint like an Olympian. In one leap he reached onto the other branch after the itikrat.

"By the ancestors...!" Karit said. "If he ever loses the key the wyassies and my parents will string us up like dead karoties!"

Lezura said to Bahit, “Come with me! The rest of you work on getting those vines tied together!”

Bahit reached for his crossbow and checked the barrel for a full stockpile of arrows. They ran to another side of the limb and jumped one on the limb closest below them.

The itikrat clutched the key against its chest and swung from a vine with its other hand. It reached for a branch with its tail and dropped into a hanging position from it. It fell lower onto a small limb and leaped across to another.

Joey found a vine and swung on it after the blue mischief maker. When he had taken a few whacks out of some small limbs and swung over the itikrat he let go of the vine and fell on the animal. He grabbed onto the animal’s tail and dragged it down with him.

Joey snarled monstrosly and gripped the itikrat by the throat. The monkey hooted out of control and flicked its clawed tail across Joey’s head, scoring two bloody marks on his forehead. The both landed in a red-leaf parasite, breaking some branches on the way down before coming to a stop.

Lezura hung from a branch and dropped down a few meters onto another limb. Bahit waited for her to slide down a vine before following her.

He thought he remembered Lezura being a city girl. *But I can barely keep up with her!* He thought. “Slow down, Lezura!” Bahit called.

Lezura dropped onto a branch and hung on. Kicked out with her feet to create some momentum and swung across to another.

Joey had blanked out in the fall. He hit his head on a tree limb. Tiny insects flew out of the tree and scattered around. He regained consciousness and remembered that the blue monkey-thing had the key.

With that fact jolting alertness into him he realized that he had something in his left hand. He looked and saw something like a blue rope with claws at the end. After the strong tugging force at the end of it he realized he was holding onto the animal’s tail.

Below the tree the itikrat dangled by its tail and kicked and screamed like it was the end of its world. Yet it still held the key in its grasp.

Joey found somewhere to hold onto and place his foot in the tree, and found a sturdy position to try and reel the itikrat up by its tail. Each attempt made the itikrat squeal louder.

“You should’ve thought of that before you took my key bitch!” Joey said. “Count yourself lucky I don’t blast you into monkey-chunks all over the place!”

After struggling with the animal for over a minute Joey finally got its body a good distance up, only to have the itikrat kick him in his face and fall from his grasp.

“Shit! Mother...” Joey cried, holding his already bleeding nose.

The itikrat landed on its feet and on a bridge of roots and took off. An arrow impaled its tail and pinned it down to the branch. Another arrow pierced its right hand through the plan and pinned it down as well.

Standing meters on a limb over the itikrat, Bahit lowered his crossbow and sighed. Lezura, who was on the lower level during the chase, walked across a very wide root-bridge to examine the itikrat.

None of Bahit’s shots hit anywhere fatal on the animal, but it would be in some pain. Lezura ignored the itikrat’s hollering and took up the key it had dropped.

Lezura pointed at the animal and said, “I hope you learn not to stray too far from your troop...”

Lezura yanked the arrows out of the animal. It quickly scurried off the branch clutching its wounded hand. Even without the use of a tail and an arm, the animal was still fast and agile.

Joey fell out of the tree on his hands and feet. He looked around fiercely, limped over to Lezura and reached for the key.

Lezura pulled the key out of his grasp. Joey eyed her questioningly, but Lezura returned a condemning stare.

Lezura pointed to the key and then to Joey. “Do you see how reckless you are?”

Joey rubbed his aching head. “Me? That damn monkey took the thing from me?”

“I told you to leave the animal alone and come up the blasted rope,” Lezura said, “but you insisted on being a little child and just had to have your own way!”

“Lezura the damn monkey had the spray that I need to breathe with!” Joey said. He took the other canister from out of the strap and shook it. “You here that? This one is almost finished! And the monkey lost the one that was still full! Why do you always think I just do what I do to spite anyone else?”

Lezura relaxed and said calmly, “I do not think you do it on purpose, Joey. I just think that you do it out of pure habit. But you need to change your ways, Joey. You need to learn to prioritize—”

“I don’t need to fucking prioritize!” the Human screamed. His voice shook Lezura and Bahit. Bahit almost slip and fell, holding onto a leafy branch for balance.

Lezura was compelled to reach for the vicious and most foul remarks within her mind.

*No, she thought. You are not that person anymore, Lezura.*

Lezura said as calmly as she forcibly could. “That is exactly what I mean, Joey. You have yet to grow up.” She gestured to him disappointedly, “You just lash out and throw tantrums anytime you hear something you are not pleased with.” Lezura walked up to Joey and said, “Joey, if you really love and wish to be with me, first, be a man. I do not deal with little boys.”

Joey bit on his bottom lip to suppress his outcry. Doing so would prove Lezura was right. Instead Joey cut his glowering from Lezura and walked away. He looked up into the trees, expecting Karit and Marina to be coming down.

Lezura thought that Joey might have taken her words as an insult. But she didn’t care. Joey needed to hear it whether it he liked it or not. Joey looked at her briefly before looking back at the trees.

Bahit silently came down by the branches. He made sure to turn his attention to looking out for any predators than eyeing Lezura or Joey.

Lezura approached Joey and handed him the key.

Joey gave her a cocky look and gestured for her to take back the key. “No...you keep it.” Joey said. “Since I’m not responsible, you keep it and be the Rakai.”

Lezura shook her head. “Do not be like this, Joey,” she said wanly.

“But this is who I am Lezura,” Joey said in a low voice, hinting of despair. “I’m a city boy. I’m a Yankee! I live in the concrete jungle, not the bushy one! I’m trying here...I really am. But you can’t expect me to just roll over and be the Rakai you want just like that!”

“I am not asking you to,” said Lezura. “I want you to be the best you can be.”

Marina face appeared outside Lezura and Joey’s conversation. Her luminous eyes and wide smile caught their attention and scared them both. Marina was hanging by a length of vine tied around her waist a few feet above the surface of the branch.

“It is finally finished!” Bahit said, approaching them.

Joey looked up the length of the vine all the way to the top where it seemed to vanish. “Where’s Karit?” Joey said.

Lezura helped Marina down onto her feet. “He is coming down with the rest of the vine,” said Marina as she untied the vine from around her waist. “This one that I have is not that long.”

Soon Karit’s scream was heard, growing louder each second. He fell through some leaves and hung above everyone. He was higher than Marina was, and required that someone shoot him down.

Joey was happy to help him, and even more pleased when Karit landed on his side. But his fall was cushioned by a mass of vines wrapped around his upper body.

Karit eyed Joey murderously when he got up, and took the vines from off his body.

“So how are we going to do this?” Joey said.

“Pretty much the same way I just did,” said Marina. She turned to Karit. “Karit came up with this great idea...tell them Karit!”

Karit spoke with a vast air of cockiness, “We cannot possibly expect that using the vine once will carry us all the way down to the other trees, so we will try to be flexible in using it. We will tie each end to someone, and have one person leap off first. When that person secure his or herself to their landing spot, the rest will climb down and the person at the other end will follow afterwards. And we will repeat the process until we have reached down.”

Lezura said, “I am not sure that plan sounds one hundred percent, but its chances of success are over sixty, meaning its success is a little plausible.”

*Bungee Jumping?* Joey thought. *How comes I’m not coming up with any cool ideas?*

“But we will need the lightest people at each end for now,” said Marina. “We do not want to stress the durability of the vine too early.”

Karit pointed to Joey and said, “That that means you and Marina, Rakai.”

Joey laughed and said, “Hey...get this right everyone,” everyone paid Joey their attention, “I’m not short; I’m just not as tall as you guys. Plus this planet’s gravity is pulling on my legs and making look squat!”

Marina translated it for Bahit and Karit to hear. Karit replied saying, “Then how do you explain *our* height if this planet’s gravity does pull on our legs?”

Joey said harshly, “You guys are damn aliens! You’re use to this crap—I’m not! And you got honoi to use and make yourselves taller.” Joey then walked and murmured, “Talk-talking about how I’m short. I’m not short...I’m just not tall...”

When Marina translated the explanation to the others, Karit said, “Yes, well...we do hear your argument, short-man. Anyway, you dwarf, take this vine and tie it around your waist.”

Joey took the vine from Karit’s hands casually. “You know,” said Joey smiling, “I’m just goanna wait until the time comes for me to get you back real good.”

Lezura placed the key around Joey’s neck. So sudden was what she did that Joey seemed puzzled and paused in tying the vine around his waist.

“Go on, Rakai,” said Lezura.

Joey grinned. He tightened the vine around his waist. He turned to Marina and said, “Ready Marina?”

Marina tightened her vine. “Ready, Rakai!”

Joey looked down off the branch for the smoothest opening in the tree and leaped off. Apart from some little twigs snapping on him and some bugs splatting on his body the fall was quite exhilarating. Joey never once considered that he would fall a hell of a distance to his death. He only cared about the moment now, just experiencing all of this.

The vine’s length was fully extended and Joey was tugged to a stop, bouncing with the momentum a few feet up. The tug on his waist was quite harsh though, but he was still pleased.

He held onto the vine and looked around, still in the depths of the massive yelm tree, for a limb large enough to support everyone. When he saw it Joey swung back and forth on the vine until he generated enough push to reach over to the limb. There Joey found a red-leaf parasite and fastened the vine from his waist around its trunk.

It was not too long before the other climbs down and met him, and afterwards they saw Marina falling from the sky right pass them and down to the purple, leafy ether. They could hear her riveting, childish giggles as she fell.

“She looks like she enjoys this more than me...” Joey remarked.

The group repeated the process over and over until they lost track of time. But the operation was smooth form interference from any predator or any environmental hindrances...well...except when Joey hit his head against a limb while falling down, breaking his helmet and rendering him almost unconscious.

The others had to reel Joey up, and Karit had to take his place. Surprisingly Joey was more hurt that Karit had taken his place than the big

bruise on his head. Everyone wondered how he managed to remain conscious having sustained a blow like that.

“I don’t need a break,” Joey had stately clear, “I just need to know when I’m goanna get back my spot from Karit!”

Joey never did get back his spot, and after nearly an hour they were at the end of the branchy layer of the yelm tree.

Finally, it seemed that the young adventurers could take a break. Just a hundred more stories to go and they would be on the ground.

Even at this low level, there were still giant branches capable of supporting an elephant. They rested on one of those branches. Joey seemed quite disappointed by something.

“I though you would be happy to get down?” Lezura said to him.

Both of them were chewing on some meat that Joey had sliced off the nuta he had slayed. The group had made a small fire using the readily available dried branches from the trees, igniting them along with a piece of Joey’s tattered shirt using spark rocks. Over the fire they roasted the little amount of meat on sticks.

“Are you really telling me that Halirit and the others aren’t goanna come looking for us?” said Joey. “I mean...the Rakai and the village headman’s son are lost out here and they don’t plan on sending a search party?”

When Marina had done her unofficial duty of translating it to the others, Karit had replied in a cold voice, “I do not think my father would mind if never come back...”

No one remarked to Karit’s statement. Fortunately Bahit said something Joey could reply to. “Joey, you still have not realized the whole reason for being out here, have you?”

Joey swallowed his food and said, with Marina readily translating, “I kinda get that they want be to be a man and take care of myself in certain situations, but hasn’t the hunting plan gone a bit wrong?”

“And that is precisely what they want to teach,” said Bahit. He leaned forward, not too close to the fire. “They want to test your survival skills in the event that you get lost from your party and have to survive on your own. Of course they are worried about you and Karit...but they will not readily run behind you and catch you when you fall.” Bahit grinned. “I’ve been trying to teach that to Karit here,” and Bahit gestured with his chin to his friend.



“I could not care less who wants to save me or not,” groaned Karit. “I can take care of myself.”

“You don’t have to be so arrogant all the time, dude,” Joey said to Karit.

“It is not arrogance,” Karit said, “It is self-confidence. What else can a man have when not blessed with anything?”

Joey looked up Karit a long while before saying, “You know; I like you better when you’re all annoying and shit, Karit.”

Karit finished his meal and wiped his mouth. He lay back on the limb and droned, “That is nice. The Rakai likes me. Let us all have a celebration to your historical opinions!”

And Karit slowly applauded Joey before dropping hands over his head.

Joey looked at Marina for an answer. Marina raised her eyebrows at Joey briefly and shrugged. Bahit scooted over to Joey on his butt. He said in Joey’s ear, “Karit gets this way usually when he thinks about his dead brother, Jathnit. The village had a preference for him than Karit.”

Joey decided he didn’t want to get sucked into the depressive void as Karit had let himself. He turned to Lezura to speak, but something about Karit still gnawed at his conscience. He grunted, frustrated that even unintentionally Karit still got to him.

“What you doing Lezura?” Joey said.

“I am using the data-pad to upload information from the radar,” she said. “I am making new additions to the geography of the new areas we discovered. We will need it if ever we were to come back here.”

“I hope not,” said Joey with a sour expression. “I don’t see the point of all of this. I could be training with Mulena right now and perfecting the Noibeam.” When Lezura turned to Joey he said, “Please, Lezura...don’t give me some lecture about not understanding the bigger picture.”

“Actually I was going to say I agree with your first statement,” said Lezura. “At this point the hunting has become nonsensical. We are stranded out here and your only canister is low on sessellic. If we do not get back soon you could start experiencing symptoms of nitrous-felluxide suffering.”

Joey scratched the corner of his mouth. “Gee...that’s a surprise...”

They continued the bungee jumping process until they reached the lower trees. This time it was Bahit and Lezura who had taken up their positions at both ends of the vine. They were now out of the realm of the tall ville and yelm tree, where below was the natural forest canopy of close-knit variants of green, red and blue colored tree tops.

But there was still a gap between those and the growth of the yelm tree, caused by the omnipotent presence of the yelm tree's trunk. That space, free of obstructions that could hinder any object's flight path, was the perfect place for a swarm of avidactyls to make a mad dash after their prey.

"Get down the vine!" Marina shouted when they saw the birds coming.

"You don't have to tell me twice!" Joey said.

The two of them and Bahit were going down the vine in spasmodic slides. Unfortunately that wasn't fast enough to save their skins from the avian terrors.

An avidactyl swooped past with Bahit in its clutches by his shoulder. Joey dropped off the vine onto the avidactyl that had Bahit. Marina shot down one of the predators with a Noibeam just as it swooped at her.

"Boys!" Lezura shouted from above, seeing the mess that was transpiring down on the vine.

With the added weight of Joey the avian killer was plummeting to the trees below. It had let go of Bahit in its despair, but the Nycarman smartly held on to one of its feet. Joey was on the avidactyl's back, attempt to ride it as Marina had in order to steer it to safety. But judging by the avidactyl's crazed, raspy squawking all Joey was doing was causing it immense pain and yanking on its neck.

"Yah!" Joey shouted. "Go bird, go!"

"*I am going to die!*" Bahit cried, dangling from the avidactyl.

Joey pulled up on the avidactyl's neck. The bird made a gurgling sound. "Come on bird, Marina's not the only one who can do this!"

The real expert at this task went into action. In the swarm of avidactyls that consumed the vine a frightened avidactyl darted from out of the swarm with Marina on its back. Marina flew her transport down after her falling comrades like a dive bomb.

Karit, below on his limb and clueless as what had was taking place above him, heard the sounds and looked up. Joey, Bahit and the avidactyl came crashing down through some small branches.

Karit gaped. "My goodness...if Joey was not involved something would be wrong."

Joey and Bahit reached the lower trees, where they hit branches until they lost their focus. Bahit's grasp on the avidactyl loosened and he fell. He landed harshly on his ribs on a branch. He closed his eyes and grunted. He didn't want to move in case he rolled off, so he stayed put right there, and

right in that position where his body seemed to have been cemented in the branch.

Marina saw Bahit, and with a recklessness that seemed of Joey leaped off the avidactyl and landed on the branch next to Bahit.

The bird cracked and snapped tree limbs in its crash towards the almost forgotten forest floor below.

“Are you hurt?” Marina said.

“I think I broke a few ribs...” Bahit squeaked the words out of his mouth.

Marina said, “Stay still...oh blast...” Marina looked down and saw Joey and the avidactyl. The two were separated by the branches that knocked them apart into two bodies plummeting to near doom. “Joey...!”

Joey’s complaints each time he hit a limb was louder than the avidactyl’s cries. “Shit...dammit...ouch...awww!”

At this level there were no branches large enough to support Joey’s weight, they all broke. Nothing was here to save Joey, and he knew. Turning his body through the air he faced the forest floor that was coming ever so closer.

Is *this it for me...*? He thought. But he was not the same Joey as before, he wasn’t going to let something like this be the end of him. He was done with that! He remembered what Halirit told him:

*“When in the face of the most dangerous situation, when all hope of survival seems lost and impossible, never panic, never lose focus! Think only about the solutions to the situation. Then, even when the situation seems impossible to overcome, your faith in survival will produce possibilities of hope.”*

Joey reconsidered the possibilities of survival. *Nab! I’ll die some other time.*

The Rakai reached within himself for his honoi...a lot of it! He put his hands together by then ends of the wrists, and opened his palms and released his best Noibeam. The two beams quickly zapped out and disappeared.

Not good enough, Joey told himself. More you damn lazy bastard! More! This time the back of Joey’s head throbbed, and the beams seemed to have been fired from high-powered cannons. They hit the ground meters below with a forces that sent a hurricane of dust, plant debris and pebbles out from the site of impact.

The continuous recoil of the force was slowing Joey’s fall, just he wanted. With each passing second the Rakai’s head throbbed harder; the signs of his brain telling him too much honoi was being used.

Joey didn't give a damn as far he was concerned. His focus was only on his honoi output. Like a mystical, enchanted waterfall of glowing blue, spilling into a vast lake of equal beauty, the beam of honoi grew shorter and shorter, while the crater it was making grew wider and deeper.

Joey's brain gave him a stern warning with a rocking pound. He closed his eyes and screamed. He lost focus and his beam thinned and vanished. Joey fell, but not from a life ending height, just a few feet from the air. He landed in the crater that had been dug more than two meters deep.

In the crater Joey clutched his burning, trembling hands to his chest and adopted the fetal position. He gasped and whimpered as his head and body ached all over. Misty honoi dispersed and vanished from the crater, revealing the Human meteor that had fallen from the heavens.

Joey smiled in satisfaction at his trick's success. He started to giggle, soon passing out.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Jinkai Onn's airship flew through the sparkling sky of stars like a colossal, nightmarish bird of prey. A flock of arcops flew a great distance away from the machine in fear that it was a giant and deadlier avidactyl. The winds it expelled from its thrusters blew the clouds apart as it flew, and its ever-seeing eyes scanned the ground for the presence of the Ixian community.

Borros Onn sat in his command chair on the main deck and observed as his subordinates went to work. He had one fist resting beneath his chin and the elbow on the armchair. But he was not in this position out of tiredness or lack of concern for what was going on around him. He was thinking.

He was thinking about his reasons for joining Apuna in his mad man's quest to find the key of salvation to win a war he was going to start. Was he right to accept the request put forth by Apuna, and risk the life of his soldiers all at the possibility of his species finally reaching their goal as the more dominant in the solar system? Or had he been foolish to join such a quest because the idea of gaining immense political power enticed him too much into a downright stupid mistake.

But still, the possibilities of destroying the Barsoon kingdom were very pleasing considering a few factors.

The first was that thanks to Apuna and his satellite that cloaked the presence of their starships over the planet's atmosphere they had the element of surprise. They also knew the main source of the planet's military power and the location of the union of the nations in the entire planet system; Barsoon. With that knowledge they knew where to concentrate all their firepower if they wanted to cripple the planet's military defenses.

All that was perfectly clear to him, But he still didn't know the purpose of this "key of salvation" that Apuna wanted so desperately. What would he require of an object that dangled around the neck of an alien with skin that was almost as light as that of an Orderran? And where did this alien come from?

The door behind him swooshed open. In bristly walked is Yelkai who stopped at his chair and spoke. "My lord, we have found no traces of computer viruses that may hack our computer systems.

"That is good news," Onn replied in a low voice.

“But unfortunately we have not found anything from the data-pad that may give information about the alien called the Rakai or about the key of salvation.”

Onn sat up in his chair and frowned in displeasure.

His Yelkai tried to find useful news to ease his displeasure. “But the coordinates given to us by Apuna seem to match the ones we are finding on our own scanners, my lord. We are definitely on the right track.”

“But on the right track to what, Gadsa?” Onn said. “We have no knowledge of what this planet holds. For all we know Apuna might have sent us to our death and we have foolishly accepted the journey.”

“That is... a strong possibility,” his Yelkai agreed. “But with respect, my lord, if we do encounter the Ixians it will be quite easy for us to retrieve the alien and the key, as those people have second rate technology and are small in numbers.”

“Numbers do not win a battle,” Onn said to his Yelkai in a somewhat grim tone. “If we were to fight these Ixians they would have knowledge of the environment and use it to their advantage.”

“That is true, my lord,” Yelkai Gadsa said. He looked out the window into the night. Though it was dark he could make out the millions of trees that covered the landscape. “This planet has a primarily jungle environment, the opposite of the rocks that cover our lands.”

“And that is what led to our defeat the last time—we were not prepared.”

One of the pilots suddenly spun around in his chair with red eyes glowing with excitement. “My lord, we are now approaching the Ixian kingdom at a distance of 150 meters at a rate of three meters per second.”

Onn jumped out of his chair and walked over to the control panel. He leaned over the shoulder of the pilot and looked through the eyes of the airship. His blood boiled with pleasure and excitement, and he smiled, exposing his huge canines.

He could see a building that was a few stories high in the distance, and its top was dome shaped.

“Quickly, turn off all our searchlights! We do not want them to know of our presence!” he snapped to the pilots.

Within seconds all the external lights on the ship dimmed to darkness. The Orderran would now have to rely on their thermal vision. So would the ship.

“Send a message to the mothership that we have made contact with the target. Order the dissention of one more Skymera to aide with the mission.

We are going to surround the Ixians before they can escape.” He turned around to his Yelkai, “Organize eight recon-mechs to descend and conduct an observation of the landscape surrounding the village and the number of people living there.”

“Understood, my lord,” Gadsa said. He turned to a monitor on the panel and pressed a button that lead directly to the channel linking the main command deck to the mech maintenance deck.

The face of a middle aged, short haired male blinked into existence on the screen.

“Mech captain Covol reporting, my lord, ready to receive and obey orders,” said the man.

“By orders of lord Onn, prepare eight recon-mechs for descend upon the specified target to conduct a quick observation of the area,” said Gadsa.

“Understood, eight recon-mechs will be ready for deployment within the next six minutes, captain Covol signing out.”

The monitor winked into darkness.

Within minutes a door behind the ramp of the airship slowly opened by sliding two squares out of sight, revealing a hollow that lead into the ship. Two giant black discs fell through the opening, flying via the use of antigravity orbs going around the edge of the disc.

They descended into the dark, murky depths of the forest. Four Orderran heads around the base of the discs opened their heat sensitive eyes and swiveled them around in the darkness. So far the eyes picked up only the recognizable thermal signatures of wild animals, but not that of any sentient beings.

As the drop-discs were nearing the ground they sprouted four insect-like legs. The legs bent slightly under the weight as they touched the forest floor. The passengers inside read the readings sent back to the computer by the eyes outside. After carefully assuming that everything outside was at best to their liking they exited the disc. The door at the front of the disc slid open to allow the exit of four slim passengers from each.

Slimly designed with black bodies, red chests and heads, the recon-mech grouped with each other in the growth of plants that surrounded them to organize their method of gathering information. Their heads were a bit flat and had three white crests on top. Their pelvises were a reddish brown with green wiring throughout it.

With loud beeps, electronic whistles and screams that they released from their zigzagged mouths they argued with each other about the methods they

should take. These robots were the standard Cyri-bots. They were unique because they had the programming of sentient beings which gave them their sentient like behavior; happiness, anger, frustration and surprise. This made them unique because they could carry out some of the tasks a sentient being could, such as critical thinking. But at times their thinking is crippled by their artificially attained emotions.

All this is thanks to the work of one Orderran and his Ginlank wife, a pair that were so versed in their field of robotics that they made the first sentient machines. But as a consequence of their knowledge and skills were forced to work for the military forces of Veheculon.

After much slapping, kicking, biting and screaming, the Cyri-mechs came to a decision about how to approach their mission. They would each separate and surround the village. They would record while moving straight down until they met up with each other at central point.

With the Orderran salute to each other they leapt up into the nearby trees and climbed all the way up. They leapt from one branch to the other as they headed to the Ixian kingdom.

Moments later the others came down from the leafy ether above, still by us of their prized vine. This time Marina and Lezura had taken up point at the ends of the vines. Karit had the “not so glamorous yet still had to be done” task of carrying Bahit on his back down the vine.

*If the Rakai ever laughs about this, I will throw him to the nearest gulfder,* Karit thought.

Marina was the first to reach the ground. She knew Joey had used his honoi. She could sense the thick traces of it in the air. And she could tell where. Through the bushes she could see the eerie, faint movements of the Oikumi.

She waited until the others reached her until they walked over to the Oikumies.

There they found that the creatures were flying trance-like over a crater in the ground. The Oikumies flew away once they had fed on enough of the honoi in the air. The edge around the crater was clean of debris, and from it the Nycarmans could sense the heavy presence of Joey’s honoi.

“Is he really in there?” Lezura said as she walked towards the crater, wondering how the hell Joey made that hole.

They looked over and saw the Human curled up like a ball, sound asleep.



Karit made Bahit to walk with his aid. Clutching onto his friend, Bahit looked in the crater and saw Joey.

“What technique did he use?” said Bahit.

“Does it really matter...?” Karit said in an annoyed tone.

Lezura slid into the crater. Unlike Human females, Nycarman females were stronger. So Lezura found little effort in cradling Joey in her arms and carried him out of the crater.

“His hands!” Marina gasped.

Lezura looked at them. She too was shocked. The Human’s hands were burnt to the point where the flesh around it was crispy, black and red.

Immediately Marina searched Lezura’s utility belt for the necessary medical items.

“Do not take out the serum, Marina,” said Lezura.

“Why not?” Marina asked in disbelief.

Lezura gently lowered Joey onto the ground of leaves and twigs. “I only use those for emergencies. Right now only Joey’s hands are injured. The rest of his body is weakened, but will recover before the day ends.”

Marina wanted to protest, but Lezura was in charge of her equipment. And her medical knowledge was what they had to work with.

They heard Joey grumble something.

“What is was that, Joey?” Lezura said.

Joey grumbled louder in an exhausted voice, “I said you guys better have brought some suku...”

Karit shook his head at the Rakai and seated himself on the ground. The girls chuckled and continued to dress Joey’s hands.

Joey had soon regained full awareness. He sat up and checked the bandages around his hands.

“Ah man...!” Joey droned, “Just when I got over the gufder attack! I knew this damn hunting mission was a bad idea!” Joey pointed to Lezura with the little of his finger that stuck out of his wrappings. “See Lezura, see? I was right! You owe me a kiss for this.”

Lezura gawked at Joey. “I beg your pardon?”

Joey grinned and said, “It doesn’t have to be right now. But I expect you to plant one on me when we get back to Ixial!”

“I think you hit your head in the fall, Joey,” said Lezura, “both of them!”

Marina only smiled at Lezura’s joke; which was oddly strange for her to just do that at a sexual comment. But she seemed more interested in Karit.

Marina sat beside him on the ground. She put her knees up against her breasts and wrapped her arms around her shins.

Karit glanced at her and looked away. He glanced at her and looked away again. Finally he couldn't resist looking into the marvelous jewels that were Marina's eyes.

"If you want to say something just say it, Marina," Karit said.

"I do not want to say anything," said Marina humbly. "I just wish to be by the side of my ex-fiancé."

Karit seemed to have shuddered like he took a blow. "Did you have to use that word?"

"Do not be ashamed of what we once had," said Marina in her most soothing voice. She took Karit's hand. She felt his entire body shift into a different mood.

Karit looked at her with a passion reminiscent of what they once had.

Marina leaned closer to Karit. "You only have to say you want me, Karit, and we can have what we once had."

Karit heard the expectance in Marina's voice. Karit desperately wanted to say yes. But he couldn't stop thinking of hearing father's voice screaming into his head. Karit took his hand from out of Marina's and sighed heavily. Karit looked away from her captivating eyes, a feat that required all of his might.

"You know my father would not allow it..."

"Your father can go to hell!" Marina said in a hushed but still powerful voice. "Karit, you are not weak and worthless as your father says you are. Even though Jathnit had charm and the fame, you had something greater than he did not, Karit. You had *kindness*."

The young man couldn't stand to hear anymore. He said grumpily, "Why do you not help Lezura and tend to the Rakai?"

Not only did Karit say it with such smugness and hate, but he didn't even bother to look at Marina. Instead he kept his gaze at the trees as if he were speaking the fruits and not her.

Marina felt like a mountain fell on her chest. Embarrassed, Marina slowly got up. Her eyes went from beautiful pink stars to destructive, explosive suns while she stared at Karit. Marina shook her head and walked away to Lezura and Joey.

At least those two were honest, as she saw it. She knew Karit still loved her, but he was too afraid of the wrath of his father.

*Your worthless father!* Marina thought. *I hate that bastard with every single bone in body.*

Bahit heard all the conversations of the people around him. But the young man wasn't interested in all of that. He didn't mind not being the center of attention. He didn't want to be. He couldn't deal with the problems another person would bring in a relationship, or being the caretaker for the Rakai.

But he still considered himself a friend to the others. He would risk his life to save them.

*I just don't like relationships.*

Bahit was practicing his quick-aim. He spun around, looking along sights of his crossbow at different spots. He crouched and turned up into the trees, just in time to see a silver face slink back around a tree.

Bahit instantly lowered his crossbow and dropped the lens over his eyes. Looking back at the tree the image was not there.

He turned to the others and said, "Hey, everyone, I do not think we are alone out here!"

The others became alert. They got up; Lezura checked her pistol and reloaded the last of her rounds in it. Karit and Marina readied their crossbows.

Lezura took her goggles off her waist and put them over her eyes. She came beside Bahit and said, "What did you see?"

Bahit pointed. "Right there, up in that tree. I saw a face!"

Lezura zoomed in with her goggles. "I do not see anything Bahit. Are you certain...?"

"Of course I am!" Bahit argued. "Even without my lens I could see it clearly. It was a silver face with silver eyes!"

"Someone's really spying on us out here?" Joey said. Then Joey heard something snap behind him. The Human looked behind him, and slowly gaped like mad.

*"G-g-guys...!"* Joey whimpered.

Lezura turned around. "Joey what..." Lezura saw a terrifying image "*...ob my dear!*"

Bahit spun around with a quick-aim, and was pointing his crossbow at the ghastly form of a bieduvel; pink feathers and large serrated beak unmistakable.

The bieduvel walked out from the plants that concealed it. Its menacing eyes swept across each of the potential prey items.

"My hands really picked a bad time to go out on me," Joey whispered.

“What do we do?” Karit whispered in a panicky voice.

The bieduvel raised its head and made a gargling, whistling sound.

Joey screamed. “What the fuck is it doing?”

“It is calling for the others!” shouted Marina.

Lezura fired at the bieduvel twice, Bahit fired his crossbow. Two holes popped into the bieduvel’s head and an arrow lodged in its throat. It made a guttural sound and staggered to the left. The huge creature fell like a ton of bricks. But almost as soon as it fell they heard footsteps crashing through the forest.

“Everybody haul ass!” Joey shouted, and ran with his hands clutched against his chest.

As always, the plan wasn’t to run in any specific direction. Just run as fast as you could away from the teeth and claws.

Marina was running so fast she passed Joey who was already ahead of the group. Then the others caught up to Joey and ran alongside him.

Lezura took a quick glance behind them and saw a horde of bieduvels gaining upon them.

The comrades zigzagged through a dense network of small trees. Over their heads the jaws of the bieduvels snapped at their heads. Lezura just pointed the gun behind her and fired off one shot.

The bullet hit a bieduvel in the shoulder. It cawed in a low pitch in discomfort, but the wound did nothing to slow it down.

Bahit was clutching his side and grunting. The intercostal muscles moving his broken ribs were giving him a hell of a time. He felt his left ear stung when the bieduvel snapped its beak near it. He grunted and staggered, but Bahit faught on and kept going. He slipped between two narrow trees, but the bieduvel’s big head was too large to fit and just hit against the trees.

It stopped and shook its head miserably.

“Marina, wait up!” Joey shouted at the short woman. “We’re all friends here girl!”

Marina was at least twelve meters ahead of the group. Only one hand moved in stride while the other held the crossbow against her shoulder. She responded to Joey with a, “So?”

Joey shouted in despair, “So don’t leave us behind bitch!”

Joey felt the bieduvel’s breath on his back and hollered.

Two bieduvels ganged up on Karit. They used their beaks to knock him off balance. One of them flipped him off the ground, sending the

Nycarman screaming and flying through the air. The other bieduvels stopped and went after the wounded prey.

The others heard Karit's screams and stopped as well. Marina slid to a halt and saw the swarm behind her.

“Karit!” she screamed.

Karit fired a Noiburst at the bieduvel. The attack tore the skin across the animal's head. It bit onto Karit's leg, its serrated beak slicing into his flesh. The bieduvel shook its head from side to side to try and saw through Karit's leg.

Karit was a screaming machine. He reached for his knife and stabbed madly at the bieduvel's face.

As the other predators closed in for the kill, so did Karit's friends.

Lezura emptied her pistol into the midsection of the nearest bieduvel. The animal slumped in its stride and slid on the ground to a dead stop.

Bahit took aim at a next bieduvel and shot it right in the neck. The predator swung around enraged and kicked down Bahit. It pinned the Nycarman under its foot and opened its jaws over Bahit's head.

Marina ran towards Bahit and fired repeatedly from her crossbow. Arrows stitched up the bieduvel's body. It reeled and cawed long and hard before falling over.

A bieduvel knocked Lezura over with its tail. It rushed Lezura on the ground and bit onto her arm. Lezura screamed and pounded at the animal's head with her fist.

Joey rushed the bieduvel that attacked Lezura. With his hands still burning like hell, Joey wasn't able to use any honoi. But he improvised. He reached for a big stone he saw in the ground and clutched it painfully in both hands. He rushed the bieduvel, screaming at the top of his lungs while pounding the animal in the head with the blunt weapon.

Joey heard something crack, and the bieduvel let go of Lezura and stumbled back.

After Karit made a dozen lacerations to the bieduvel's face it let go of him and shook its head to relieve itself of the pain.

Joey lifted Lezura under her arm and carried her over to where Karit was. Marina went with the limping Bahit and grouped with the others.

Even with three bieduvels dead, five others still surrounded them.

Karit couldn't even find the strength to stand. Marina went over and took off her blouse. In just her black bra and pants Marina wrapped Karit's bleeding foot.

Lezura tried to dress her own wound awkwardly, while Bahit and Joey kept the animals at bay. Bahit pointed the empty crossbow from bieduvel to bieduvel. Joey shouted and screamed at the animals while waving a big stick in his hands wildly.

The pain in Bahit's side shot through his body again and he crouched and held his side. He dropped his crossbow and panted like he was about to faint.

*Wait, Joey remembered. I have that!*

Joey dropped the stick and reached into the sack on his waist. As he did the predators on his side closed in.

“What the hell are you doing, Rakai?” Marina screamed.

Joey took the nuta's sack and blew into it. He inflated the sack to its limit, and took up back the stick and waved it around at the predators along with the terrifying face.

“Yaaaah! Get back motherfuckers! Back up! Get back!”

Joey rushed the bieduvels with the hideous face. He waved the stick up at their heads. He roared at the top of his lungs until he could taste the blood in his dry throat.

The bieduvels were surprised by this strange Nycarman. Such a barbaric voice, a hideous face, and unrelenting rage. That coupled with the blue defense mechanism of the other Nycarmans, the bieduvels didn't stand a chance.

Joey rushed to the other side of his friends where he saw the bieduvel there making a move at Karit and on the ground.

“You wanna fucking bite him? Huh?” Joey pushed the face closer to the predator. “You wanna try it punk?”

The bieduvels stepped back. Everyone was astonished to see the bieduvels flee from Joey.

Joey laughed, spittle of blood flying from his throat and out onto his lips. He let go of the face and watch it fly around the place like a deflating balloon. Joey dropped the stick, and fell on his knees and sprawled in the grass on his back.

Joey didn't think he could get up even if he wanted to. He felt he had done enough, and his body felt the same way too. His head was next to Lezura's and Karit's on the ground.

“Marvelous work, Rakai...” Karit breathed.

“You got that bird really good too...” Joey replied, with Marina translating.

Both young men laughed what little energy they had inside them. They both figured each other had done enough fighting for one day.

Lezura said breathlessly, “My goodness...I really need a bath when I get back to Ixia.”

Marina lay beside Lezura. “Same here, my sister,” said Marina. “I am so sweaty I can smell my own private parts.”

Bahit lay between Lezura and Marina. “That is really disgusting, Marina,” he said.

Everyone in the circle laughed until exhaustion made them stop.

They all closed their eyes, and savored the gentle winds that blew over them. It rustled the leaves in the trees above. Orange beams of sunlight with sparkling dust particles scattered all around them. The smells of sweet flowers and fruits in the air danced like jolly fairies around their nostrils.

It seemed that once the danger was gone, once all the death had stopped, the real essence of nature could really be felt as far as Joey saw it.

Halirit’s voice came bellowing through the air. “Children, are you here?”

Joey frowned. He whispered, “I’m goanna punch Halirit in the balls.”

“I will hold him down,” said Lezura.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Due to the hunting incident, was somewhat a success considering Joey mastered the honoibeam, or Noibeam for short, killed a nuta, survived a carspi attack and scared off a pack of bieduvels, he was given a few days break to recover.

They never thought about the silver-faced man Bahit saw. They casted it off as just a strange animal Bahit saw.

During that time Joey and Lezura spent morning and night learning each other's language; Naasi and English. Lezura seemed to be excelling quicker than Joey in learning a new language, but she couldn't get the slangs correct. When they weren't in class, Lezura helped Joey read the books in the library, if not they were watching something on Lezura's computer in her room.

All this time the two were spending together was cause for concern amongst some of the wyassies, so they had a discussion about it.

Dunit, Telkit and Murbella were in a secluded part of the forest behind and close to the temple. It was an area of land cut down of the pesky overgrowth and had beautifully colored, garden-type plants growing around its edges. In the center of the patch were some large stones that were smooth to a fine look. Overhead the large limb of a ville tree stretched out of the overgrowth and was the only thing that provided shade over the area from the light of the sun that glowed around the area like a wall of light.

Warm air gently blew around them as the wyassies all stood on one leg on top of the stones, balancing a fruit on their foreheads. It was a game Dunit, Telkit and Murbella used to play at this very same spot when they were children. As a matter of fact it was they who sculpt this area for their own private use.

They had all taken off their yotas and folded them on a stone. Dunit wore a sleeveless brown shirt with silver trim and grey trousers. Telkit wore a similar shirt but with black trousers. Murbella wore a black tunic and grey trousers. Her small breasts bulged underneath her garment, even her nipples made little lumps.

But her features did not provoke any sexual arousal amongst them men around here. They were here for the sole purpose of each other's company which they could enjoy in privacy.



The game they were playing was a contest to see who could maintain the posture the longest without resorting to stand on both legs or making the berry on their foreheads fall off. Most of times it was Murbella who was the victor of this game, and she often gloated about it to the others.

“You look a little unsteady, Telkit,” Murbella looked across at him and said with a smug smile.

Telkit’s body was wobbling slightly but constantly as he tried his best to maintain his balance. He looked across at Murbella and noted the expression on her face. They all knew that Telkit was always the one losing ever since they started to play the game. “You keep laughing Murbella,” Telkit said in a low voice as he concentrated on keeping the fruit on his forehead. “One day I will win this game, even if it takes me the rest of my days.”

Murbella and Dunit tried to suppress their laughs at how Telkit spoke. Telkit scowled slightly at the sound of their sniggers. Then without warning his foot wobbled wildly, the surprise at the movement could be seen on his face. He fought to regain his balance and so he did successfully. But Dunit and Murbella were already laughing at him while maintaining their perfect stance.

Though they were here to try and enjoy themselves as friends there were still topics on their minds that needed to be discussed. This place also offered the privacy and the quiet atmosphere to do so.

“I still do not see how is it that you are able to conclude that Lezura is in love with the Rakai, Dunit,” Murbella said. “I find such an assumption absurd as seeing how the time frame and the racial barriers would say otherwise.”

“I could tell by how their honoi flow responded to each other’s,” Dunit said.

“We sensed it too, Dunit,” Telkit said, “but we could not sense anything that indicated that their honoi energy positively charged each other’s.”

“Indeed,” Murbella remarked. “So where could your assumption come from?”

“I was not being very specific, I realize,” Dunit said, but keeping his usual merry tone. “The reason I was lead to believe so was on the night when Lezura showed the Rakai the great details of the planet’s second Great War. When Joey reacted in disgust and Lezura came to me about it, I could sense that she was worried about him more than she should be, seeing as how they had just met.”

“Do you not think it could just be because he is the Rakai and the most important person here why she worries for him?” Telkit asked. “Everyone else here worries about him as well.”

“I do not think she worries for him just because of his status,” Dunit said. “I think it has something to do with his personal life.”

“But still, Dunit,” Murbella said, sounding clearly displeased and confused with Dunit’s reply, “to say that they are in love sounds a bit too ridiculous. They are two completely different species from different worlds. And even if there was not that racial barrier, it still would not be possibly for two persons to fall in love in a short amount of time like that!”

Dunit was now slowly realizing the mistake he made in his statement. He had obviously presented it the wrong way. Or...did he...?

“Hmm, I guess it would be an unwise thing to assume that. I clearly did not say it the proper way then,” Dunit said. “Maybe I was getting ahead of the signs I had seen. I will correct myself then. The Rakai and Lezura might not fall in love with each other now, but it is very clear that they have become really good friends. And that might lead to them becoming mates.”

The other wyassies looked across at him with interest at his statement.

“Do you really think so?” Telkit asked.

“Without a doubt,” Dunit said firmly.

“But will that not pose a problem in the future for the Rakai’s development?” Murbella said in a tone that indicated her point was stronger. “It might interfere with his mission.”

Dunit looked across at Murbella. “The Rakai will need Lezura,” he said. “At this point she is the only person who is closest to him and understands him more. As I said before, based upon what Lezura told us about his family they have similar backgrounds. And that means they will understand each other more effectively.

“Also bear in mind that neither of them are Ixians. And when the time comes for the Rakai to leave this place he will need someone to help and guide him. That was why I argued that we should send Lezura to meet the Rakai instead of one of our own. Lezura too will have to move on from this place if she is to ever fulfill her life’s wishes.” Then Dunit paused and looked up into the tress above him. He smiled as if something good had just happened to him. “Children always have to leave their parents’ homes at some point in their lives.”

“But I cannot stop thinking that Lezura will be a distraction in his life,” Murbella said again.

“Come on now, Murbella,” Dunit said. “You of all people should know the kind of person Lezura is. She needs to know that people respect her and care for her, which exactly what the Rakai does.”

“That is just the thing, Dunit,” she said. “She might be expecting too much of it—the Rakai giving her all his attention.”

“I doubt it will come to that,” Telkit said as his foot wobbled slightly. “Lezura herself wants the Rakai to progress in his training and complete his mission. She is worried about him because he is just a young man who has to fight a war he knows nothing about, and might even die in the process! That is something most of us often overlook.

“We expect him to die for us, but do you not think he expects something from us as well? He might want to feel love and appreciated, and that is what he gets from Lezura.”

“But does he not get it from everyone else?” Murbella argued.

“But he receives genuine love from Lezura,” Dunit said.

“So what do we do?” Murbella said.

That moment they focused less on maintaining their balance and on the discussion and the matter at hand.

“I think we should just let them be,” Dunit said. “I see no harm being done as a result of their bonding. And I do not think that either of them would like for us to interfere in their friendship.”

“So it is settled then,” Telkit said.

Murbella saw no reason to continue the discussion any further. “I guess so.”

Then Murbella noticed that Telkit was still having trouble balance the fruit on his forehead. She saw his foot was still wobbling, and she took it upon herself to end his suffering. Murbella fired low-powered Noibursts at Telkit’s foot.

Telkit was startled by each burst as they flew passed his foot with near hits. “Stop that, Murbella!” he shouted at her, but she only grinned and continued.

Dunit laughed to the point where he was unable to maintain his balance and his foot wobbled as well. Murbella continued her attack until one of the Noibursts struck Telkit on his calf with a stinging sensation. He uttered a quick yelp and leapt off the rock in a flash. He knelt on the ground and massaged his calf.

Dunit was still laughing and wobbling. Murbella was counting on Dunit’s easily humored personality to get the better of him, and so it did. Dunit was

about to fall flat on his face, but he quickly back flipped off the rock and landed in a crouch position. Then the two men looked up and the smug smile on Murbella's face.

"Hah!" Murbella said triumphantly. "I win again!"

"You cheated...again Murbella! That is why you always win. Why can you not for once play fairly?" Telkit was arguing as if the loss was really hurting him, and that made Murbella smile even more mockingly.

Dunit was giggling at Telkit's misfortune. Again, Telkit had lost a game. Dunit was not in the game so much for winning it, but to see the expression on Telkit's face when he lost.

Telkit gave a scowl at his fellow wyassies. Dunit patted him on the shoulder. "May be next time, my friend," He said.

"May be next time Murbella will not..." and Telkit spun around to Murbella and pointed at her with an aggravated expression that made Dunit and Murbella laugh uncontrollably "...cheat so much!"

The day came when Joey was fit for his lessons again. His wounds had healed, and he was ready to learn the honoisensory technique and get pummeled by Halirit.

He had class with Mulena that morning. The two were seated in their usual spot under the pihok tree on the mat. Joey was in his comfortable Atmos suit, hoping there will never come a time where he had to take it off to use any more of the foul smelling sessellic.

Once they were settled Mulena said, "Honoisensory uses only honoi energy and your mind. But what makes it difficult is that it is done by active meditation. This means that you will have to be meditating, but not by blocking out the things around you in your world. It is the exact opposite. You use your honoi energy to touch the living things in your environment by expelling your honoi energy in a wave that can spread a distance around you. This creates a field that is invisible to the naked eye, but your brain can clearly pick up the presence of the field. Anything that enters this field will disturb the makeup of that specific area of the field, and your brain will be able to tell where in the field that disturbance has occurred.

"The thing about honoi sensory is that it does not require the use of any of your five senses; honoisensory is the sixth sense that can be used instead of the other five."

Joey thought long and hard on the effects of honoisensory, and to be honest with himself he did not see it as fascinating and awesome as the Noibeam or the Noiburst. But he did believe it served a good purpose, but he just couldn't see it.

“So how do I do the honoisensory?” Joey said.

“You will have to concentrate on your honoi energy and feel all of it inside your body. Then you must project that honoi energy out of your body in a controlled wave. But do not send the wave too far out, or else your mind will strain to keep a hold on such a long range.”

“All right,” he said, and Joey relaxed the tense muscles in his body with five deep breaths. “Let's do this.”

Joey concentrated and felt the honoi inside him. The vast networks of the coolness flowed steadily inside him. He manipulated the energy and stopped the flow in its tracks. He brought the energy up through the layers of his flesh until it rose out of the creases on his body and unto the surface of his skin. It was a bit difficult to get a hold on all of the useable energy at once.

He concentrated harder until his forehead wrinkled. He pushed the energy out more until it came off his body and was now in the air around him. He pushed further with a pain he felt in his mind until the blue glow around him dispersed into a fine mist, and then to nothing that could be seen.

As Joey pushed further until he felt himself losing touch with sensation. He realized that he was going too far out and stopped dead in his tracks. He slowly pulled himself inwards until he calculated that he was at a suitable distance that the honoisensory required.

He closed his eyes and felt the honoi field he had created. He could feel the makeup of the field in his mind.

Then Joey could see in his mind part of the honoi field floating out of place in the form of a humanoid figure. He could see an electrical impulse being emitted from the honoi source that brought with it a kind of personality. It was calm and direct, stern at times and caring. Much like—  
Mulena!

He smiled at the workings of the skill.

*Honoisensory!*

“I would assume that you can sense my presence?” Mulena asked with a smile at his success.

Joey nodded in agreement.

Mulena tested his honoisensory. She got up and walked around him until she reached behind him. But in his mind Joey could see the particles in his honoi field being dispersed by the glowing network that formed the shape of a woman moving around him.

“Now can you tell where I am?”

“You got up and went to my left until you got behind me,” Joey said.

“Well done,” Mulena said.

Mulena walked back and stopped a couple of meters away from Joey. Joey could suddenly see the shape no more.

“Now where am I?”

“I can’t tell!” he sounded almost frantic, as if frightened that his honoi sensory stopped working.

Mulena calculated the distance between her and the Rakai “I am twenty meters away from you,” she said. “That is the limit of your sensory field.”

She walked closer towards him until Joey could see the glowing figure back in his mind.

“You’re closer now,” the Human said.

Mulena said, “I am back in your sensory field.”

She sat before him. “You can deactivate your field now, Joey,” she said. Joey brought the energy back inside him and opened his eyes. He felt a strain on his brain and rubbed the back of his head. Mulena spoke, “Your range of sensory is limited to how far you extend your field. Your strength of sensation is limited to how strong your focus is. You can practice to increase your range and your sensation to achieve full effectiveness of honoisensory.”

After the explanation Mulena got up and went to her back on one of the benches. She took out a bottle of cool juice and gave it to Joey when she got back to the mat. As he drank the sweet liquid Mulena continued to speak, “For the rest of the class we will be focusing on increasing the range and sensation of your field. We will try to go up to thirty meters for now.”

And the work began. For hours on end Joey tried to extend the range of his sensory field. It was an extremely strenuous task for his mind, but he managed to increase the range to thirty meters with one hour still left in his class. But he was already too exhausted to continue any further.

“We will end our class for today, but good work,” Mulena said to the Human sprawled across the mat. “Come tomorrow we will push the mark to forty five.”

“I know for sure my skull’s goanna explode by then,” Joey said.

Karit and Bahit were in a section of the forest that was a few meters from the architecture of the community. It was a good enough distance to go into the forest without straying too far into the heart of it, where the predators lurked.

The entire area was over shadowed by light filtering trees, swaying merrily in the cool warm breeze of the late morning. Lankers and tyhics flew and perched in the trees around them. Further down into the depths of the forest they could hear the familiar sounds of basurel's, mynamathers and gersheep.

But what they were out here for was a karoti. It was a pig-sized animal that had almost the same body shape; thought the legs were slightly thicker and longer. It was a creature that would bring great taste when used in any kind of cooking. And it stood right before the two of them.

The reason it didn't notice the two Nycarmans was because they were a seven meters away, wearing leafy camouflage and lying flat on their bellies. They disguised their smell with that of the crushed leaves and fruits on their skins.

Bahit positioned the bow beneath his chin and aimed down its iron sights. He moved the small ring he was looking through until it was around the long snouted head of the animal.

Bahit smiled to himself as he thought how foolish the animal was. It had bright yellow skin with green rings all over, which further had green spots inside them. This kind of camouflage would be useful if it were surrounded by sun-spot plants. But it had ventured out from its territory for food in an area of blue and green colored plants.

*Too bad*, he thought, and then he pulled back the trigger and released it. The arrow swished out, and the karoti tilted over without even making a sound.

Karit pat Bahit on his shoulder. "Well done," he said.

The two of them got up and casually walked over to the slain creature. When they inspected the body Bahit's arrow had gone cleanly through its eye and out the other side painted in yellow.

They immediately took bags slung around their shoulders and placed them down. They took out their knives and dissected the needed parts from the creature. They began by slicing open its belly and removing its innards. They took the liver, heart and kidneys and stuffed them inside the bags.

Then they proceeded to skin the animal and slicing off the thickest chunks of meats from its body.

Soon all that was left was the skeletal remains of a torso, a head and the intestines, all surrounded by soil damped with yellow blood.

They slung the heavy bags over their shoulders and their bows across their backs. As they walked home along a narrow path Bahit asked Karit a question.

“Do you consider yourself and the Rakai friends, now Karit? I have been noticing that you two only run jokes instead of argue when you see each other.”

“It could be said so,” Karit said.

“I am very pleased that you two have put your differences aside and have come to respect each other,” said Bahit.

“So am I. I feel relieved to know that someone from a higher authority; even higher than my father, can see good and potential in me. Well, there is also you, Bahit.”

Bahit acknowledged him with a nod.

“So how do you feel in yourself overall,” Bahit further questioned.

“I feel like I have been...reborn.”

Bahit chuckled.

“It might sound ridiculous, but it is true,” Karit furthered while he laughed with Bahit.

“All right, my friend. I am glad you are well.”

“And as a matter of fact, Bahit, I feel so good in myself that I am going to attempt something I really wanted to do for a long time now.”

“And what night that be, Karit?”

“I am going to get back Marina.”

Bahit suddenly stopped smiling. “Really,” he said in an uneasy tone.

“Most definitely, Bahit,” Karit said in his cocky tone.

Bahit swallowed nervously as he thought about what would happen if Karit were to try and accomplish such a feat.

“I do not think it will go so well. There is the issue of your parents and the rest of the Bloodliners.”

Karit shot him a serious glance and said, “I care not for the thoughts of my parents or the rest of the Bloodliners. It is time I started thinking about my needs.”

“That may be true, Karit, but you have to think of the bigger picture; of your future as the village headman.”



“And what if I do not wish to be the next village headman? What can anyone do about it then?”

“Remember that your father expects you to follow in the footsteps of him and his forefathers.”

“I do not give a damn,” said Karit firmly. “No one is tying a noose around my neck to make do anything I do not want to...and no one ever will! I was born a free man!”

“Like Tyhunies?” Bahit questioned.

“Exactly, we should not live our lives by meaningless rules. Why do you think that the Tyhunies are always so happy when they are amongst one another? Because their religious belief is more satisfying to their hearts than what we Bloodliners have.”

“Not that I care for either Bloodliner or Tyhuny faction,” Bahit said, “but it sounds to me that you are more of a Tyhuny than a Bloodliner based on how you speak of it so passionately.”

“Marina thought me about it when we were together,” Karit said. “And...to be honest...I am interested in Tyhunism.”

Bahit gave him a curious look. “Are you interested in it because of how it sounds or because of Marina?” he asked.

“Both,” Karit answered proudly.

“So you are saying that you want to be a Tyhuny because it will not only please your spiritual need, but also because it will please Marina?”

Karit felt that he was being attacked. “Think what you wish, Bahit, but I know what I want. And what I want is happiness with Marina.”

“So,” Bahit said, “what of your plans to unite the Tyhunies and the Bloodliners?”

“I will do so by marrying Marina. When the two factions see how members can live together in love and respect for each other, then they will bound to follow our example.”

“But if you also say that you would not be the next headman, then why would they follow your example? Only the Tyhunies would give credence to your actions.”

“Because I will have the backing of the Rakai,” Karit said without a doubt. “The people will surely listen to him; even the Bloodliners.”

“But what will you do when the Rakai leaves?”

Karit paused in his thoughts and he walked. He hadn't thought about that scenario at all. Bahit stopped to watch his friend dig deep in his thoughts to produce an answer.

Karit closed his eyes briefly and opened them back with a smile. He looked at Bahit and said, "Then I will leave with him."

Bahit looked at him with a raised eyebrow. "You will *leave* with the Rakai?" "And take Marina with me."

Bahit smiled in amusement as he thought about what would happen if Karit really were to leave this place.

"Do not smile with me, Bahit," Karit said in annoyance. "I am dead serious about what I said."

"Then you do realize that if you were to leave, someone else would get the position as village headman?" inserted Bahit.

"Well that would be very good for them," Karit replied smugly. "My father can give the position to whomever he wants; because I know he thinks that I am incapable of being a leader."

"But, do you really think that it would be good to leave this place and go off in the wider world? I mean, they will not recognize you as royalty, and will treat you the same as any other commoner."

"Tyhunies do not put themselves above others."

And with that statement from Karit, Bahit let out a laugh and a wide grin. "So you do want to be a Tyhuny?"

"Yes-yes I do," Karit said in confidence about his decision.

Bahit paused for a moment to think. Then he spoke, "Do you know what I think, Karit? I believe that you are right to be a Tyhuny."

"Why so?" Karit was very curious as to his belief.

"Because it is what you want," Bahit replied. "Look around," and he spread his arms wide out to his sides, "The Ixian kingdom is slowly disappearing. The time of our people is coming to an end, whether you see it or not."

Karit looked back along the path and sighed. "I do see it, Bahit." And Karit remembered from the drawings and stories about how large the kingdom once was. The very path that they walked on once lead into another part of the kingdom a long time ago. But now those building have been reduced to dust by time and the environment, or destroyed by Barakies.

"So it simply means that we, as the younger generation, should move on with our lives instead of going along with the passing time of this place."

Karit looked at him and said, "You are indeed right, Bahit. I have no intention of staying in this place for much longer."

"That is right. And when you do decide to leave I will be going with you."

“You want to come with me?” said Karit.

“Are you deaf? Have you not been listening to a word I have said? I do not like this place either! I want to go into the wider world and experience new things!”

Karit laughed. Bahit playfully punched him in his head. The two of them could now enjoy their walk on the way home.

Joey and Halirit were at their class once more, with Lezura watching intently from one of the benches and making mental notes of Joey’s progress.

His movements were faster and more coordinated than the days before. His balance was one point, his attacks were becoming more precise; aiming for the vital points of the body as Halirit had instructed. And it was these factors that were giving Halirit a run for his money.

Halirit swatted away Joey’s fist with a forearm and kicked out at his knee. The Human quickly pulled this leg out of the way and then up at Halirit’s head. Halirit ducked out of the way just in time to feel the wind over his head. The movement caused Joey to spin all the way around to regain his footing, which was when Halirit came up with a blow to the upper of Joey’s back.

Joey staggered forward, but did not fall. He spun around with his forearms raised up before his face, and sure enough it was done just in time to block Halirit’s fist. The impact caused one of the bones in Joey’s left arm to shake.

The pain made him wince. He quickly dressed back, but kept his gaze fix on all of Halirit’s limbs as his teacher lunged forward.

Joey saw the Nycarman’s right fist clench, he immediately reached out his left hand and caught the heavy fist, and before Halirit could pull away Joey caught him square in the lower rib with his right. The Nycarman was not given another moment to breathe as Joey continued with his right foot slapped against Halirit’s ribcage. Joey immediately let go of his fist and took three quick steps back to watch and wait for Halirit’s next move.

Lezura almost jumped out of her seat in excitement at the display of skill Joey had present in that moment, but the young woman controlled herself and just smiled in approval.

Halirit smiled thinly at the progress his student was making. But he would betray his job as the Rakai’s teacher if he made it easy for him.

The Nycarman feint a move to Joey's face; he wanted to hit him square in the stomach. But by doing so he moved his left hand a bit too early, and with that mistake Joey caught sight of it. Halirit was surprised when Joey did not move his head out of the way and punched him straight in the face and sent him back. In the heat of the moment Joey desperate wanted landed a big blow and went after Halirit again. His kick was caught by Halirit's strong hand, his foot twisted and he fell onto his back.

Halirit stood over him with a foot raised over his head. The startled Human was lucky to move in time as the purple bare foot stomp the ground beside his right ear. The moment Joey scurried to his feet Halirit shifted his balance and sent a knee into the Human's ribs. Joey rolled over three times before staggering back to his feet. Halirit stopped when he saw Joey dress back and scanned him with his eyes. The boy's breathing was beginning to quicken and get heavier, but his endurance was astonishing. Normally any student who fought with Halirit would not be standing after taking such a pounding. Halirit began to wonder if this was a trait in his species.

On the bench Lezura was a fit of contained excitement. She thought about flying up and cheering Joey on...but she did not...and why would she even be thinking that anyway? It's not like she was his girlfriend...

Halirit crept up closer to Joey with his arms splayed out to the sides. Joey cautiously took a step back and walked around his right to keep Halirit at a distance in his field of vision where his stretched arms could still be seen. Joey thought by now that Halirit would be upset and thrown off his game with him being so close to accomplishing his task, but it seemed that Halirit was maintaining his focus in order to throw *Joey* off.

Joey's body was reaching its limit for the class, but would not even in the slightest think about going down so easily.

Before Joey knew it Halirit was about to kick him. The Human didn't have enough time to react and received the blow square on his left thigh. The pressure hit his bone and made him gulp in pain. Halirit then struck under Joey's left rib, but the Human already saw the attack coming. Joey swung his left arm up and knocked Halirit's hand away. Halirit was about to strike again. Joey mustered all the strength he could find to move his throbbing leg, and in one fluid motion he spun his body out of the way of Halirit's attack riding it until he came behind him and plowed his elbow into the base of Halirit's back and sent him diving onto the ground.

Lezura quickly flew to her feet in a fit of excitement, she stared wide eyed at Joey and then at Halirit who was slowly trying to get to his feet. Lezura then looked back at the exhausted Joey; kneeling on the ground and trying to catch his breath, his chest going in and out so rapidly that it looked like something was moving around inside him. Then he fell on his chest and rolled over onto his back.

Joey slowly realized what had just happened, and began to smile and giggle.

The class was not dismissed by Halirit, so Lezura could not approach Joey in the field. As Halirit got up and massaged the flesh on his aching back he turned around and glanced both startingly and admiringly at his student on the ground.

It was not the fact that Joey had succeeded in his test that was amazing, but the fact that he struck Halirit with so much speed and force that it made Halirit wonder if the child had previous training.

Halirit slowly went over to Joey, still feeling the sting in his back. He offered a hand to help the Human to his feet, but Joey waved the hand tiredly away and said, "No thanks, teach. I'll just lay down here for a while until my body stops aching."

"Well, I guess you could do that, seeing as how you have just passed my test," Halirit said with a light smile on his usually stone serious face.

Joey smiled widely once more upon thinking at his accomplishment. He turned his head on the ground to look up at Lezura. She acknowledged him with a smile and a nod.

Halirit knew that Lezura wanted to speak with the Rakai, and decided to let them have their privacy. He looked back down at Joey and said, "Tomorrow we will fully begin with weapons training, continuing with the ve'ran. Class dismissed." And he gathered his little belongings off a bench and left.

Halirit didn't feel disappointed in himself as a teacher by having a student such as Joey beat him. But instead it was a learning experience for him as to the abilities of this alien species. He was also proud that his student had such determination and endurance.

*"You are going to need it wherever you go, Joey Sadomski."*

As Halirit walked away Joey had the brief satisfaction of seeing Halirit touch his injured back once more.

"That's what you damn get," Joey said to himself. Then he froze on the ground when he saw Halirit abruptly stop and stood up straight as if he had

heard what he said. Joey was expecting Halirit to turn around any second now and come back.

In fact both Halirit and Lezura had heard him. Lezura looked worriedly to Halirit as what would be his reaction to the Human's cockiness.

Then Halirit looked at her for a few seconds with a serious expression. Halirit shook his head and walked away. She could hear Joey breathe in relief. He looked back at her and they both giggled.

Lezura walked across to Joey and knelt beside him. His clothes were soaked with sweat. She could slightly feel the heat off his body.

Lezura took into consideration the fact that Joey was tired, but she thought what she was about to say was more important than a few minutes rests. She rested her hands on her knees and said, "Joey, I want us to discuss your plans later on."

Joey opened his eyes and swiveled them up at Lezura's face, "My plans?"

"Yes," Lezura replied. "What will be your plans of defeating the Orderrans once you leave this place?"

Then Joey remembered his true purpose here once more, and slapped a hand onto his forehead. "Oh shit! I honestly wasn't thinking about all of that," he said. "Thanks for reminding me Lezura, or else I would just be sitting around at these people's place eating their food and shitting up their toilet."

Lezura grimaced in disapproval at Joey's statement. "The Ixians do not think that you are using them for your own personal gain Joey," she said in a somewhat serious tone. "I wish you would not make assumptions about what people think about you."

"Well isn't that what some of the people here think?"

"You..." Lezura was about to answer him, but saw no need to prolong the illogical argument brought upon by Joey's presumptuous mentality. She got back to the previous discussion. "...As I was saying before; we should talk about what you plan to do once you leave here."

Joey saw that Lezura smartly switched the argument to avoid conflict. He wisely did so as well.

"I guess we should," he said.

They later got themselves refreshed from a bath and found themselves inside Lezura's room around her computer table. They sat facing each other. Lezura sat with her back straight and the computer in her lap. Joey

was sitting with the back of the chair facing Lezura and his arms folded across the top.

Lezura watched with some impatience as Joey struggled to gather his thoughts about what to bring to the discussion.

“I assume that you have not put much thought into your mission,” she finally said.

“Well...I don’t really know much about the things that the Orderrans do or how they do it. I just know that they are really badass dudes by what you showed me on your computer.”

Lezura processed what he said in a second and replied, “Well, I guess that you have a point. Not much is known about Orderran culture or way of life. All that we know is that they are very skilled warriors, but are weak against sunlight.”

“So are they like vampires?” Joey asked, as a vampire movie he once watched came to mind.

Lezura tilted her head slightly to indicate she did not know what he was speaking about. When Joey explained it to her she replied with some amusement, “No, they do not change into these creatures you call *bats*, drink the blood of sentient beings or are allergic to this plant you call *garlic*. It is because they come from a planet that is furthest from the sun and hence gets only a minuscule to no amount of light. So they had no need for skin pigmentation; that is what gives your skin the color it has, by the way.”

Then Lezura began to type on her computer.

“What are you doing?” Joey asked, lifting his head high in an attempt to peer over and see what Lezura was doing.

“I am making notes about the things you speak of,” she said. “These will be records about the beliefs of your species.”

Joey grinned and said, “You’ve been studying me since last night?”

“You are the only Human here,” Lezura said.

Joey saw the sense in what was happening. It would make sense for an alien to study a Human who has just arrived on their world. It could also help him by letting them know about his species so some partnership could be made. Well...whatever partnership could be formed by one Human and billions of aliens.

“Now back to matter at hand,” Lezura continued, really finding it hard to concentrate on a topic for long when this alien was so more interesting. “The other sentient species believe that the Orderrans invaded their planets

with the intention of stealing their resources, and their women among other things.”

Lezura didn't realize that she stopped speaking and went into deep thinking. But Joey was well aware. He seemed to realize that Lezura had other opinions about the statement said by others.

“But you think there is more to it?” Joey said in hopes of getting information and providing a partner for Lezura to have se... *discuss* confidential issues with.

She gave him her attention, “As a matter of fact I do. I just cannot seem to accept the notion that an intelligent sentient species like the Orderrans would just get up one morning and decide to go at war with every other sentient race in the solar system. There has to be more to it.”

Joey thought about the possibilities on the little that he understood. “Well probably the Orderrans attacked everyone else because they all did something to the Orderrans,” Joey stated, though sounding a bit unsure.

Lezura responded to what he said with a look of disbelief. “Something like that would be impossible,” she said firmly. “The only knowledge of the existence of the Orderrans came when they first invaded our world. There has not been any record of previous encounters with the Orderrans. If there was, the public would have found out a long time ago as we did about the other species.”

Then Lezura saw Joey smile amusingly at her.

“What is it?” Lezura asked as she tried to figure out what he was smiling about; or was that a trait with Humans to just smile and laugh about everything.

“I guess you Nycarmans are in the kind of shit as us Humans,” Joey replied gleefully.

Lezura closed the laptop and stared with irritation at the Human's vagueness. “Whatever do you mean, Joey?” she asked again.

“So you don't think that your government could lie to you about something like that or about anything?”

Lezura was about to respond with an affirmative “No”, but then thought worked its way in her brain. Her ears flexed back and forth in the thinking process.

*Wait*, she thought, *I do not believe it, but Joey could have a serious point right there.*

But before she went any further she said, “Would you be so kind as to explain your reason for thinking so?”



“Well...” Joey began “...on my planet us Humans have been trying to make contact with other alien races for years now. But we hadn’t had any luck. But most people believe that aliens have already visited our planet and have even abducted a few of us for experiments. It was only since these rifts started to appear thirty years back that the whole world finally knew that aliens existed.

“At first the government tried to cover it up by saying it was just weather phenomenon. But they kind a looked like idiots when aliens started coming out of the rifts and all over the place. They probably figured that they couldn’t fool the whole anymore about aliens not being real. But people still believed that aliens where on Earth long before that.”

Lezura nodded. “I see.”

Joey continued, “They say that even in our planet’s stone age days aliens visited us. In modern times people took pictures and videos of supposedly alien aircrafts and actual aliens. There were even some cases where aliens had crash landed!”

“And what action has your planet’s government taken based on such a substantial amount of evidence?” Lezura asked.

“They got rid of it,” Joey replied grimly. “The government sent their ‘men in black’ to steal the evidence and hide it before anyone else could get to it.”

Then Joey had to pause and explain to Lezura who were the men in black.

“And you really believe that your government has appointed such people to carry out the task of covering something so revolutionary?”

“One hundred percent,” he replied firmly. “Our government didn’t want us to know about because they feared that we would find out.”

“Find out that the government was allowing aliens to abduct people for their own personal use,” said Joey.

Lezura grimaced. “Are you certain of these accusations, Joey?”

Joey gestured with open arms. “Then why would they go to such trouble to cover it up back then if it weren’t real? The governments didn’t want people to know that they and the aliens had an arrangement. Probably the governments agreed for some alien technology in exchange for some of Earth’s people to experiment on!”

“But Joey,” Lezura said, and leaned closer to him, “do you not think that your government would do such a thing for the good of the public? I mean; what if the public were to find out that there are intelligent beings with more superior technology abducting them for experiments? Would that not cause a possible global panic that could severely destabilize the societies?”

“But now we do know,” said Joey, “and we have proof. We’ve seen the alien coming through the rift often. But the point that I’m trying to make here Lezura, is that what if an alien race had something good to offer to another species but the government of that species wanted it for themselves? They could have easily well taken it and said to the rest of us that they didn’t get it.”

“You know...you do have a very good point Joey,” Lezura acknowledged. “But the possibility that the Orderrans have previously visited our world and have had dealings with our governments that lead to a conflict as big as a war just seems too farfetched. Yet I still cannot shake the feeling that there was more to the second Great War.”

Lezura discarded the troublesome thoughts with a sigh and a shrug. She said, “But the matter right now is that we have a possible third Great War on our hands here.”

“And are we even sure that a third Great War is goanna happen?” Joey asked.

Lezura replied with some level of certainty, “Well it was told onto the wyassies by the Dielenganns when they were contacted by them during their meditation.”

Joey looked Lezura with an uncertainty that caused her to question him, “What is the matter?”

Joey was not sure if it was the right thing to say about the wyassies and their whole religious system. It might offend Lezura as well. But he thought that it was a question that was also important to him as well.

“Lezura, I don’t mean any offense, and I do believe that what I see is around me now is real, but—”

“How can I believe that there is a war coming based on what a group of religious people have said further based on the predictions they have received from dead people?” Lezura stated.

Joey’s reaction was slowed down by his surprise, after several mouth movements of forced speech he began to speak, “H-how did you know what I was going to say? Can you read minds?”

Lezura smiled. “Know. Only the Raizean are able to read minds...and some psychics,” she answered. “But I had a feeling that at some point your common sense was going to kick in and question whether such a thing as *‘messages from beyond the grave’* was possible. It was a question I asked the wyassies myself when they told me about it.”

“And you believe it?” Joey asked her as he eyed her doubtfully.

“Of course I do,” Lezura said enthusiastically and surely. “The Dielenganns told me so themselves...well...one of them anyway.”

Joey stared at Lezura; who by now he had thought to be the most intellectual and sensible person here, as if she were a psychopath.

“You spoke to the Dielenganns?”

“That is correct.”

“You spoke to people that died hundreds of years before you were even born?”

And when Lezura amused herself by saying “*Hell yes!*” in standard Human English, Joey gasped at how she responded and how she pronounced the words perfectly. But her accent was deep and sounded a bit Irish for her African features.

Joey could only reply with a “Whoa!” He was clearly impressed by this young woman’s charisma.

“I really have spoken with the Dielenganns,” Lezura said with less humor. “If not then ask any of the wyassies if you can contact her.”

“Her?” Joey asked.

“The Dielengann Alteria,” Lezura answered. “It is her honoi energy that he Ixians got. The honoi energy of the other Dielenganns was sent to other parts of the world.”

Joey held his head down as the few seconds of information he had just received rattled his thinking and understanding.

He sighed and looked up back at Lezura. “So your saying that I can actually speak with one of the Dielenganns and get more information on if this on coming war is true?”

“She is only a floor away,” Lezura replied in a subtle voice to put Joey’s thoughts at ease.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

With Lezura's advice Joey went up to the floor where he and the wyassies slept. He was not sure if any of them were present in their rooms at the moment, but he still decided to have a look for himself.

He had never been in the room of one of the superiors in the community, so he approached Dunit's door with caution. He stood there for three seconds before deciding to knock, but before he could even do so he heard, "Come in Rakai."

Startled that his presence was already been aware of, Joey twisted the knob on the door and slowly pushed his head inside. He was first greeted with the sight of Dunit sitting in the center of his room on the floor.

He appeared to be meditating; so how did he know Joey was approaching?

Dunit was wearing a sand brown shirt and grey trousers. His sandals were neatly placed a few feet away to his right next to the foot of his bed. The bed had blue covering and an orange pillow. The bed head was ornately designed in the form of a tratali with wings spread gloriously outward to match the width of the bed. To Dunit's left was his dresser equipped with a mirror that had many items of personal and significant value to the old Nycarman. To the right of that dresser was his clothes rack with numerous yotas hung on the arms. Behind Dunit was the single large window; with a very eye catching vase that glowed an alluring bright blue.

Common sense told Joey that that vase had something to do with the Dielenganns. It was now approaching dusk, and Dunit had lit lamps in two corners of the room high upon small shelves.

Dunit reached for the earpiece in his pants pocket and put it in his ear.

Joey entered the room and closed the door behind him. He stood three feet in front of Dunit and spoke. "Sorry if I'm disturbing you--"

"Not at all," Dunit promptly replied in his usual pleasant voice. "I am always looking forward to your presence, Rakai."

With that said Joey felt a little relieved and spoke more forwardly. "I'm here to ask you about the Dielenganns. Lezura and I were just talking about our plans towards the war for when I leave here, and she said that if I wanted to get more information about it I should contact one of you speak to the Dielengann Alteria."

Dunit opened his eyes and came out of his honoisensory state. He had been in the state for the purpose of sensing the flow of the people around

him in the temple. It was a process that the wyassies usually did to keep track upon the health and wellbeing of the people they were responsible for.

At this moment Dunit had sensed uncertainty in the honoi flow from Joey's mind. He was well aware that the Rakai needed some answers to his purpose here.

"You wish to speak to Alteria?" he asked out of courtesy.

"Yes," replied the Human.

He looked up at Joey and smiled. "I suppose it was about time that Alteria met her Rakai."

Dunit got up and went over to something like a small closet with the wood twisted at the edges, and two small mirrors on the doors. Dunit opened one of them and reached into the dark space. Dunit took out something wrapped in a green cloth with beady designs.

Dunit turned to Joey and smiled as he approached him. Joey seemed perplexed now. He looked back at the vase on the window. He had honestly thought that *that* was Alteria. Dunit held the cloth before Joey's eyes.

"No, this is not Alteria," Dunit said, reading the expression on Joey's face. "This, Joey Sadowski, is a personal gift from me to you."

Joey got a burst of interest. He looked at the object and back at Dunit and said, "A gift for me?"

"I am sure you are not deaf, young man," Dunit said. "I had this item for over forty years, now. It was one of my very precious possessions bestowed upon me by a dear friend before his passing. And now, the time has come for me to pass on the flames of the future. Go on. Take it. I will not take no for an answer!"

Joey took the cloth carefully from Dunit. The object felt somewhat flat, but Joey decided to look for himself. He removed the wrapping and revealed a sheathed sword.

The sheath was red with designs like scales, and with green creases and a yellow, metallic end. Joey held the course, caramel colored handle of the sword and pulled it out.

Usually Joey would smile stupidly when he saw something that amazed him. But now he had an expression of childish disappointment when he saw that the blade was a dull brown, cracked and chipped all over. There was a pattern on the blade, but because it was so rusted that he couldn't clearly make out the design. The blade tapered to a point and was about thirteen inches long.

Joey swung the blade up and down to test its weight. It was surprisingly a bit heavy despite its size. But it was still the appearance of the blade that turned Joey off.

“Ah, what the hell is this?” Joey said.

“That Rakai is Riuk'untara—the Dragon's Claw,” Dunit said. Joey still gazed at the blade in confusion. “That sword is one of the most powerful weapons that belonged to the Rapturan people.”

“This?” Joey swung the sword up in front of Dunit. “Dunit I'm surprised it can even cut through air! Just look at this thing!”

“That is because that sword had been through many wars since it was crafted into shape. Do not let its appearance deceive you; it has the capability to cut through the hardest metal—even that of a machine!”

“This?” and Joey waved it around with distaste. “Dunit it looks like this sword can barely cut through my skin, let alone a robot or a vehicle? Are you serious?”

“Does it look as if I am joking?” Dunit said. And Joey was indeed surprised to see that Dunit was not smiling at all. “Let me tell you a little story, dear child. I spent a few years of my life outside of Ixia when I was younger. During that time I traveled almost all across three continents on this planet.

“I came across the Riuk'untara during my travels when I encountered a group of Rapturans. I asked to be a part of their group, and over time they came to accept me as a comrade. One day they were fighting against a troop of Nycarmans soldiers who wanted to destroy their illegal settlement on the planet. The wielder of that sword was a man named Taraka Motise. That man was given that sword because he was the only one with the strongest honoi flow and willpower in his clan to wield Riuk'untara.

“I saw him cut a Viceken in half with just one swing of the Dragon's Claw. During which the sword shone as bright as the star in response to the strength that dwelled in his body. And that was only a small taste of what that sword could do.”

Joey was becoming more interested as he listened. “So how did you get it?”

“Taraka gave it to me upon his death by the hands of that troop's general, a very powerful honoi user. Taraka had killed him, but later succumbed to his injuries. On his death bed Taraka offered me the sword, because no else remained in his clan to carry the sword with them.” Dunit smiled excitedly. “But there is more to the sword's history than that, my boy.

“Taraka told me a story that was passed down amongst his people from generation to generation. The Dragon’s Claw is only one of eight swords that were crafted together by a swordsman they called Joroda, a feared warlord on his home world. Joroda further built on his feared name by recruiting eight soldiers to fight with him. For each of them Joroda crafted a sword, and collected the honoi of rare creatures and trapped them inside those swords, as you would trap a soul in a Sheikon-vase.

“Those eight became the generals of his building army. But before he could build his army any further his generals were killed when they turned on each other for the other’s sword. Then only one was left. That general fought his master, Joroda, but he was unable to control the power in those swords, and the souls of the weapons consumed his entire being when they came together in his body.

“So to prevent the reoccurrence of the same problem, Joroda abandoned his title as a warlord, and scattered the swords across his world. Those who found those swords kept its existence a secret within their own groups or to themselves entirely, because even though Joroda had died of old age he still had a few followers who wanted the sword for themselves.

“What you have in your hands, Joey, is a part of the history of the Rapturan people.”

Joey gasped in disbelief and stared at Dunit with spaced out eyes. “So wait! I have to carry the key and this damn sword?”

Dunit laughed at him and said, “Do not worry, Rakai. As far as the solar system knows the story I just told you is a complete fairytale. Eighty percent of the Rapturan population does not even believe the story, and the rest who do say the swords have been destroyed by Joroda. That sword will not bring you any harm.”

Joey sighed.

“But, Joey Sadowski, do not judge anything by its appearance. That sword may look as if it was chewed up by a monster with gingivitis, but it will only respond if the user can feel the soul that lurks inside the sword.”

Joey said, “The soul in the sword?”

“The source of the sword’s power,” said Dunit.

Joey gave the sword one last look before sheathing it. Joey clutched the sword under his arm and said, “Okay, Dunit. I won’t let you down!”

Dunit nodded. “I trust you will not. Now...” Dunit went over to the window. He carefully picked up the vase from the small fence-like structure that held it like a newborn child. Dunit turned with to the Rakai, but before

handing it to him he said, “Rakai, this that I am holding in my hands in the honoi of the Dielengann Alteria, her *soul*...”

Joey gulped and nodded. *They really got her soul in that?* Joey thought.

“This is a Sheikon-vase,” said Dunit, “a special item crafted for holding one’s extracted or captured soul. It can come in many designs, but all serve the same purpose.” Dunit was holding the vase by two crescent designs that were the handles. “If you wish to speak with Alteria, you must channel some of your honoi into the tiny holes in the handles I am holding. Her honoi will absorb that small amount and be fueled into action. If you were to break the vase Joey, Alteria’s soul would be let loose into the world where she would be taken by an Oikumi and carried to the afterlife, never to speak to use again!”

A grim expression came on the face of the Human at the thought of breaking the vase and destroying the soul of one of the most important people on in Nycarman history. He swallowed down a dry throat and said, “Are you sure you want to let me hold it?”

Dunit laughed and said, “If you were the one to break it, I am sure Alteria would forgive you,” said Dunit. He then said on a grimmer note, “But I doubt that the people of Ixia would be lenient.” Dunit changed his tone to a happy one again, “But then again, I am sure you have the common sense and carefulness not to break such a significant object.”

Joey gave Dunit a firm nod.

“Good.”

Dunit slowly placed in the vase in the hands of the Rakai. Joey slowly placed his grip on the cold object and stared into the brilliance of the soul of a spectacular woman.

“Go to the privacy of your room and contact her there. Once you transfer your honoi energy into the vase you would have automatically send a part of your mind there as well. All you need to do is to meditate and block out the world around you. Alteria will do the rest.”

“Thank you, Dunit,” Joey said.

“You are welcome, Rakai. Now go, I have to finish my meditation shift before I get hungry!”

In the confines of his room Joey sat on the floor with the Sheikon-vase in front of him on a folded shirt. He had lit the lamps in the room to provide



illumination so he could see what he was doing, and could now begin with the process.

He gently placed his palm on the end of the crescent and channeled his honoi into the vase. At the same time Joey concentrated only on feeling his honoi, removing all unnecessary thoughts from his mind.

It didn't take long before he noticed a change in the feeling in his mind. He was beginning to sense the presence of another honoi source that crept into his awareness in the dark of his mind. He tried not to think of anything else that would interfere with the oncoming honoi signal. The signal got stronger with each approaching second, until finally the signal came in full strength with a burst of white light in the darkness. He allowed the light to spread across him until he could fully feel the effects on his body.

Then there was darkness again, the light had suddenly vanished. But his senses were now stimulated. Joey could feel cool wind on his skin; he could hear it blowing in the atmosphere around him and feel it flowing over him as if he didn't had on his Atmos suit. There was the sound of windblown leaves ruffling around and the sound of birds chirping. He inhaled fresh air into his lungs. Joey felt a surface beneath him that was different from the surface of the floor in his room, due to differently shaped tiles.

He realized that his eyes were still closed so he opened them; only to realize that he was not in his room or the temple anymore.

Where he was, the room was wide and open. It had four high arching columns and a high circular ceiling that lead him to believe that the roof was dome shaped. The columns were made from a collection of bronze and gold colored stones of random sizes, but all were of a similar oval shape. They were arranged on segments that totaled to twenty on the length of each arch. The ceiling also had these stones on them, but in the center of the ceiling was the sculpture of a beautiful woman on the surface. The artists had the extraordinary skill to sculpt her clothes and every feature on her face, even the creases and the jewelry she wore on her ears and her fingers. She even had a small crown that was a bit too ornate for him to fully define. Her hands were folded across her abdomen beneath well-defined breasts.

It appeared that only her upper body was sculpted into shape, and beneath it there were alien writings that Joey did not even bother to decipher.

Joey took his gaze off the ceiling and brought it down to the environment around him. He was seated near the opening of one of the arches, from that position he could see everything before him. There same stone tiles were on

the floor, but there was also a structure in the center of the room that demanded his attention.

It appeared to be a very low and large pedestal with a disc shape and made from a single bright blue rock. There were short stairs that led up to the top. And at the top was what appeared to be a large coffin of a gold top and red base. From the ends of the opening of the arches were smooth paths that lead straight to the pedestal. From where he sat Joey was looking at the side of the coffin, but beyond that all around him outside the building he could only see the sky and the very top of the trees.

The Human slowly got to his feet as his eyes dated curiously around at the strange place. He looked behind him outside and saw the shapes of the clouds and tratalies in the distance. He cautiously walked closer and saw that he was actually standing at the edge of a staircase that led all the way down a steep and grassy mountain side.

“How the hell did I get up here?” said Joey, though not expecting an answer.

He looked beyond that and saw that the mountain was surrounded by a small forest. And in the distance were the silhouettes of glorious mountain peaks beneath a radiant sun

*But back at Ixia it was sunset...?*

The place and time made him believe that he was definitely not in Ixia, and had to be Alteria’s place. And common sense told him that he should go to that coffin where she probably might be.

Joey turned around and walked along the path out of caution towards the pedestal. Upon reaching the foot of the staircase he paused and peered up the top.

“God damn it! Just go already!” he said to himself and walked up the steps. He reached the edge of the coffin, where to his great surprise he saw a woman lying inside. His eyes nearly popped out of his head when he saw her eyes closed and presumed that it was a dead body.

The woman...well it was obviously Alteria, so Joey didn’t have to guess anymore as to who she was, laid in the red cushioning of the coffin with her arms across her chest. She was not a rotting corpse, but a being made from freshly developed flesh that let her maintain her natural beauty. Her skin had a light purplish-blue tone to it, and the creases on her cheeks were in the patterns of swirls that went inward to circles. Another circular point also came onto her chin.

Her face was oval and came down to a straight chin, though she was a Uola Nycarman her lips had a level of fullness and sweetness to them that reminded Joey of Lezura. Her nose was straight but short. Her eyes had golden lashes just like her hair. Her hair was short, and styled where all of it was combed up to a single point, (Indicating she was a follower of the Fiuge religion.). Her crown went around the width of her forehead and was made from pure silver with irregular and at the same time ornate shaped patterns shaping its surface. In the center of her crown was a large diamond and smaller ones going around the width. Her earrings also had these diamonds inside them as well.

She wore a light blue dress made from pure, glistening silk with curving gold lines on the chest and down the sleeves. The collar was fluffy and white with red gemstones. The hems of the sleeves were wide and in a dark blue. There was a split down the length of her dress that exposed her legs, showing that she wore bright green tights that extended just below her knees, and on her feet she wore black high heeled shoes where the wrappings on them came all the up to the end of her tights.

The young man was entirely captivated by the beauty of the woman. His lungs took in the scent of roses and honey that came from her body and lifted his sense of smell to the high heavens.

The woman's eyelids suddenly lifted up and exposed unusual bright blue irises. Her eyes slowly drifted to the young man staring at her. Joey was startled and stiffened, and when the corners of Alteria's mouth lifted into a warm and glowing smile it made Joey blush.

*Her smile is so...beautiful!* He thought.

Then she elegantly lifted her left hand and spoke; in Human English. Her voice was soft, melodic, and divine! "Would you be as kind as to help this queen out of her coffin, my dear Rakai?"

Joey didn't hesitate in giving Alteria his hand. Her soft flesh pressed against the material of his suit as she gripped his hand. She placed one leg after the other over the cover edge and then elegantly lifted herself to her feet. Joey realized just how tall woman she was when he had to look up into her face.

Joey found his manners and courtesy and said, "Hi...my name is Joey Sadowski. I'm the Rakai that you chose to carry the key."

Joey extended a hand for a hand shake. The six feet tall woman carefully took the hand into hers. She kissed it gently with soft lips that made Joey's spine tingle. Then she placed the hand onto her forehead for a brief

moment. Joey realized that this was a different greeting from the Ixians. He copied her, bringing her hand to the mask of his helmet and then to his forehead. Then Alteria took her hand off his forehead and did the hand shake.

“I am Queen Alteria Fuzon of Atileten,” she said in her harmonic voice. “King Ongal, queen Urora and king Farthon and I are the Dielenganns who have chosen you as our Rakai.”

Joey abruptly ended the handshake when he realized something. “How can you speak English?” he said.

“I read your brainwaves when you gave some of your honoi energy to me,” she replied.

“You can do that?”

“It was fairly easy, because it was a contact between two pure honoi sources.”

With that understanding Joey got straight to his purpose for seeing her. “I came here to ask you a question,” then he eyed her suspiciously, “but I guess you already know what I’m here to ask you about.”

Alteria smiled amusingly at him and said, “Indeed I do. Uncertainty plagues your thoughts.”

“No disrespect but; I got to be sure that you’re sure about what you’re talking about.”

“If what you require of me is to show that there will be a war, I cannot do such a thing,” she said. “But what I can do is tell you that I have received information regarding the plans to start another Great War.”

Joey twisted his face in confusion. But before he could ask Alteria explained. “You see, Rakai, I have divided my entire soul into three parts. One as you can see is with the Ixians. Another has been kept within the nation of Barsoon. And the last of it I have given to a family who has been loyal to my kingdom since I was alive and ruled.

“But over the centuries the family has migrated from Atileten and found their way to the nation of Akirmon. It was from one of the family members there that I received the information of a possible third Great War.”

Joey said, “So your guy in Akirmon is the one who knows everything about the war?”

“Yes.”

“And what has he told you exactly?”

“That his government will have a hand in the war to come,” Alteria said.

A wrenching feeling came into Joey's stomach. *Was I actually right? Did the Nycarmans have some link with the Orderrans?*

Alteria continued, "My Subordinate has told me that a member of the political party of Akirmon has allied himself with an Orderran force that is native to the planet. When I heard about this Rakai," and she slowly took on a subtle tone, "I lost faith in my people as a species. I realized that I could not trust my own people with carrying out the task of keeping the key of salvation any longer. I had to find someone else from another race that could be worthy of carrying the key, but the other species in the solar system could have also been influenced by the Orderrans and these Nycarmans. So when I heard about the accident that resulted in the release of the beings from another existing world, I found hope that there might be a race somewhere in those dimension that could not have been capable of being influenced by the Orderrans."

"So that's why you chose Earth."

"Yes. I have had the chance of speaking with one of the dimension reapers with the aid of my subordinate in Akirmon."

"How?" Joey said.

"When a portal opened into his house, I'm afraid."

"Did he survive?" Joey asked out of genuine concern.

"Yes, he did survive."

"But...why would a reaper tell a Nycarman about another dimension? Isn't their job to prevent other dimensions from crossing over and knowing about each other?"

"It was because that reaper was once a Nycarman," Alteria answered. Then she explained, "You see, Rakai, dimension reapers were once sentient beings from different planets, Humans."

"Really?" Joey was astounded. "How long as this been going on?"

"I am not certain." And Alteria gave Joey a suspicious smile. "And I will say no more on that matter, Rakai." And she waved a finger at him warningly.

Joey smiled lightly at his failed attempt to cheat knowledge of the universe. "I'm sorry for asking."

"You do not have to apologize for wanting answers. Every sentient being must seek knowledge.

"But as I was saying before; that reaper was concern about the fate of her world and her species, and risked judgment by their superior by speaking about the existence of your species to us Nycarman. It was then that the

other Dielenganns and I decided to take the chance of choosing the Rakai from your world.”

“And your guy is absolutely sure that his government will have a hand in the second Orderran invasion on the planet?”

“He is not at liberty to lie to me. If he does such a thing then he would have disgrace himself and his entire family and would have lost the respect of the Dielenganns. Such is the equivalent of being sentenced to eternity in hell.”

“I...guess...your guy is telling the truth then. So whatever’s going on with the war is going down at Akirmon. Then that’s where I should go!”

“Yes,” Alteria replied affirmatively. “When you do reach Akirmon, the name you should look for is *Dobar Kelsin*, in Kreplon city. But he is at risk for being discovered for working against the government, so ask for him only within the Fiugerist community. They wear the same hairstyle as I do because they are followers of the same religion as I am—Fiuge.”

“Alright, I will,” Joey said.

“Remember, Joey Sadowski, your task is to prevent the war from happening, not to fight it. If the war begins then there will be a massive loss of life. If we can prevent the war then we can prevent the loss of those lives, including the Orderrans. We want peace amongst all species, Orderrans included. Only if you fail should you activate the God Titan to fight the Orderrans and their associates.”

“And where is it?” Joey said.

Joey suddenly realized that Alteria was staring at him intently. She walked closer to him and gently placed her hands on his helmet where his cheeks were. She held his face up to hers and stared into his eyes.

Joey wondered what was going to happen.

“My dear child,” Alteria said. “I did not intend for the key to fall in the hands of such a young man. I realize that such a burden could mean the loss of your life at such a young age. I am deeply sorry that this has happened to you, but we still do need your help. I know that you think differently of our species; now that you have learnt of our alliance with the Orderrans, and you might be asking yourself why you should risk your life for people you do not know. But I beg of you to please help us not just for the sake of Nycarmans, but for the sake of all the sentient beings in our star system.”

Alteria’s eyes glowed with a passion that reminded Joey of himself and his desire to prove his worth to this world. But he wondered now if it was

Alteria's beauty, the vulnerable state of her voice and the hypnotic gaze of her blue eyes and her intoxicating sweet smell that made him reply, "I won't fail the Dielenganns."

"You have my blessing and guidance throughout your journey."

She took her hands off his face and gave him a smile that made him blush again and giggle goofily.

"Have I answered all your questions?" she asked.

Joey thought about one more thing. "What kind of a lady is Lezura?" he said.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Lezura; she told me that she spoke to you before."

"Yes! Lezura! What a marvelous young woman. You are very lucky to have her with you."

"You bet I am. She saved my life more than once." Joey hung down his head slightly as if embarrassed to say what he would say next. "I really like her."

"What young man would not be attracted to a young woman as beautiful as her?"

"Probably some guy that likes hairy balls," Joey remarked in a serious tone.

Alteria narrowed her gaze at the young man. "And I would assume that you are one of those young men that have fallen under her spell?"

Joey looked up red faced. "I didn't say I did!"

"Then why would you be asking about her?"

"Because I'm worried about her!" he replied. "I think something bad happened to her and she won't tell me!"

Alteria could clearly hear the concern in the Rakai's voices. She did in fact Alteria knew exactly what had happened to Lezura. But she did not have the right to tell Joey about it. It was simply not her place to.

"I am sure that she will tell you when she is ready," Alteria answered. But Joey only waved away the response in frustration. "You should allow the friendship between the two of you to build. Only when the two of you are close as she and Marina are will she consider you a true friend to tell such a secret."

"So it's something really bad then?" Joey asked her with a hint of ferocity.

"As I said before," and Alteria for the first time sounded serious, "I cannot tell you. You will have to wait until Lezura herself can tell you from her own mouth."

“Bullshit! I could help her if I knew!”

“Trust me Rakai, what has happened to her you cannot think of erasing from her memories.”

Joey stood with his fists clenched and his face flushed with rage. But somewhere he caught himself before he went any further. He took deep breaths and calmed down.

“Sorry...Alteria,” Joey said.

Alteria smiled lightly and said, “It is nothing to be ashamed of Rakai. But you must know when to listen. But I am still glad Lezura has someone like you to care for her.”

The Human nodded respectfully. “Well then, I guess I should be leaving. Speaking of which-how do I get out of here?” and he actually looked around as if there was an exit.

Alteria went close to him. “Hold still, Rakai,” she said.

“Ok.” And the Human kept himself quiet and still.

“I hope we can speak again, Rakai,” Alteria said.

Then she lifted her right hand up in the air across her body.

“Wait...What-”

Joey was cut off when the back of Alteria’s hand came down across his cheek.

Joey flew up and fell on his side with a quick high pitched “Ouch!” He lifted the mask off his face and rubbed his bruised cheek, wincing each time he touched the sensitive area with a stroke.

“She just slapped me!” he said to himself. He looked up to see Alteria, but he saw the familiarities of his room and realized that he was in Ixia again and not in Alteria’s world. “Yeah, slap me and then disappear. Very queen like behavior!”

“And then she just slapped you?” Lezura said with amusement in her voice.

“Yeah,” Joey said. “She just slapped me and I ended up back here.”

They were in the confines of Lezura’s room, once more discussing their plans for the future.

“She probably realized that you were not yet able to bring your out mind out of the world she created, so she had awakened your body herself.”



“But with a slap? Lezura, it stung like she dipped her hand in a bucket of piss and left it in there for ten hours!”

Lezura held down her head to hide a smile at the Rakai's misfortune. Then she looked up and said, “I am sure she meant you no harm.”

“I know she didn't,” and then he gently touched his brightly pink cheek, “But man!”

Lezura decided to end the casual conversation and get back to more serious business. “So what did she tell you?”

Joey pulled down his mask “Well, she said that she got her information about the war from one of her people in the Akirmon nation. She said he has been checking out the things that have been happening in his government. And guess what; it turns out that one of the politicians there is in league with the Orderrans.”

Lezura narrowed her gaze at the Human and leaned forward, “What did you just say?” she asked in disbelief.

“Alteria told me that her aid said one of the politicians, if not the whole government, is partners with the Orderrans that are planning on launching their attack on the planet.

“I cannot believe this!” Lezura replied. “Was she very certain about this?”

Joey shrugged. “The way she said it to me, I think that her guy is also a part of the government. But he seems to be apart of a special family that has been spying for the Dielenganns. And I'm not really sure, because she didn't tell me, but I think that this guy and his family were suppose to be looking out for Dranaki's return. But instead he found out about this.”

“That is a very plausible theory,” Lezura said in support of his statement. “But who is this person?”

“She told me that his name's Dohar Kelsin. And that when we do reach Kreplon city in Akirmon we should ask for him within the circle of the Fiugerist religious people like her.”

“Atileten itself is a nation of such people,” Lezura remarked.

“So?”

“So if that is the case, if we do find Dohar Kelsin then he might be able to convince the Atileten government that Akirmon is planning to launch an attack with the Orderrans. And with your presence there as the Rakai we might also be able to further get their trust.”

Joey was confused, “Why would we need their trust?”

“Because there is no way the entire solar system will believe that there is a second war approaching if it came from your mouth or mine alone. We

would need the backing of a higher authority to accomplish such a feat. Joey, keep in mind that the belief in the Rakai is only within the civilization of the Nycarman. The rest of the solar system and its species would not care if you were the Rakai or not. But if a government official were to say that he or she had evidence of an oncoming Solar War then the governments of other nations and planets would have to listen.”

“It sounds like a plan,” said Joey. “So, Akirmon’s where we’re going.”  
Lezura nodded.

And with the air cleared of the serious matters Joey decided to show Lezura something. He took up the wrappings had carried with him off the ground and showed it to Lezura.

“Hey, check this out Lezura!”

Joey unsheathed the Riuk'untara and showed Lezura. The woman’s eyes erupted with excitement and she smiled like she saw her father again.

“Is that what I think it is?” Lezura said. “Please tell me it is Joey! Please tell me!”

*And they say I’m the cocoo one!* Joey thought.

Joey smiled and said, “So you know about the Riuk’untara—”

Lezura nabbed the sword from Joey’s hands so fast that Joey felt his arms were going to come off. Lezura’s eyes were fixated on the sword like a drug addict staring at a spoon of cocaine. She ran her finger along the rusty looking blade to feel the texture.

“*Riuk’untara...*” Lezura said “...the *Dragon’s Claw!*” Lezura turned to Joey and said, “Oh...sorry for my rudeness, Joey!”

Joey was seated with his arms folded and his legs crossed. The smile on his face was clear that he was enjoying seeing Lezura act like a goof. “So, you mind telling me why all the excitement, Lez?”

Lezura said, “Well, when I was in high school my history teacher and I always debated as to whether the legendary Eight Swords of Joroda existed or not.” Lezura gestured to herself in a pompous manner. “I always believed that swords existed, but my teacher always said that the story was a fairytale.” Lezura hugged the sword. “But now I have proof that swords *do* exist!”

Joey flew out of his seat and grabbed the sword from Lezura. “Stop rubbing up against my Ri...Riki...my *damn sword!*”

“Where did you get it?” Lezura inquired.

Joey said in a low voice, “Dunit gave it to me. Hey, did you know that he spent a few years living outside of Ixia?”

Lezura shook her head, “Know I did not.”

“Well that’s how he got it,” said Joey.

“Can I hold it just a bit longer, Joey,” said Lezura. “Not even most Rapturans get to see something so historic that relates to their homeworld.”

Joey had a devilish smile on his face. He said smoothly, “What do I get in return?”

Lezura recoil her head and raised an eyebrow. “What is that supposed to mean?”

Joey said, “You still haven’t given me that kiss yet!”

“So you are going to bribe it out me?”

Joey said, “Actually, I planned on sneaking in your room one night and kissing you,” he watched Lezura’s face form a huge gape, “but this works just as well.”

Lezura wasn’t so ignorant as to not realize that Joey was joking about sneaking into her room. But she knew that the boy liked her. She didn’t have the same strong feelings for him though, but, maybe she could do something nice for him.

Lezura sighed. “Fine, I will give you that kiss.”

Joey’s voice took on a subtle tone, “Really?”

Lezura said, “Why not?”

Lezura lifted Joey’s mask and touched his cheeks gently with her hands. She pulled him closer to her, and she stepped closer to him.

Lezura caught Joey shaking his fingers.

“Are you nervous,” she whispered.

“Yeah...” said Joey.

“Do not be...”

Lezura put her lips close to his, so close they could feel the warmth of each other’s breath on their lips. Joey closed his eyes, wanting Lezura to take over and do all the work. Lezura opened her mouth slightly to put them over Joey’s lips.

There was a snigger in the room. It was a quiet one, but one that was still heard by Joey and Lezura. They both parted and became alert.

“Who the hell was that?” Joey said.

Lezura grimaced and said, “That little sneak!”

Lezura went on her knees and peered under her bed. She saw two big bright eyes staring back at her. Lezura reached underneath the bed and grabbed onto the person.

“Marina how many times have I told you not to sneak into my room?”

Lezura dragged out Marina by her hair. Marina grabbed Lezura's hands. "Ow!" Marina cried. "Ouch! Lezura let go of me you beast!"

Lezura reluctantly released Marina's hair.

"Marina, what the hell are you doing in here?" Joey demanded.

Marina smiled at the two of them. "I will not make up stories. I was hoping to catch you two having sex. But I just could not contain my excitement."

Lezura folded her arms. Joey looked at Lezura and said, "When did she get in?"

"Probably when you went to Dunit and I went to the bathroom," said Lezura. "Marina, Joey and I were not going to have sex."

Just when they thought Marina's mouth couldn't get any wider, her smile got so wide that it seemed it would slice her skull off. "Come now, you two. Do you really think I am stupid? Once you two started kissing you would both be having sex all over the place!"

Joey and Lezura exchanged embarrassed glances with their faces flushed. They looked at Marina and said simultaneously, "Marina shut up!"

Marina giggled. "It would not matter if I were speaking or not, because I am pretty sure that you two would be moaning and groaning and screaming."

"That is enough out of you!" Lezura snapped, and darted after Marina.

They both ended up on the bed and wrestled with each other.

"Marina, do not touch me there!" Lezura screamed.

"Why, only Joey should?" Marina said.

In the entire ruckus Joey was moving his head in all directions to get a peek at where Marina was touching Lezura.

Lezura finally pinned Marina unto the bed by sitting in her back.

"You suck Marina!" Joey said. "You ruined it! I was about to kiss a girl for the first time before you..."

Joey trailed off when he realized he had said too much. His face looked horrified like he was about to be eaten by gufders.

Marina and Lezura had disbelief written on their faces. First Marina chuckled, and then Lezura smiled and covered her mouth.

*Shit!* Joey screamed in his head.

The women got off the bed.

Lezura said with an annoying smile, "Joey...are you saying...that you are a virgin?"

Joey replied with a firm, "No!"

Marina laughed. Now it seemed that he mouth could open wide enough to swallow someone's head. "I knew it! I knew you were a *piapl!*"

"So what?" said Joey, "So what if I never had sex? I don't care if I am a *piapl!* It only means I'm free of any STDs or shit like that."

"I am not talking about being a virgin," said Lezura, still grinning, "I am shock that you never kissed a female! Not even of your own *species?*"

Joey waved the women away and said, "You guys suck. I'm going to my room."

Joey left the room with the girls grinning inside. Just as he started walking in the hall he felt something really warm against his chest. He looked down and saw a green light glowing from within his suit. *Is that the key?* He thought. Joey pulled down the zipper on his suit, and just as he did the key just floated off his chest and into the air.

Joey felt like a ghost was moving the thing and wanted to run. But he figured strange shit was bound to happen on this planet. The Human was nearly scared off his feet but kept his balance firm. The key made a turn as if it had a mind of its own and yanked his neck with it. It made him turn around, only to see the key pointing straight towards the window; where the silhouette of some kind of giant, tailless lizard with limbs spread across the window stared at him with glowing red eyes.

Speechless and officially scared out of his mind Joey mouthed a curse word. But the figure still kept its piercing gaze on him.

It was the figure's stillness that allowed him to properly visualize that the figure had a somewhat Human shape. Even the four fingers and opposable thumb could be distinguished.

Joey tried to move his body into some kind of reaction but the nerve signals from his brain were not reaching; crippled by fear. It was as if the key had sensed this happening in his body and responded for him. The key made a huge flash of green light that startled the figure at the window. The thing at the window made a high-pitched electronic sound and quickly jolted to the side and out of sight.

Its motion frightened Joey again, this time it triggered the release of adrenaline in his blood which quickly spread to his muscles. He managed to move, but the motion was uncoordinated and he fell flat on his backside.

Joey scampered to his feet and headed for Lezura's room. He nearly broke the door off as he made his way inside.

The sound of battered wood instantly alerted Lezura to spin around in her chair and up onto her feet. She reached for her pistol from under the table

and pointed it at Joey. Marina was already standing in the bed. Her right arm glowed with honoi ready to be used.

Joey screamed and raised his hands when he saw the gun.

They saw Joey breathing rapidly and his face almost as pale as an Orderran's. Lezura lowered her weapon.

"What has happened?" Marina asked as she approached him off the bed. He looked as if he were about to fall over.

"There's something at the window! The window in the hall! I saw something there!"

"What did you see?" Lezura asked in an equally frantic tone.

Joey searched through his mind but couldn't relate the figure to anything he had ever seen. "Lezura I don't know, but it looked like it was a person! The thing was pasted up against the window and looking me all the time! The key...started to glow when I saw it, and then it flashed and the thing just crawled out a sight!"

"Red eyes...?" Lezura murmured to herself. Her voice felt as if her breath was being forcibly pulled from her lungs. Lezura spun and rushed over to her dresser. She yanked the drawer open and reached inside for her goggles.

"Show me!" she demanded as she pushed pass Joey and went through the door.

Joey and Marina hurried behind Lezura, but she had already reached the window and proceeded to open it by the lock at its corner. As she swung the window open cold air blasted over their bodies.

Joey and Marina caught up with Lezura and all of them stuck their heads out into the night. They looked along the wall of the building, but saw no signs of what scared the Rakai.

"I swear! It was just here a minute ago!" Joey said.

Marina thought of the possibilities. "Are you sure it was not an itikrat, Joey?"

"This thing didn't have a tail!" Joey said.

Out of the corner of her large eyes Marina saw movement down on the ground. She looked at it. "Look! Look! There it is!" Marina said.

An extremely rare trait, Marina was born with unusual eyes since birth that allowed her to see well than any Nycarman in the village. No one knew where the trait came from, for neither mother nor father had it. But her eyes were near in efficiency of a Rapturan or an Orderran's eyes.

Lezura got close to Marina and looked down the length of her finger through her goggles. She did in fact see a figure moving around the base of

the temple to the other side. Before it could go away Lezura turned on the flashlight below the barrel of the pistol and aimed at the moving blackness.

The beam of light dimmed in intensity as a result of the length it had to travel, but it provided sufficient illumination for both their eyes to observe whoever or whatever it was.

As if startled by the light the figure stopped dead in its tracks and frantically spun around in search of the light source. They managed to pick out its black body and its red chest and pelvis, but more than that they could see its white face and bright eyes.

A white face and red eyes; that combination reminded them of people they had seen somewhere before. The memory was in no way lost, it was quickly registering in their minds. But the faster mind of Lezura recognized the face within two seconds of seeing it.

“Oh my goodness!” the words were barely audible as she had to force herself to speak because of the terror she was now feeling.

“What? What is it? What?” asked Joey.

Before she could reply the white-faced figure had found the source of the light. As if realizing the kind of people it were the red-eyed intruder let loose a low pitched, electronic whistle and ran off making more indistinguishable sounds.

Joey shook Lezura and asked again, “What the hell was that damn thing, Lezura?”

“Joey,” Lezura said, and Joey and Marina could see the fear in her eyes as much as they could hear it in her voice, “that was an Orderran type robot we just saw!”

Joey let go of her. Things were beginning to register. “What the hell do you mean by an Orderran robot?”

Marina felt shivers run all over her body and wrapped her arms around herself.

“I mean that blasted thing we just saw was made by Orderrans! Specifically that robot was sent here by Orderrans! Joey the Orderrans know about this place! If they did not then, then they will know if that robot escapes!”

For a few seconds Joey’s mind froze in the thinking process. Then primal instinct took over and made a decision for him. “We’re getting the hell out of here! We’re getting everyone the hell out of her now!” he spun around and ran down the hall.

“Where are you going?” Marina said.

“I’m going to tell the wyassies!” Joey shouted back. “Lezura and Marina pack up your things and tell everyone else on this floor to do the same. Tell them that we’re going to meet up on the first floor!”

Lezura ran up to Joey and stopped him with a yank on his arm. The pain made him stop and turn.

“What is it?”

“Joey, everyone in the temple is now on the top floor. It is there evening group meditation!”

“Okay! I’m going up, but you just make sure that you pack up all of your things and get ready to leave!”

And with those last words Joey went up the stairs.

But there were more important matters to deal with. Somehow an Orderran robot had found this place; more importantly had found Joey.

This place was no longer a safe haven for any visitor or local. Knowing the Orderrans they were going to reduce Ixia to rubble in order to get what they wanted. It was time to leave Ixia. And with that in mind Lezura tightened the grip on her pistol and went into her room.



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

Every single Nycarman in the group meditation circle sensed the honoi flow of the Rakai getting immensely stronger as he approached. They could tell that the increase in its intensity was a result of him experiencing a stressful or life or death situation.

The all awoke from their meditative state and rose to their feet. They all faced the door and watched as the Rakai barged his way inside. The look on his face confirmed their sensations just a moment ago.

Joey looked amongst the crowd from the wyassies and saw them emerging from the center of the crowd.

“What is it?” Telkit asked with urgency.

Joey caught his breath before speaking. “Lezura, Marina and I just saw a robot outside the window in the hall! When she looked outside and shined the light on the thing she saw that it was an Orderran robot! It might be gone by now but we’re sure that the Orderrans know where we are!”

Gasps and whispers of terror rippled throughout the crowd. Telkit and Murbella looked at Dunit for some reason. Dunit stepped forward and spoke with an urgency that was not fitting of his nature. “Exactly what kind of robot was it?” he asked.

“It was skinny and had a red head and chest!”

Dunit thought back on his experiences with different kinds of robots. He had never seen an Orderran robot of that kind before. But the build of the robot led to a conclusion.

“The small build of that robot leaves me to assume that the robot you saw was a recon type. It was probably sent here to conduct a surveillance, which would mean that the Orderrans already know that we are here for sure.”

“So what should we do?” asked a woman from behind them.

“That robot is probably on its way back to the Orderrans to report its findings. They will know of the presence of the Rakai here and of our small fighting force.”

“How in the world do the Orderrans know that there is a settlement far out here?” a man asked.

“It does not matter now,” Dunit turned and said. Then he raised his voice a few decibels. “What matters now is that we get the Rakai out of Ixia at all costs!” he turned to Telkit, “My friend, alert the rest of the population of the incoming threat.”

“Right away!” Telkit said, and ran out to the balcony.

“The rest of you prepare yourselves for war!”

“Wait,” Joey stopped Dunit and said, “aren’t you guys goanna get out of this place too?”

Dunit placed his hands on Joey’s shoulder calmly and said, “My child, it is you they are after. There is no other reason why they would want to survey this place secretly. Somehow they know that we Ixians were the ones that would bring you to this world, and now they want you for reasons only they could tell. We Ixians were only alive to this point so we could bring you here and prepare you for what is to come. That was our purpose, and our duty is to also protect you from any harm until you have reached your goal.”

“Bull-fucking-shit!” Joey threw Dunit’s arms off him and protested. “You guys can’t die for me! I’m the Rakai! I’m the one that’s supposed to protect you guys, not the other way around!”

Dunit laughed, “You could not even protect yourself from gufders! You are not ready for war. You have much to learn.”

Joey looked at Dunit with defiance and disbelief at his laughter just now.

“You must leave this place and take Lezura with you in order for her to survive another day, that it what you should do right now.”

Joey wanted to speak out against the situation before him. But Dunit had said something that had touched him deeply. He indeed did not want Lezura to die; but neither Marina, Murbella, Telkit, Karit, Mulena or anyone else for that matter.

His stomach boiled with pressure and frustration to the point where he was losing touch with himself.

“Do not stand there like a buffoon!” said Murbella. “Go, boy!”

At least Joey was still afraid of Murbella. Joey followed the rest of the crowd and headed down stairs.

As soon as the crowd reached the mouth of the stair case Lezura came running up with Marina at her side. A cluster of objects clung to Lezura’s bod; a large bag underneath one arm, a black, mean looking rifle under the other arm along with the Dragon’s Claw, the pistol in a holster on her hip and a smaller bag which she held by the strap with her teeth.

The crowd made way for the young woman to pass. She almost knocked down Joey and Marina when they bumped into each other.

She dropped the bag from her mouth to speak, “I am going to the Thwopter to pack these things inside!”

“We are going to the armory!” Marina said with a tug on Joey’s hand. “We have to get protected and then go for our Mynamathers!”

“You are actually going for the animals?” Lezura asked. “Why do you not come with me in my Thwopter? It will be much faster!”

“We can’t just leave the poor things out there for when the Orderrans come, Lezura!” Joey told her. “Plus your Thwopter only seats two people. Marina and I can travel together!”

Lezura did not want to travel without either of the two of them. But she understood the point they brought forth.

“Fine, all right,” she said. Lezura reached in the bag she had dropped on the floor and took out two wrist bands. The bands also had a small screen with buttons at the sides. She gave each of them one to put on. “These are wrist-phones. Press the buttons at the right to turn it on and off. Press the ones on the other side to change the channel between who you communicate with. My wrist-phone is channel one, Marina’s is channel two and yours is three. When you have reached outside and have gotten your mynamathers contact me as soon as you can. We will leave together when we know from which direction the Orderrans are coming.”

“Understood,” Marina replied.

“Aye, aye, captain!” Joey said.

Lezura kissed the two of them on their cheeks and continued forward. Marina and Joey headed downstairs to the armory to get suited.

When Lezura reached her Thwopter to begin packing the bags in the trunk she saw Telkit at the edge of the balcony. There he raised one hand high in the air and released a huge beam of honoi that stabbed the star spotted sky. The beam was loosely concentrated with honoi molecules, meaning that the beam was wide and bright but not deadly as if it were used in an attack.

It was so bright that it could be seen by the entire Ixian community if they were to look in the direction of the temple. And that was just what Telkit wanted.

Every single citizen of Ixia rushed out of their homes and into the cold air that enveloped the night. All eyes turned to the beam of honoi that stood atop the balcony like a solid pillar of light.

Halit walked forward until he stood beneath the edge of the balcony. Usually a Nycarman could not determine a person’s face in great detail

from six stories up, even though there was the light of the moons. So Halit signaled his presence by raising his left arm and flashing the creases three times slowly.

With Halit identified Telkit relinquished his glowing spectacle.

“What is the danger?” Halit asked. At this moment he felt no way with speaking with a Tyhuny.

“We found an Orderran machine lurking around the temple!” Telkit said. “The Orderrans have found our community and are planning to attack”

“Do you swear on your life that you are certain of this fact, Telkit?” Halit asked in the standard procedure.

“I swear by the names of the holy trinity!” Telkit said in a new fashion that irritated Halit somewhat.

Halit turned around to the rest of the Ixians with a heavy feeling in his stomach. “A leader has said that our kingdom is going to be invaded! And I, Halit of Ixia! The village headman and leader, say that we prepare for war!”

The crowd, both Tyhunies and Bloodliners, all responded with a loud roar of approval and the creases on their faces glowing with honoi.

“To war!” the crowd roared.

All the Nycarmans scattered back to their homes, emerging moments later in full body armor. Even the children that were old enough to wield a sword or fire a crossbow were running with armor covering their small bodies.

They all moved in an organized fashion like an army of ants. They went to the main armory of the village that was to the side of the houses opposite to the pasture. It was fairly large building made from reddish-brown wood. The first to enter with torches found the lamps inside and lit them. Illumination brought into sight an arsenal of weapons; daggers, swords, spears, crossbows and portable cannons.

Only certain people carried certain weapons depending on their class of fighting. The archers took their crossbows and carried a dagger for close combat. Bombardiers took the cannons and fire bombs. The other class, the knights, took the swords spears and shields.

With the classes armed they headed out to the pasture where they saddled their mynamathers. Both the brave and the cowardly, the weak and the strong, Tyhunies and Bloodliners all suppressed the fear and dislike they felt for individuals and the tragedies that came with war in order to face the task before them. As the protectors of the key and the Rakai chosen by the Dielenganns, they were given the most important task. It was clear to

everyone that the Orderrans had more superior weaponry and greater numbers than they did. Victory against the Orderrans for them was somewhat of a dream for the Ixians. They could only by time for the Rakai to escape.

Still, the pride they had in them was enough to carry them into war with the satisfying feeling that they would be able to at least give the Orderrans one hell of a time.

The Cyri-bots have managed to return to the Skymera airship with a considerably good amount of information, and some bad news!

The base of the Skymera opened up to allow the entry of the two drop discs. They rose into the hanger at the base of the ship. A huge amount of space made from angular, light blue metallic tiles and black creases. The ceiling had dim light bulbs running along its entire length in three rows of six.

Organized at the sides of the hanger were a few drop-discs at the left and a row of twenty five assault-mechs after it. To the right were seven ground-cars beside a row of six hover-cars. Attending to the machines that were arriving into the ship were a few auto-mechs. They had quite a large size, pale grey colored bodies and white faces with a single large eye that rotated wildly to inspect every inch of the drop-discs for damage. But they still had an Orderran supervising them on the actions.

The assault-mechs moved orderly out of the way in order to allow the discs to glide back into their places. The doors opened and out rolled the Cyri-bots with the usual stressful noise they made. They looked to the Orderrans there a bit frightened; judging by how they twitched and their heads spinning from time to time.

The officers aboard the ship wore a uniform of entire black but with segments on the thighs and shoulders. Each officer wore a badge indicating his position and level of authority on the Skymera. The hanger was occupied by Orderrans with knowledge in mechanics and computers.

One of the computer technicians approached the robots with a device in her hands. Tapping a few buttons on the screen she entered the program that controlled the Cyri-bots. But it was always dangerous to control them, as usually when the program were being sent, the sentient programming in the Cyries often interrupted the signal and caused overloads and malfunctions; as was the case right now.

The robots were gashing sparks from their heads and necks, their limbs twitching and contorting like some kind of ritualistic dance. After nearly two minutes the program was properly received by their CPU.

She ordered them to line up before her and commenced the extraction of their visual information using another program. Soon files skipped across the screen in her hand. These files were both visual and also a summary of what the Cyries found in the form of a note.

Approaching the woman from behind was captain Covol. A slim figure that appeared to be sticks beneath clothes. On the left of his chest was a large, blue badge that symbolized his supremacy as the mechanics captain in Onn's entire fleet.

The officers in the fleet would usually joke about Covol's thinness; saying that one of his parents was a Raizean, but instead of getting their skin color he got their slimness. But none of those jokes were ever told in front of his face or in his range of hearing.

The short haired female was made aware of Covol's presence when he called to her. She turned around and saluted him. But Covol did not return the salute, not feeling the need to do so to someone of a lesser status.

His posture was one of pure pride and cockiness. He stood with his chest high and his arms folded behind him. His head was tilted slightly up as if he could see over everyone else—though he could never look over his eight feet lieutenant that stood before him.

"What information do you have for me, lieutenant Formon?" he asked in a crisp and quick manner.

"I have just finished extracting the data from the recon Cyri-bots," she replied in a cool tone that she tried her best each day to project when having to deal with her captain. "I am now reading the collected information."

Covol roughly reached up and took the data-pad from the lieutenant as if she owed him it. He held it before him with one and read. "You are hereby dismissed, lieutenant," he said to her without looking up for a moment.

Formon did her best to absorb the insult she received. She stood stiffly with displeasure, saluted him and then walked away, slowly moving heavily as she went to the stairs behind the captain.

"That damned Covol," she murmured to herself as she took her post behind a large computer on a long table. She was sitting amongst a few other computer technicians who were processing the damage done to the stable Cyri-bots during the process of the program transfer and the

inspection of the discs by the maintenance mechs. “What a self-righteous, skinny piece of shit!” she was unaware that she could be heard by her colleagues beside her. They all stared at her as she cursed to herself. But this was what usually happened when she spoke to Covol, and they often enjoyed hearing the awful things she had to say about him.

But there were moments when Formon would get a bit too angry and punch one of them. So those staring at her did so out of concern for their own wellbeing.

Covol went to his station across the other side of the bay and went to his computer to report his findings.

One of the officers at the panel at the main deck turned to Yelkai Gadsa and said, “My lord Gadsa, receiving a message from captain Covol.”

“Accept,” said Gadsa as he approached the panel from a seat near Onn.

The officer touched a button beneath the monitor and the screen winked to life. There was the face of Covol with a mug smile.

“Speak, captain,” Gadsa ordered.

“My lord, the Cyri-bots have returned with a report of their findings,” and as he spoke the summary of the report was displayed on the other half of the screen. “It would appear that the population of the Ixian kingdom is a little over one hundred and fifty. Their weaponry is at a level two, and their only source of mobility is domesticated animals. But they are very skilled warriors who seem to have some level of organized warfare. The highest point in the community is the six story tall temple, but, there is also the issue of an aerial machine parked on the balcony of the temple which leads us to believe that there is an outside influence.”

“And based on the summary that I am looking at that could mean weaponry of a higher level could have been exposed to those people,” Gadsa remarked.

“It is a possibility, my lord,” replied Covol. “And there is also one more thing, my lord.”

Onn and Gadsa did not like the tone his voice had taken. Onn rose from his seat and asked, “What is it, captain?”

“It would appear that one of our Cyries has been spotted by the Rakai himself. They are already mobilizing their forces in response to the possibility on an invasion.”

Onn's eyes widened with disbelief and his nose bridge wrinkled with displeasure. "How the hell the Cyries could have been so reckless to have been discovered?" he snarled.

"My, lord," Gadsa said, equally disturbed by the situation as Onn, "it says here in the summary that the Cyri-bot's presence was known to the Rakai when the key around his neck shone and pointed directly towards it!"

Onn rushed over with heavy steps and stared at the report. He thought about the key glowing and pointing towards the robot. What could that mean about the key? Is it an object that can detect the electrical impulses given off by machines? Could that be why Apuna wants it so badly?

No! It could never be something as simple as that. An EMPD (electromagnetic pulse detector.) is something that almost every military force has in their possession. So what the hell could it be?

"My lord," Gadsa's voice broke Onn's concentration, "What are your orders on how to approach the current situation?"

Onn thought quickly on a solution. "They know that we are coming, so they have already prepared. They would have already thought that we are after the Rakai and have organized his immediately escape. But..." and he smiled to himself. It signaled to Gadsa that something was to their advantage and made him smile as well "...I doubt that they know our location and where we would attack from. And if they played cautious and waited for us to attack, then it would give us enough time for our other Skymera to arrive and surround them with soldiers."

"That sounds like a very excellent plan, my lord," Gadsa remarked. The Yelkai then turned to one of the co-pilots and asked, "How long until the second Skymera enters this planet's atmosphere?"

The pilot checked on his computer, "approximately one Orderran hour and three minutes from now!"

"Damn!" Onn shrieked and stomped his foot. "If we don't attack them soon, then that would leave them no choice but to send out a scouting party to find us. This ship will be a big black dot on an Orderran's skin; easily seen even by Nycarman eyes!" he thought again and was forced to come to an unwanted conclusion. "I guess we would have no choice but to send our ground troops to engage them, then have our aerial troop surround the entire vicinity. Yelkai, carry out these orders."

"Yes, my lord."

Gadsa dismissed Covol and he winked out. Then Gadsa opened the communication channel to the assault division. The face of a somewhat



young, Outo male winked into existence on the screen. An oval face with a rigid jaw line and trimmed hair, assault captain Knark spoke: "This is captain Knark of the assault division, awaiting your orders my lord."

"We are about to engage the enemy," Gadsa said. "Organize sixty of our soldiers and twenty assault-mechs to accompany them. Your orders are to engage the enemy and kill all Nycarmans. But on encounter with the Human called the Rakai, capture him along with the key he carries. Information regarding his appearance will be sent to you after this message."

"Your orders are understood, my lord," Knark replied.

"You are dismissed."

And with that the monitor winked into darkness.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

In another area of the Skymera soldiers suited up in a large room filled with all kinds of deadly weapons. The men dropped on brown armor with silver trim over their uniform, and placed a brown helmet with a segmented silver front over their heads. Equipped at the sides of the helmet were built in communicators that appeared as black discs with nobs on the outside.

They went to the walls of the room, which had a light blue glow to properly display the rifles and pistols that they desired to take with them. The weapons were on shelves that lowered down to the height of the soldier once the shelves below had been cleared. The shelves were in rows that had specific kinds of rifles, pistols and launchers.

In the center of all the organizing was captain Knark and his lieutenant Unu; a medium built, Lulu Orderran male with short spiky hair that jutted out in all directions. They stood at the door of the room that lead to the main walkway of the ship and thus outside.

When the soldiers had geared up they stood in front of their commanders in three lines. Each line was a platoon with the leader at the front.

Knark walked back and from in front of the soldiers as he addressed them. “Now I am counting on each and every one of you here to carry out the wishes of lord Onn. Failure will not be an option for us! Not one of you is to return to this ship alive unless you have brought with you the Rakai and the key! Is that understood?”

“Sir, yes sir!” erupted the crowd.

Knark smiled in satisfaction at the pride, strength and bloodlust he heard in the voices of his men. It is almost as if they could already taste the Nycarmans’ blood, Knark thought. Knark said, “May victory be your dinner tonight, move out!”

Lieutenant Unu stepped aside to allow the soldiers to ship out. The doors slid aside to allow the men to exit the room.

Heavy, metal-cladded footsteps echoed through the hall. Metallic equipment clanged against their bodies. Their commanders followed closely behind them into the drop bay. There other officers waited on them to assist. One of them worked the computer in the wall on the other side of the room. The rectangular portion of the floor in the center lowered, and the soldiers kept to the sides to avoid falling into whatever lied beneath.

The ramp lowered in the open air just above the vastness of trees below. Cold air gushed up into the bay and touched the skin of everyone as hard as it could. But Orderrans were used to much colder temperatures than this.

Below them awaited a fleet of transport Dawhawks, air vehicles painted in silver and gold at the front with Orderran faces at the ends which acted as the headlights. At the sides were antigravity orbs in arms that extended from the ends. The top was wide open to allow easy entry of all the military personnel, a long bench was at both sides inside the Dawhawks, and up at the front piloting the vehicles were the assault-mechs.

Nearly nine feet tall and with glossy black bodies, their chests were wide and divided into five parts with one in the center. Their faces had a thin smile with a straight nose. Their eyes were narrow and their heads round. Their necks and back were a rust-brown color, as were their pelvises.

One by one the soldiers slid down the ramp and into the back of the Dawhawks. Once the first Dawhawk was full with the maximum of ten passengers the other pulled up below the ramp. Once all six of them were full the ramp rose up and the Dawhawks descended to the forest. Travelling in groups of two each platoon separated until they formed a semicircle that was almost to the exact diameter of the distance of the kingdom.

When that distanced was reached the Dawhawks came to a stop and hovered over the trees. The back of the Dawhawks opened and the men threw down wires that connected to reels in the inside and slid down the wires until they reached the very bottom of the forest floor. With each platoon came three assault-mechs carrying heavy weaponry.

There on the ground the Orderrans activated their thermal vision. The creatures that crawled and croaked in the night had a faint reddish-orange glow to their bodies, but certain of their features could still be distinguished; their body texture and facial structure. The rest of the environment had a faint bluish and purple glow to signal areas with a low temperature.

“This is platoon-1 to platoon-2,” said the commander to the microphone near his mouth, “Do you read?”

“This is platoon-2, reading you loud and clear,” said the other in his ear.

Then platoon-1 captain ran his finger down a gear like structure at the side of his helmet and changed the channel. “This is platoon-1 to platoon-3, do you read?”

He was met with the same response as the other. “Good,” he replied. “Platoon-1 is now approaching the target from the west. We’re moving out.”

“Understood, platoon-3 is now approaching the target from the south. We’re now moving out.”

“Platoon-2 is now approaching the target from the east. We’re moving out.”

The archers were positioned in the trees on the outskirts of the kingdom, surrounding the entire perimeter of the area. Further behind were the bombardiers, and waiting back in the center of the kingdom were the knights acting as the last line of defense if and when the Orderrans breached the archers’ defenses. There were also some bombardiers up on the balcony of the temple with a view of the entire community if it were to become the battleground.

Karit were one amongst the knights on their mynamathers. Though he was not that much of a fighter, he was there because he had a duty to protect the Rakai as a member of the Ixian people.

His nerves wouldn’t calm, and his hands trembled on the strap of his armored mynamather. His foot jittered as if it were about to pull off his body and run away. The fear of an Orderran bullet ripping apart his body and their machines crushing him beneath their body was more than what he could bare to fathom as the possibilities of this battle.

Yet, at the very moment, excitement and pride settled in him, because he was about to go to war with one of the most powerful military forces in history. He would fight and display his prowess in battle before his father, Marina and everyone else. But especially in front of the Rakai, who he had long thought would be his only rival in his attempt to reach greatness amongst his people.

He stood beside his father and looked out before him and the bombardiers hidden in the bushes. He failed to notice his father looking at the tension on his face.

“Easy, my son,” said Halit.

“It is very hard to dos so, father,” Karit replied.

Halit knew very well why his son was nervous. Yes, it had to do with the fact that his blood would be spilled tonight, but Karit was nervous because he had not thought him otherwise.

Yes, the great Halit of Ixia was a great headman, yet could not properly teach his son the things a father was supposed to; like how to go to war with a smile on your face. He wanted that very much for his son, but

instead of teaching him he only sheltered him from the things he thought would hinder his progress in life; such as the Tyhunies and Marina. But in the end he ended up causing damage to the boy.

Now his only son and child had a deep hatred for him.

Halit said to his son, “Karit, no matter what happens, do not die with me. It will only prove that you are as worthless as I am.”

Karit’s head snapped around to look at his father; who act as if he had not spoken and kept a plain face.

*Maybe, Halit thought, if he sees me die, then all of his troubles will die with him.*

And the thought made Halit look at his son and smile, leaving the boy wondering.

Hidden amongst the bushes, the Nycarmans hid their thermal signatures from the Orderrans by cloaking themselves in cold honoi all over. They had heard that Orderrans fought at night by seeing heat, so along with covering themselves with bushes, the Nycarmans cloaked their bodies with the honoi. But the honoi used also had to be little, as too much would create too much light that the Orderrans would pick up.

The Nycarmans were only feet away from the Orderrans that walked by them on the ground. The Nycarmans thought that if the Orderrans didn’t see even from this close, then the trick was really working.

One Nycarman, probably the leader of this troop, whispered something that only the other Nycarmans close by him could here. “If you can, take out the Orderran close to you. We are attacking now.”

The Nycarman rose up out of the bushes; it looked like a part of a bush just suddenly came to and wrapped a hand around the Orderran’s mouth, touching the breathing apparatus that connected to the filter on his back. The Nycarman plunged the dagger into the Orderran’s throat and quickly pulled him back into the bushed.

The Orderrans heard the bushes moving, but that could be the wind or the small animals about the place. They couldn’t tell.

Another Nycarman gripped an Orderran by the mouth and stabbed him in the throat. He lay on top of the Orderran, covering him with his bushy body.

A Nycarman saw an Orderran alone by himself, but he was quite a distance away. But the Nycarman wanted the chance to kill him so badly.

He darted out of his cover and went after the Orderran. The Orderran heard the footsteps and spun to meet the attack.

The Nycarman pushed the rifle out of the way just as it fired. The gunshot rang through the forest. The Orderran dropped his rifle and punched the Nycarman in the face hard. The bushy man's head snapped back, but he quickly countered with a blow to the Orderran's groin. The soldier grunted and dropped to one knee. The Nycarman brought his dagger down but the Orderran caught his hand. The soldier punched the Nycarman in his knee so hard that it broke. The Nycarman shrieked and dropped on the same level as the Orderran.

The Orderran threw him on the ground and rolled on top of him. He pushed the Nycarman's hands over his head, removed his breathing apparatus and bit into the alien's neck. Huge fangs pierced the Nycarman's jugulars and sent yellow blood spurting over the Orderran.

The soldier ripped out a mouthful of flesh and went for his rifle, leaving the Nycarman on the ground to bleed to death.

The Orderrans all turned to where they heard the sound coming from.

"Enemies around us!" a soldier shouted.

"Shoot the damn bushes!" said the platoon leader.

The Nycarman emerged from the foliage, their cover blown and the element of surprise lost. They fired their crossbows at the soldiers. Arrowheads pierced armor and touched Orderran flesh.

With Orderrans dropping, the white aliens returned fire. The mouth of their rifles lit up, flashes of yellow flew at the Nycarmans and plants that surrounded them. Screams escaped from the mouths of the Nycarmans when hot lead ripped into their bodies. Yellow blood spewed onto the plants around.

It went from a stealth attack to an all-out gun, honoi and arrow battle.

The Orderrans took cover behind trees and returned fire at the Nycarmans. An Orderran fired from around a tree and dropped a Nycarman; an arrow in turn lodged into his face with a thud, dropping him like a lifeless doll.

A Noiburst tore part of a tree and sent the Orderran there scampering for new cover. But the Orderrans countered with their own explosive force.

The assault-mechs carried with them greenish-grey colored cannons with a body shaped somewhat like a horizontally flattened bug and with a long barrel. Attached to one side of the cannon was a chain of red rounds the

size and shaped of eggs. This chain was linked to the cannon by a case on the back of the assault-mechs.

With a squeeze of the cannon's trigger a mech popped out a round at some Nycarmans scurrying around in the shadows. The fiery explosion erased the darkness and sent two Nycarmans flying just inches off the ground and landing in a heap of torn bodies.

A Noiburst tore off a chunk of metal off the mech's chest. The machine turned to the direction where the blast came from and fired twice. Screams, along with a body missing an arm and leg flew from the explosion.

A Noibeam burned through the mech's abdomen. Sparks flew out its abdomen and steamed off smoke. The mech turned around and faced the other attacker. It fired off a round. The Nycarmans there hand instinctively raised their hands before them and casted a brilliant wall of honoi immediately after the Noibeam. The explosive round detonated against the shield and shattered it.

The Nycarmans were knocked down by the shockwave, but they managed to get back up. But another one of the mechs fired in their direction and blew them apart.

The injured mech received another Noibeam to the chest. The lights in its eyes went out and it careened to side, dropping with a loud crash.

One mech had a light machinegun instead of cannon. With that it mulched at the areas where it saw the Nycarmans running near. One Nycarman was caught in the crossfire and torn to pieces by continuous fire.

Three Nycarmans decided to gang up on the machine. The two at the front put their hands together in front of them and created a thicker shield of honoi than usual. They roared at the machine and ran towards it. The mech fired at the shield, tearing it apart piece by piece.

With the machine distracted the Nycarman darted from around the shield and fired a Noiburst at the machine's foot before diving behind a tree for cover. The blast tore piece of the mech's foot and made it wobble. In that moment it had decided that that Nycarman was a greater threat and fire at the tree he hid behind. In no time the hailstorm of bullets reduced the tree's trunk to nothing and sawed it in half.

The Nycarman didn't have time to escape, and the tree fell on one of his legs and crushed it. He forgot about everything and screamed as he tried in vain to push the tree off him.

The other Nycarmans broke down the remnants of their tattered shield and fired bursts at the machine. Trying to resist the pressure of the bursts as

best as it could, the mech turned to the Nycarmans and let loose a spray of bullets. One of the men was disemboweled by the gunfire; the other fell with holes stitched across his chest.

The mech took too much damage, and its body sparked and smoked all over. It fell like a toppling tower.

The Nycarman with the tree pinned on him looked around to see Orderran soldiers walking about. The last of the Nycarmans were rounded up and made to kneel on the ground in a line. Standing behind them were Orderrans with guns pointed at their heads.

In front of them an Orderran waved his hand, indicating a signal. And with that the Orderrans fired.

The trapped Nycarman looked away in terror just as the Orderran gave the signal. He didn't see the blood spurt out of the head of his comrades. Their blood stained bodies fell forward in the grass.

The Orderrans were already regrouping. And it seemed to the trapped Nycarman that they were not in any way affected by the loss of life at all. Only a very small of the Orderrans shot by arrows died. The Nycarman noted that one of them was walking around with two arrows in his shoulder, only noticing to take them out when he apparently couldn't feel his arm.

The Nycarman knew with this tree on top of him he was going nowhere. And to his horror he saw the assault-mech approaching him. But he couldn't panic. He had to do one last thing before his end. The man fought through the pain and raised a hand. From it he fired two consecutive beams of honoi and dropped it back down. The poor soul didn't even get to die from his wounds. The mech stood over him like a ghastly mountain, staring down at him with evil eyes. The mech crushed his head beneath its foot and walked away.

The mech looked back to the rest of the platoon and said in Orderran in a deep electronic and husky voice, "The last of the enemy unit has been eliminated, captain."

"Not yet," the captain quickly replied. "That Nycarman just sent out a signal. We are about to engage the second wave." he looked around and saw that he had only seven members left in his platoon. No way in hell he was going to take on the rest of those purple bastards with just seven soldiers and one assault-mech. As he was about to speak into his communicator to the other platoons to regroup, he and the others heard what sounded like explosions.



He swore under his breath.

“What the hell? The rest of the platoons must have encountered the enemy!”

“It would seem that the Nycarmans have the entire perimeter of the community guarded,” said one of his officers.

“There’s no point in continuing the attack on our own. We will retreat from this area and wait for the survivors from the other platoons a few meters from here. Then we will launch another attack together. By then their forces would have already been weakened and the second Skymera would have arrived with reinforcements.”

“Understood, sir,” his platoon replied in unison.

The captain spoke into the communicator in his helmet and ordered the mechs to bring their Dawhawks down for immediate evacuation.

Standing next to the archers and bombardiers on the balcony, Lezura heard explosions, gunfire and screams all around her in the forest. Then there were patches of flame and smoke ascending to stars. The only direction in which she had not heard the sounds of battle were directly in front of her; straight ahead to the path leading from Ixia and into the forest.

And that was the way to go.

She opened the channel in her wrist-phone and said, “Joey, Marina, we are leaving now, straight ahead along the path. That is the only direction in which the Orderrans have not occupied.”

“All right, Lezura,” she heard Marina reply.

But there was no immediate reply from Joey. Lezura could sense his reluctance to leave.

“Joey, there is nothing we can do here. We have to leave. It is the duty of these people to protect you, not the other way around!”

“You don’t get it, do you?” Joey’s voice snarled from the other line.

“These people took me in, fed me, gave me a place to sleep and treated me like their own damn son! And I’m supposed to just leave them to die? What kind a hero would do that?”

Lezura got frustrated and snapped back, “Joey you blasted stubborn child! It does not matter if you choose to stay and fight! We do not have the numbers or the firepower to stop the Orderrans! If we stay here we are as good as dead!”

“But we have the key!”

Lezura rubbed the sweat off her face, irritated by Joey's persistence. "We do not know what the key even does as yet, Joey. Please, Joey, stop this and just leave. Why are you making things so difficult?"

Lezura heard Marina, who was more than likely standing next to Joey, scream at him to stop his nonsense. She then heard Joey talk back to Marina, and then a loud sound that sounded like something slapping against another surface. She heard Joey scream. Then there was low mumbling.

"Alright," Joey answered with displeasure. "Marina and I are moving out now."

Lezura sighed in relief. "Thank you, Joey."

But Joey didn't reply, she only heard the communicator go off line with a beep.

Lezura looked over the balcony and saw Marina with Joey behind her, with a hand rubbing the back of his neck, up to the end of the village on their mynamathers.

As Lezura entered the Thwopter, the archers and bombardiers on the balcony wished Lezura farewell.

Marina and Joey rode up to the head of the knights and made an abrupt stop.

"We're leaving now," Marina said to them, including her mother and father; a black haired man and a gold haired woman of forty odd years. Their lack of grief at her departure was not a sudden surprise. They and Marina had discussed her decisions to leave Ixia years ago with Lezura. They had agreed on that decision without much discussion. As a Tyhuny and a young woman, Marina had the right to live her life as she pleased.

"Be safe, my child," the round-face woman said with watery eyes.

"May the holy trinity be with you, my daughter," said the long chinned man.

Marina looked around for Karit, and found him standing next to his father. They both thought about exchanging words, but both were reluctant to do so in front of Halit.

But Joey was not.

"So?" he said to Marina. She looked back at him startled. "Aren't you going to say something?"

She looked back at Karit with emotions racing across her face as her mouth made an attempt to speak. So did Karit.

Halit didn't interfere in the strange fiasco until he saw the Rakai looking at him long and hard. Halit had a feeling inside him that the Rakai knew of the relationship between Marina and Karit. He could clearly sense that the Rakai was expecting...no...*daring* him to defy it in front of him.

Halit didn't fear the wrath of the Orderrans or the wyassies, but he was shit-pants afraid of a holy figure in the flesh that challenged him.

He looked down and sighed in defeat.

*Blasted children!*

"Karit," he said, "take a few of your closest companions and escort the Rakai out of here."

Karit was nearly shocked off his mynamather. "What-"

"Do not 'what' me, boy, just do what I say!"

"Y-yes, father," a confused Karit replied.

Karit turned away to the back of the knights, returning to the front moments later with Bahit and five others; Sorit and Mecina included in the bunch. Karit though that the Rakai were to be protected in his journey, he would need the assistance of professionals, and pride aside, Karit knew he wasn't one of them. So he Sorit and Mecina were his options.

Joey acknowledged Karit with a nod. The Nycarman returned it.

"Now leave," Halit ordered. "And no matter what happens none of you is to return."

"Yes, father."

"And Marina," Halit said to her. The young woman stiffened to hear him call her name. Halit looked at her with mixed emotions. He hated her because she was Tyhuny, but at the same time had to accept her because his son had chosen her as his woman. "Take care of my son; you know he cannot do it himself."

Marina had never once imaged that she would smile and that man, neither Halit at that young woman. "I will!" Marina replied. She turned her mynamather and headed down the path. The others promptly followed her. The footsteps of their galloping mynamathers dimming as they reached further into the depths of the forest.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Marina turned on the small and sleek but powerful flashlight that she had gotten from Lezura and placed it on top of the mynamather's head. She used the green tinged light to guide the others along the path. But her further guide was Lezura flying over their heads high amongst the vegetation.

They had reached the ruins of the old Ixia. The eerie movements of the animals in the shadows sent biting chills up Joey's spine as he remembered the gufders he had encountered here.

An hour into the journey, when Lezura felt that they were far away from Ixia, her voice sounded over the wrist-phones of Marina and Joey.

"Listen up," she said. "I will find a spot to land. I want all of you to meet me there. I will send up a flare to let you all know of my position."

Lezura's Thwopter sped up over their heads and descended into the forest before the group. It was not too long before they saw a bright light shoot into the air, leaving a blazing trail.

"There is Lezura's signal!" Marina said.

When the group headed over to where Lezura was, they found her Thwopter in a small clearing in the forest. Just some large flowers and blue bushes surrounded them. They saw Lezura already putting away the flare gun in a compartment in the front of her Thwopter, and took out something like a white scroll and held it in her hands.

When they had tied their mynamathers to the nearby trees Lezura quickly gestured for them to come close.

Joey wondered if what Lezura had in her hands was a map, and also why would she be carrying *paper* for reference. But when she pulled the two sides she exposed a blank surface that blinked to life...

She made Marina hold one end while she manipulated the touch screen with the free hand. Everyone looked at a three-dimensional display of the Ixian kingdom.

"Now we have just left Ixia and have arrived here," Lezura said as she touched the screen and it zoomed out and showed the forest. "The closest sentient settlement in this region is Suride Town, just thirteen miles from here. If I was to leave now I could reach there within a few hours; but only if I went alone by my Thwopter, and I have no intention of leaving you all behind."

“Wait; there’s a town all the way out here?” Joey said.

“It was established sometime after the Orderran invasion as a settlement for refugee aliens from other worlds,” Lezura answered.

“So do they have like a police force there, because we could just let you go there and come back with help,” said Joey.

Lezura shook her head. “Unfortunately, the police force there is small, and its only concern is governing the lives of the people there. And as far as I could remember they are racists toward the people there.”

“But then that means they might help!” Karit said. “Right now their fellow Nycarman people are being attacked by Orderrans. They would have to do something!”

“Still,” Lezura continued, “that is not in their payroll. They will not risk their lives if they are not getting paid.”

Despair came upon the faces of those around Lezura. Lezura could offer no comfort about the situation that they were facing. She kept silent. It was sad to see how knowledge-less these people were of the bigger world.

“Then what are we going to do then?” asked a black-haired man.

“Joey and I have been discussion our plans yesterday about when we leave. We received information from Alteria that Nycarmans in the Akirmon government may have a hand in the Orderran invasion that is happening right now.” she ignored the disbelief on their faces and continued. “At this point what we should do is go to Suride Town for fuel and supplies and then head back to Akirmon. There, we are going to find a man by the name of Dohar Kelsin. He knows who is helping the Orderrans. If he has the evidence we can prove to the rest of the solar system that his government is helping the Orderrans and stop them before their plans progress.”

“But what do the Orderrans want? Why did they attack us?” questioned Bahit.

“Well,” Karit began with a sigh, “by now I thought that we would have realized already that they are after the key.”

“Then how in the world do they know about the key?” asked Linit, a medium built man with a round face and golden hair.

“At this point we do not know anything beyond the fact that they are after the key and Joey,” Lezura said to quell the repetitive questions. “So what we should all do now is get ready and keep on running.”

Then everyone was treated to a sour expression from Lezura when one of the men asked about rest.

“Are you stupid?” she snapped with so much intensity that everyone jerked back. “Do you want to sleep and wake up the next morning with and Orderran pointing his gun in your face? Just look at how close we are to the enemy! They are probably catching up to us as we speak. We have no time to waste. Let us get going!”

The few survivors of the attempted “Rakai capture” met up two hundred meters away from the target location in their Dawhawks. The captain of platoon-2 had died leaving only three members and his three assault-mechs. Platoon-3’s captain had survived with only three members and one assault-mech. The other mechs had been unfortunate to encounter the wyassies, who had showed them their top quality Noibursts.

From there they sent back a message to the assault captain about the current situation, as expected they were greeted with growls, snarls and curses at their failures. Then he sent back the message to lord Onn, who was surprisingly not as angry as Knark was.

“Thank you, captain Knark,” Onn said. “I will contact you when I have further orders. You are dismissed.”

He turned from the blank monitor and looked at his confused Yelkai.

“My lord, are you not disappointed?” Gadsa asked.

“Not that much. I was expecting something like this to happen.”

“You were, my lord?”

“Yes,” Onn said. The Orderran seated himself. Gadsa went to stand by his chair. “I was not really expecting that amount of my soldiers to capture the Rakai, though I regret the loss of their lives and their skills. But what I really wanted was to get the Rakai out of their protection. I suspected that they would realize that they had no chance of winning this encounter against my troops, and would be forced to resort to sending the Rakai away from the warzone. It would then be a simple matter of just tracking him down.”

“But my lord, wouldn’t it have been easier to have had the Rakai in an area where we could have prevented him from escaping? It will be a bit harder task to track him down.”

“But the thing is, Gadsa, for that to have been accomplished all of this ship’s resources would have had to be spent. And the key could have been destroyed in the process along with the Rakai.”

Gadsa began to understand. “I see. The Rakai would then be defenseless and outnumbered when we are hunting him down.”

“Exactly,” Onn said with a wry smile.

Gadsa said, “And what of the rest of the Nycarmans, my lord?”

“I am tempted to just kill them all when the second Skymera arrives—punishment for slaying my soldiers.”

Gadsa smiled devilishly at the thought. “That is a very wise decision; if I may say.”

Onn took Gadsa’s advice and said, “Yes, it does indeed.”

With smiles they both approached the main panel. Gadsa went to a monitor and opened a channel to the second approaching Skymera.

On the monitor came the rough looking face of an Orderran female with cropped hair.

“This is sky-ship captain Vaksa speaking, ready to receive instructions my lords,” said the woman in a rough voice that matched her features.

“This Yelkai Gadsa speaking on behalf of lord Onn, he requests immediately that your Skymera launch an assault on a specified target. The co-ordinates will be sent to you as soon as this briefing is finished. Note; not a single one of the enemy is to be left alive.”

“Understood, my lord,” and Gadsa saw the corners of her mouth twitch into a smile.

The channel was then cut. Gadsa and Onn stood looking out through the eyes of the Skymera with arms folded behind them.

Onn took a deep breath and said, “This will add to my name and yours Gadsa.”

“Indeed it will, my lord,” Gadsa said.

Unlike the Bloodliners where the leader sent the lesser members of the society out to war, the Tyhunies were accompanied by two of their wyassies to war. The Tyhunies surrounded the other half of the perimeter of the kingdom. Ironically compared to the Bloodliners; more of the Tyhunies survived the encounter with the Orderrans because of the protection they received from their commanders. The two wyassies had managed to survive the encounter as well, but the cost of being on the frontline was receiving a few ghastly wounds.

Telkit, who had dashed in front of one of the assault-mechs and gave it his best Noiburst, had received gunshot wounds to his left leg and shoulder. He had managed to push the bullets out and stop the bleeding using his honoi. But the pain and the damage were too severe for him to continue.

Laying on one of the beds in the clinic, Telkit closed his eyes and folded his hands across his abdomen. He was meditating in an attempt to suppress the pain in his shoulder and leg.

On the bed across him sat Dunit. He seemed at first to have only sustained cuts to his face when one of the mechs punched him. But if one were to look at his hand they would have seen him applying a pulpy mass of plant matter to where his left middle finger had been severed off the mech's hidden blades.

But the loss of the appendage did not seem to affect him as much as anyone would think. He was humming a lively tune while dressing the wound. One finger was not that much of a deal to him; at least his group had managed to stop the platoon. And he was well impressed with his performance at his old age.

The rest of the room was occupied by those who had sustained great injuries—Tyhunies and Bloodliners alike.

"I think they will be coming back," Telkit whispered, trying not to vocalize much and break his concentration.

"Of course they will," replied Dunit. "Orderrans do not give up that easily. Even with the Rakai gone, they will still seek to kill us all."

"They probably might succeed," said Telkit.

"Maybe," he agreed. "But they will not get the Rakai and the key. That I am certain of."

Murbella walked into the room, pass two nurses and towards the two men. Her immediate thought was to ask how they were, but she detected strong flow of their honoi and made her own assumption.

"How many have we lost?" she asked.

"Including the Bloodliners, we have lost a total of 47 Ixians," Dunit answered.

"Blast!" Murbella cursed, "so many!"

"They have much better quality weapons, Murbella," commented Dunit.

"And that is supposed to help the situation?" she argued.

Dunit shrugged and went back to wrapping the bandage around the severed end of his finger. "We have fifty three of our people left. That with the remaining forty six Bloodliners put us at ninety three knights."

"And that will be useful how?" Murbella squeezed on the helmet under her arm in despair.

Dunit looked up at her with a smile that defied all logic of the situation and said, "We can still give them a warm time."



But Murbella slowly began to realize the logic of the situation as well, and she agreed with Dunit through painstaking acceptance of their faith. “So it seems.”

“Indeed,” whispered Telkit.

A Bloodliner came running into the room with his armor clanking on his body.

“We have more Orderrans!” he shouted. “They are coming from the sky in their machine!”

“We will be out right this moment!” Murbella answered as she placed the helmet over her head.

Dunit and Telkit got up and painstakingly fitted the armor over their bodies. So did the others in the room. Even the nurses reached for their armor in the closets in the room.

It was first agreed that the wounded would not fight, but circumstances have changed. The Rakai and the others needed as much time as they could get to escape. The severely wounded were helped by others outside, as Telkit was helped by Dunit.

Upon reaching outside the temple they all noted the darkness that was casted upon them. The Ixians moved their eyes into the air and saw what would be bringing their death.

The Skymera, just meters above the top of the temple, was a little larger than the entire building. Its length stretched out to cover the entire kingdom. Lights at the base of the metal leviathan turned on and searched the ground. Then there was the sound of churning metal as various parts of the base of the machine began to dislocate.

A ramp lowered off the ship. Metallic wires began to flip out, and black figures came sliding out on the wires to the ground. Then even machines came out, and some four-legged maechs leapt off their ramps and until the top of the temple. The sound of the crushed tiles echoed back to the ears of those below. The red eyes of the three huge figures stared back at them as they climbed down the building with a speed and grace that was not the usual with something made from metal.

This was no ordinary Skymera. This Skymera was specifically designed to transport robotic troops to carry out attacks. This was Sin-Skymera, which carried heavy-assault-mechs.

Sliding down the wires were Cyries and assault-mechs. The larger looking assault-mechs were Narcoms; twice the size, with a high black crest and golden rust colored chests. The four-legged ones were the notorious

Araknues. They had an almost oval shape body with slender, jointed legs and a slim face designed to look like an Orderran female—having red, sweet lips. All the limbs were blue at the joints, as were their heads, and had the symbol of a white star slashed in half on their backs.

The Nycarmans were not interested with their appearance and design whatsoever. The wyassies immediately pushed their brains to produce honoi at a faster rate and in more amounts beyond their mind's capacity.

They conjure it all in the center of their bodies until it moved through their creases and consumed them entirely. Soon it was manipulated until huge humanoid figures were formed out of pure honoi. Two had the clear shape of a man's body with eyes that glowed white, the other a woman with a mist of honoi blowing off her head that mimicked hair. Networks of more concentrated honoi flowed throughout their bodies.

This was one of the most advanced honoi techniques in the world; the manipulation of honoi molecules on a grand scale to create a manifestation of a person out of pure honoi. This was the *Zeromuos!*

The other Nycarmans coated their entire bodies with honoi to the point where it solidified over their armor. At this point it became like a second covering of armor.

The bombardiers took aim and fired. Before some of the mechs reached the ground flaming, metal orbs knocked them off the wires into a fall. Burning metal boomed on the ground. Others exploded instantly when hit in their chests.

The bombardiers took the cannons off their shoulders and reloaded from a bag around their shoulders; filled with metal balls in sacks of a substance like gunpowder. They heaved it back onto their shoulders and took the lit piece of wood from their mouths and placed it in a hole at the top.

Seconds later there were more booms and more falling scrap metal. The mechs decided to take shortcuts and leapt off the wires. Ixians scattered from the center like insects, but the huge glowing humanoids remained.

Standing at fifteen meters tall, Dunit swung a hand and swatted two assault-mechs like flies. They flew over yonder with torn limbs.

One of the Narcoms landed on top of Murbella and brought her crashing into a house. The impact shook the ground and sent every Nycarman stumbling. The Araknues rushed in at the scattering organism, firing from rotating guns mounted on their shoulder-blades.

The bullets kept on hitting at their armor until the pressure caused it to break. Marina's father's armor went first, and bullets tore away one of his feet. He stumbled and one of the machines began to crawl in for the kill.

His wife stepped before the mechanical creature and fired Noibursts at its face. One connected in the eye and made it stop. It was enough time for the bombardiers that were lying like corpses on the balcony to get to their feet and aim up the metal bastard.

The machine arched its back when it was struck by a bombardier blast. Telkit ran in and kicked the machine, sending it in a tangled heap of limbs into a house and tore it down to rubble. Another Araknu leapt onto Telkit's back and produce a meter long blade from between its four claws. It sunk it into the head of Telkit and swung outward, lopping off a piece of his head.

But to the machine's surprise the still living organism fell onto its back and knocked off the machine, then rolled over onto his feet and stomped at the Araknu. The Araknu moved its limbs against their joint's axis and touched the ground, pushing itself up and flipping to the left out of the way of the foot that cracked the ground beneath. It turned on its guns and let loose a hailstorm of blue flashes. Telkit's chest rippled into pieces, but he attacked even still, punching the machine in the head. Then gripping it and putting one foot on its shoulder ripped the head off.

Sparks flew and flame gashed from the torn ends and the machine stopped moving. But soon, Telkit fell to his knees and with one hand touching at his chest. Inside the center of the giant, Telkit coughed up blood from his mouth. There was a huge hole in his chest. The machine had manage to break through the giants body with its bullets and struck him. With his life slowly fading, the giant began to dissolve into a huge mist. Soon the giant shrunk into a smoke of honoi.

As they cool air blew, it took Telkit's honoi with it and left only his body lying still on the ground beneath the stars.

Like enchanted scavengers drawn to the scent of death, the Oikumies were slowly creeping up onto the village from the distance. They descended upon Ixian and the nearby forest. Even in the midst of the chaos the Oikumies still maintained their graceful movements.

They perched on the bodies of the slain sentient beings; both Orderrans and Nycarmans, and phased into their bodies and emerged with a big heartwarming blue ball of light within the clutches of their six legs.

The Oikumies absorbed the souls of the dead within their bodies. The souls shone inside them like the inner components of a bulb, and from

around the souls the bodies of the Oikumies broke apart, and reformed into a new Oikumi.

Having reproduced, the Oikumi regenerated itself using some of the energy from the soul, and soon more Oikumies started to appear to collect more souls.

With his last breath, Telkit whispered a prayer for himself, and then said, "I am coming home, o' great holy trinity."

Murbella shoved the Narcom off her, but more of them landed on top of her like a mob. Dunit dragged them off her and threw them aside, one landing in a house and demolishing it. Another got to its feet and lifted a fist at Dunit. The Narcom's fist hung down and the top of the wrist lifted to expose two holes. They abruptly coughed flame and two missiles whooshed out. Dunit shielded his chest with an arm and had it blown to mist. He ran towards the mech as it began to fire the heavy rifle in its other hand, and kicked it straight in the face and unto its back. Another Narcom opened fire at Dunit and tore away at his body. He sacrificed some of his honoi and the size of the Zeromuos by shooting Noibursts.

The blasts tore apart the Narcom's armor and exposed its vital components. Dunit sent a Noibeam into the mech's chest and watched it blow apart.

Murbella had gotten up and was stomping the Cyries that ran around her feet shooting her. With a kick here and there the Cyries were sent flying. Then a Narcom fired missiles at her left knee and tore the foot apart. Nycarmans and mechs scattered as the giant toppled onto her back. She quickly saw the Narcom approaching her and shot a burst at one of its knees. The joint tore apart in a burst of blue, the machine fell on its chest, but aimed up with its high powered assault rifle and began to spray her face with gunfire

She lost her nose and an eye. But the Noiburst she fired caused the machine to lose its head in burst of flames and metal. Murbella sacrificed more of the Zeromuos' size in order to recreate her foot. Now she got up standing at four meters tall.

She looked over to see Dunit repairing his lost arm. He was now at five meters tall.

The Araknu that had been kicked into submission came back online and quickly went back to its data files to regain the knowledge of its mission. Having remembered it flipped over onto its feet and shook the rubble off it. Red eyes scanned around and saw the targets. It chose to leap onto one of the blue giants.

Dunit toppled over with the Araknu on top of him. He was evenly sized with the metal monster now, and struggled very much to get the machine off him. He would punch and the Araknu would slash. He managed to find the momentum and strength to roll over and gain the position on top of the machine.

Dunit punched the machine's face, his arms moving as if he were going insane. Soon a red eye was knocked out of its head and clanked away. But suddenly there was the metal swish of the Araknu's wrist blade and the loud thump it made when it pierced the giant's body.

The blade found its way inside and lopped off Dunit's left arm. The man yelled in pain and held the severed end. Blood squirted through his fingers; not enough honoi to stop the bleeding, it was already in use by the giant. Instantly one of the giant's arms fell off like a piece from a statue and evaporated.

The Araknu swung its blade and the head of the Zeromuos flew off. Dunit painfully gathered the last of his strength as he gasped in agony, placed a hand over the machine's face and channeled all of his honoi inside the Zeromuos' hand. With a mighty roar he pushed and released a Noiburst that would make Joey jealous. The explosion sent out a wave that blew away anything that was near. That Araknu's upper body tore into shreds, the lower half flew into the air along with a humanoid figure.

The assault mechs dressed back in their file as the heavily armored mynamathers charged in. The bullets bounced off the thick slabs of metal on their bodies, and the beast kicked with iron clasped feet and knocked them over.

The riders then issued out commands with specified yanks and the beasts stepped on their heads.

A few assault drones after shooting the large organisms in the armor-less center of their chest brought the mynamathers down. They immediately emailed this finding to the other mechs around. Soon, shots were specified and mynamathers began to squeal and fall.

One man saw a mech aiming at his animal companion and threw his spear in its head. The mech was knocked off balance for a second but regained its focus to see the beast galloping towards it. The assault mech rolled out of the way, sprang up and spun around and opened fire.

Lafit took a hit in his thigh and leaned over his companion's back. The mech holstered its rifle and charged at the raring beast with a wrist blade sharp and ready. It twisted its body from here to there and avoided the striking hooves. As the beast reared once more it plunged the blade into the base of the animal's throat. With a blood curdling choking sound the mynamather toppled over and Lafit fell off.

But Lafit was not dead yet. He saw a Cyri running and screaming towards him with its rifle. Lafit fired a pulsating wave of honoi that send he Cyri flying back.

Lafit felt a gut wrenching pain, he coughed up blood. It was then he realized the machine from before had plunged its blade in his stomach. It twisted the blade and Lafit made a whimper and went still.

Though successfully slaying this organism, the mech had failed to notice the other one coming from its right. By the time it managed to look in that direction Halit chopped a tendon in its neck with so much force that the tendon snapped. One side of the machine went limp, giving Halit the chance to plunge the sword inside its eye and strike its CPU.

As that one fell a Cyri came firing its pistol from behind. A Noibeam from Halirit to its head silenced the machine. Halit turned around and saw the man finishing the machine with his sword sliding up into the base of the Cyri's head. Mulena rushed in just in time with a Noiburst to knock down the assault-mech near Halirit. He saw the machine fall and switched his target. He plunged his blade in the machine's eye before it could get back up.

The three quickly huddled together with their backs turned, shields raised and weapons ready. Cyries began to surround them with their rifles aimed at them. The other machines were busy with the rest of the Nycarman.

"Blasted metal monsters!" Halit cursed.

The man charged madly at the machines before him. He took two shots to his body but kept on coming at them as if he felt no pain. He swung his

shield and clapped the first on the head, making a loud clinging sound. He spun counter clockwise and knocked another one onto the ground and then stabbed it in the eye. Halirit and Mulena went over to aid the man. At close range the machines would not fire because they would hit one of their fellow mechs and lose their numbers, so the machines switched to their wrist blades to match the organisms. But in a case like this the machines had no skills as the organisms did.

The Nycarmans pushed their bodies beyond what their muscles could sustain in order to avoid the quick swipes of the Cyries and big swings of the assault-mechs. Counter attacking with chops to the tendons in their legs to bring them down, then finishing it off with stabs to their eyes.

The last Araknu mulched away at the Nycarmans scampering for cover. Bodies were torn apart as the rotating barrels releases a hailstorm of bullets. Screams matched the loudness of gunfire, so did the boom of the last two bombardiers' rockets.

They scored a direct hit on one of the Araknu's front legs. Its body dipped and came back up, then dipped again when the tendons tore from the weight it applied a second ago. As the bombardiers reloaded the Nycarmans rushed the machines with palms blazing with honoi. The machine suddenly opened its mouth at them and exposed a narrow barrel. It flashed and a thin beam of red, intense energy shot out. It swept its head and the beam sliced through bodies of three Nycarman like a blade through water. The others had ducked just in time. The unfortunate were cut in half and laid twitching on the ground.

Then two rockets knocked the head of the Araknu and sent the red arc into another direction, towards the forest and slicing a few trees into falling, flaming wood.

The giant Murbella punched off a Narcom and ran over the spitting head of the Araknu, grabbed it and aimed it back at the Narcom behind her. She swung the head with the laser-beam and lopped off the Narcom's head in a clean sweep. The Narcom was just about to fire rockets when its CPU was lost from its body. The arm with the rockets sticking out at the end slumped down. The rockets fell with enough force to cause an explosion that blew apart the legs of the Narcom. Murbella yanked the head off the Araknu and the laser died.

Murbella was instantly hit in her chest by rockets from Narcoms coming off the wires of the Sin-Skymera. More machines were pouring down to clean up the mess that was below. They kept on firing at her before they reached the ground. By the time the two Narcoms got there was longer a blue giant, but a little purple woman lying on the ground struggling to move her limbs.

They walked around it and stopped to stare to make certain the threat was gone. Murbella fixed her eyes on the huge, three-toed foot in front of her. She could not even muster the strength to speak, but if she could speak her words to the wretched machines, it would be: "The Rakai will stop you! Enjoy your victory now, because you will all soon have your day!"

She managed though to smile, as she was about to be sent to the presence of the holy trinity. One of the metal giants raised a foot over Murbella.

Halirit watched with clenched teeth and tears rolling down his face as the machine crushed his mother beneath its feet. The cracking sound of crushed bone was deafening. The Narcom twisted its feet and made more of the sound.

Halirit looked away from the gory sight and at the Cyri-bot standing before him, Mulena and Halit and the others; they had all beaten and their weapon broken. Behind each of them stood an assault-mech with its rifle pressed against the back of their heads.

Suddenly they all broke out in song, an action that startled the Cyri. It was the old song sung by the Ixians, about the day when they would meet their ancestors and return to the "Land where the water met the clouds".

The Cyri suspended their execution in interest at the behavioral display of the organisms. The chorus grew louder, they sang with an energy that contradicted the weak state they were in. It started to seem more like an organized protest with how they raised their fists up and down.

The Cyri soon realized that there were other things for the mechs to do. He raised his right hand with two fingers pointing up, then placed it across his chest and swung it outward. The simultaneous sound of single gunfire came and the Nycarmans fell flat on their faces...silent.

The Cyri then pressed the button at the side of its head and turned the small knob to change the channel.



After receiving the most wonderful message from the Cyri, captain Vaksa then sent the message to lord Onn.

“Well done, captain,” Onn congratulated her on the monitor. “Have your mechs immediately dig the graves to dispose of the bodies. Oh! And by the way, has the temple been destroyed?”

“To my knowledge it is still fully intact, my lord,” she replied.

“Good. We can make a settlement for the time being. Return to the mothership and have it send down some troops to beginning refurbishing the building.”

“Understood, my lord,” replied Vaksa. “We will have the necessary reconstructions made to the temple.”

When the channel went off Onn walked back to his seat and sat cozily with his legs crossed. He allowed himself a smile of triumph...for the moment.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The escaped Nycarmans and the Human sat on the back of their beasts looking back in the direction towards the temple. From the clear position they had now ridden, and Lezura's spot in the sky, they could see the arrival of the monstrosity of the air machine that was the seed of Orderran ingenuity.

"My goodness," Marina gasped. "There is no way that they will be able to survive an attack of that magnitude!"

"Our people..." Karit could barely find the strength to raise his voice.

Joey was quiet, biting on his lip. He wondered if he should've felt guilty about this. He wondered if this was his doing.

*No*, he thought. *The Ixians wouldn't want me to feel this way.* Joey squeezed the reins of Redbolt. He was already imagining his revenge on the Orderrans.

Above their heads the Oikumies casted a great wall of glowing white bodies and the exotic sounds of wind chimes.

Lezura's voice sounded over the wrist-phones; glum as the rest of them were. "Come on, everyone. We have to get going."

Reluctantly the group headed Lezura's words and continued their journey.

Joey felt as if he had to do something, or at least say something!

"Don't worry everyone," he said with in strong, cocky voice, "they won't get away with this. Take that as a promise from the Rakai!"

When Marina had translated for everyone to here, Bahit replied with a, "Aye!"

"All right," Marina seconded.

"I put my faith in you, Rakai," Karit said.

"I believe you, Joey," Lezura said over the wrist-phone.

Joey smiled. "That's all the hope I need."

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joel S. Williams is the author of the Black Heart Phantasy story. He left high school in 2011 at the age of seventeen. Since then he has been trying all means to get a job to fund his further education. After two years without success, he finally decided to turn to his love for all things sci-fi and fantasy for a source of freedom and hope. Since he was seven years old, Joel S. Williams has been writing short stories and comics. This is his first ever fully developed novel. He resides in the city of Spanish Town in Jamaica.

I would really appreciate your feedback on my novel, whether good or downright nasty! I want to know the impression my work has left on people, so please email me at [jazzuchivellezide.com@hotmail.com](mailto:jazzuchivellezide.com@hotmail.com) and facebook.com, or at [jazzuchi100@hotmail.com](mailto:jazzuchi100@hotmail.com) at my windows outlook address. And leave comments wherever possible, as I have another book coming soon.

All voices are heard and respected...except racists!

# Black Heart Phantasy: A Hero's Birth Teaser:

## CHAPTER ONE

The dimension reaper Terriak was not excited or worried about being called upon by the Grand Reaper to answer for his actions. He was expecting it after all, for he had allowed a Human to enter through the rift to another world without the Grand Reaper's say so. Terriak anticipated some grave consequence for helping the Human Joey Sadowski. But he could justify his actions on the basis of non-personal gain, for he had done so for his love. But he didn't dare to tell it to the Grand Reaper.

Terriak was in a very deep part of the rift's existence. It was a colossal structure a little larger than Earth's moon. It was a world concealed from the known universe, but still influencing it; invisible in a sense. It was not against the backdrop of the blackness of space as the planets and stars were. It was against a background of pink, orange and purple radiant matter. Against the matter surrounding the world were hundreds of thousands of portals that lead to the planet via bands of luminous pink energy, veined with steaks of electricity and shimmered with beautiful heat. All these were portals which lead to the thousands of solar systems and the numerous worlds within the galaxy.

This world was known as Dorsega, the home of the reaper corps headquarters, and the center of the rift.

Dorsega's atmosphere was infused with the bands of energies that lead from the tunnels. It swirled in a memorizing, nauseating mass like the frothing ocean in a storm. Electricity crackled across the surface in lightning storms. Huge areas of light pulsated all over the clouds.

Beyond the spectacle was the surface of the planet. It was a world similar to one that was inhabited by an array living creatures. There were continents, islands, seas and oceans. But their percentages of occupying mass were a bit too equal to be natural; hence the thought that would come to mind was that the world was really built by someone!

The land was mostly occupied by huge cities of towering architecture. The height of the buildings ranging from twelve hundred stories to three thousand. The architects built them as close as they could to the skies.

The sky over the city of Sontarius was an ever blazing parade of the energies that linked the planet to the tunnels, and were harnessed by special buildings that fueled the desires of the reapers.

Terriak was in one of such buildings; called a Brighthouse. It had no visible angles to its design, as most of the buildings here did. Its height was two thousand stories. Its appearance was a huge, bronze pillar with a pointy top and a body made of bulging rings. Each ring was streaked with crystal windows. The very top of the building glowed with the energy it pulled from the atmosphere.

Around the buildings flew huge vehicles. They were shaped somewhat like a fish with mechanical attachments and long bodies, but all of them were made of a blue-tinged crystal. In the light from the energy of the clouds they roamed the skies with bodies glowing vividly like the spirits of great beings. Even the silhouette of the pilots could be distinguished through the clarity of the machines. And it is without question that they were given the fitting name Lightspecters.

Inside the Brighthouse, an elevator door of silver-white slid into the walls and opened. A purple-blue interior, streaked with veins of glowing energy, was occupied by three reapers; Terriak and two others. The nebula pattern on his mask was unmistakable to anyone who knew him. The three reapers in the suit of gold and turquoise had bodies that were faintly steaming. It was the result of them being materialized onto the floor. One of the many uses of the cosmic energy they were harnessing from the skies.

Terriak was face to face with a wide corridor of smooth, light blue walls with veins of cosmic energy. The walls were of a metallic structure, but the ceiling and floor was of the purest crystal. The floor and ceiling were connected to each other by crystal columns. Upon closer inspection one could see cosmic energy in many streams running inside the crystals in the floor, columns and ceiling.

Such was their dependency on cosmic energy. It was used to power the computer terminals in the areas of the walls that were not invaded by the columns. It provided power for the illumination of the building by the spherical bulbs in the corners of the ceiling.

There were doors in the walls that lead into different work rooms. The doors were reddish-pink membranes, not the cold metal like that of the elevator. The workers simply ran a finger down the middle of the membrane. Tiny sensors would pick up the pressure and the membrane

would split apart in an instant, coming back together once the person went through.

The workers, of course, were reapers. But not all of them had on their masks.

Their hoods were thrown back, their masks off. They exposed their faces and the identity of their species without concern, but they only did so now because they were amongst their co-workers.

An Asian Human female walked by the elevator door. She was too busy typing on a data pad in her hand to notice Terriak. A male Raizean was chatting with gorgeous black woman as they turned off into another corridor. An alien of a species on known to the Upsinodron solar system; with navy blue skin, orange eyes in black sclera and a head whose back narrowed to a point (a Suravian) took lazy steps from a room into another with his hands in his pockets.

An Orderran male bumped into a humanoid insect. The encounter made the Orderran spill hot coffee all over his chest. He leapt around and fanned the stain on his shirt. The insect came to his aid with a soothing hand of cosmic energy.

An alien with pinkish-green skin and a head off eight tentacles laughed at the misfortune of the Orderran. The tentacles of the Cephalore curled briskly and lively. The Cephalore was in turn being eyed lustfully by an alien that could only be described as a Nycarman with light bluish skin, rich orange hair and golden eyes. And it was a female. She looked at the curves of the Cephalore and her firm small breast.

This was the Reaper corps; an organization of aliens from all over the galaxy working under a single command with the purpose of stopping aliens from using the rift illegally. Here beings from all over the galaxy could be found conversing with each other; or ignoring each other when not on duty and professionalism was not required.

It wouldn't be surprising to see a Ginlank talking to Human Muslim, and light skinned Orderran talking to a black man, an insect flirting with a cat-like creature, a fish getting drunk around a bar counter or female Human and Rapturan shoving their tongues down each other's throat in a sloppy kiss.

No matter your race, religion, sexual orientation, height, IQ, skin color or political views, if you could follow the orders of the boss without fail you could be a reaper.

"Move forward, Terriak," one of his escorts said.

Terriak stepped out with the reapers following close at his side. Those who have heard by formality or rumors of the situation with Terriak gave the reaper curious glances and condemning stares.

Terriak didn't bother to exchange glances with anyone. It would be pointless. They couldn't help at all with the situation. As the commander of the group who allowed the Human to travel through the rift, Terriak was the one to answer to the Grand Reaper.

Terriak and his escort turned left into a corridor. At the end of it was a door that was made of ordinary wood and painted in a peach color. The door was completely flat and smooth with a bronze handle. Pasted at the top of the door was a piece of cardboard. On it were the words in an alien language "The boss' office".

They stopped at the door and one of the escorts knocked five times. The number of times indicated the nature of the meeting which the boss already knew. The five knocks meant that this meeting regarded a disciplinary matter.

"Come inside, Terriak," said a male's voice in English.

The two guards took their posts at the sides of the door. Terriak turned the knob with a loud creek and pushed. He entered a huge, cool room. The room had no definite shape, as the walls were a swirling mass of cosmic energy. In the center of the room stood a long, simple wooden table with two chairs opposite of each other.

Hovering a few inches above the table was an orb as swirling golden and red light, and seated behind it was the boss.

He was busy sewing two pieces of black fabric together. His head was hung down intently over his work; if one could call it so.

"Have a seat, Terriak," the man said, "and take off your mask so I can speak to you in person."

Terriak seated himself before the Grand Reaper. Terriak placed his hand on his mask. It slowly shimmered and dematerialized into his hand. It revealed the handsome face of a Human male, with rich chocolate skin and full lips. His face was rigid and narrowed to a small chin. His dark hair was short and curly. Thin eyebrows hung over deep brown eyes.

The boss, on the other hand, was of a different species. He was completely hairless and with skin of a pale grey-blue color. He had dark blue swirl-like patterns on his head (as all with his species) that went down over his face, down his arms and legs. His ears were built inside his head, but he could hear as clearly as anyone else could. He wore cotton, black-red

sweater with purple rings around the wrists. His close fitting trousers were of a similar color and material also. Over his clothes he wore a grey leather overall coat that reached down to his ankles. On his feet were simple white shoes.

Terriak always wondered why the boss would occupy his time with such simple activities when he could get machinery to do so. The man made the rift after all!

The boss stopped what he was doing and looked up at Terriak, revealing his facial features. He wore an expression of both boredom and authority. His nose was just two slits, his mouth thinned lipped over a small chin. His eyes, however, were crystal blue against the backdrop of his black sclera. His pupils were shaped like an X His species were called the Menkar, one of the oldest living species in the galaxy.

Terriak, or William Bloomfield as he was once called, interlaced his fingers and placed them on the desk before him. In Terriak's eyes his one could see anxiety and depression.

"Now, William," the Grand Reaper said in English, his voice low, but demanding, "explain to me why you allowed a Human to travel through my rift."

"Well, sir," Terriak said, "I did so because the Nycarmans wanted the Human for a very important matter. It was something which involved the Human in their written history and in some religions, so, as a reaper; it was not my place to interfere with that matter."

"But," his boss said, "Did you not aid the Nycarmans Lezura Hembim and Donnowarru in travelling through the rift to Earth?"

"Yes," Terriak said. "But I did so with the basis of allowing a species to carry out what was related to their history. The Human Joey Sadowski is the Rakai, the key keeper of the Dielenganns God Titan. They wanted him and no one else."

The Grand Reaper folded his legs and crossed his arms. He raised a hairless eyebrow and asked, "But through my rift? Why not let them take a spaceship?"

"Because it would have taken too long," Terriak said.

"And that is where you went wrong, Mr. Bloomfield," the Grand Reaper said. "You shouldn't have concerned yourself with the length of the distance they would have to travel to reach Earth. That is none of your concern. Your job is to make sure no one uses my rift like it is their bathroom!"



The Grand Reaper sunk back in his chair with a heavy burden. He massaged his forehead, wondering if he should have gotten robots to do the job instead of sentient beings. But the significant fact was that only sentient beings were capable of wielding the power of cosmic energy.

Terriak understood the mistake he made very well. He was no fool. He knew the reasons why he disobeyed the rules. The very personal reasons why.

And that made the Grand Reaper wonder if there was more to Terriak's actions than what he saw. He knew the man too well as a professional for him to be making such mistakes. The rule he broke was too commonly enforced in the mindset of the reapers for Terriak to just childishly break it.

The Grand Reaper relaxed his body and stared at Terriak emotionlessly. Terriak tensed. He could feel the Menkar's stare piercing into his mind in search for an answer. Terriak almost thought about putting up a mental block against the Menkar. He dared not lose his cool, as any flaw in his behavior would boil to the surface and hint to the boss that he was up to something.

Then the Grand Reaper suddenly remembered. There had been a change; a slight change in Terriak's behavior ever since he came back from a mission on Deton nearly two years ago. It was a change too small for his colleagues to notice, but the Grand Reaper had picked up on it recently. Terriak seemed worried about something, or someone.

The Grand Reaper tested him. "William is there something important you would like to share with me?" he said. "Is there anything that's bothering you at all?"

Terriak knew he was being tested, but if he paused in his response it would only arouse more of his boss's suspicion. He quickly said, "I guess, I just made a foolish mistake."

The Grand Reaper didn't buy it for a second. Terriak was too good an officer for "foolish mistakes". Something was definitely up, and he would figure it out. But he needed time.

The Grand Reaper picked up his needle, thread and fabric and resumed sewing. He said, "But, your explanation doesn't matter, Mr. Bloomfield. I will still have to see to it that you are punished accordingly."

Terriak sighed inward. He was relieved that the probing had stopped. "Of course, sir," he agreed.

The Grand Reaper said, "Seeing as how you are responsible for the Human being on that planet, it is only right that you are you one to solve it.

As soon as your next shift starts I want you to go to that planet. Follow the Human wherever he goes.”

Terriak stiffened. “What, sir?”

The Grand Reaper looked at Terriak like he was looking at a disobedient child. “Did I just falter in my speech, Mr. Bloomfield?”

Terriak dared not argue with his boss. He was already in enough trouble here and elsewhere. He suppressed any previous thought and said, “Understood, sir.”

“And make sure you blend into the society,” the Grand Reaper added. “We already have enough problems as it is.”

“Yes, sir,” Terriak said with forced formality.

“Good,” the Grand Reaper said. “If the Human shows the slightest trait of a Baraki, kill him. We cannot let the other species know what those creatures are and where to find them. You are dismissed Mr. Bloomfield.”

Terriak materialized the mask over his face and walked tiredly to the door. Once he was outside and the door shut, a figure suddenly appeared at the right hand side of the table where the Grand Reaper sat.

It was a reaper, but different in her dress. Her uniform was white, with a black cape with purple trim. The hood she wore over her mask had a purple trim as well, so did the ridges of her white gloves. Her mask looked like outer space, dotted with bright stars and with a moon over where the left eye would be. She was slim, with small breasts, and wore white high heeled boots with black bottoms.

“What did you hear, Twilight?” the Grand Reaper asked the woman.

Twilight stretched her shoulders. “Not enough,” she said in a piping voice. “He had a mental block up most of the time. But I was able to pick up a few things. You were right, boss, it does have something to do with Deton, and a few Barakies.”

A nervous chill ran up the Grand Reaper’s spine. He stopped stitching and offered Twilight a glance. “Are you saying that our Terriak is in an arrangement with Barakies?”

Twilight crossed her legs and leaned on one hand. “It is hard to say,” She said innocently, “I did not hear him think of any clear arrangement with the Barakies. But I managed to get a name.”

“Who is it?” asked the Grand Reaper.

Twilight was amused to hear the frustration in her boss’ voice. “Her name is Hetren, she’s a goblin Baraki.”

The Grand Reaper sighed in despair. He sat back in his chair and went silent with thought.

Twilight decided to provoke a reaction out of her boss. “You know, boss, I think Terriak is doing this because he might still be upset that you took away his Baraki abilities.”

The Grand Reaper said, “Highly unlikely. Terriak was the one who asked to be rid of his Baraki genes.”

So that’s how, Twilight thought. She enjoyed what was taking place. She hoped that this situation would go on long enough for her to gain valuable information out of it. She absolutely loved gossip. She did so from her days in high school until she became a reporter on her home world.

The Grand Reaper held up his head and got back to his sewing. “Twilight,” he said, “I want you to do something or me.”

Twilight abruptly lay on the table, right behind the glowing orb. Her head rested beneath a hand. “My ears are wide open, boss.”

“I want you to conduct a surveillance of the activities of all the major Baraki settlements on Deton. Take as many members of your squad as you wish. But make certain that you don't arouse the suspicion of any of the native Baraki. Report back to me as soon as you have found anything of importance.”

Twilight smiled brightly behind her mask. “It will be done, sir,” she said. And on that note Twilight imploded into a swirling dot of light and blinked out of sight.

The Grand Reaper wondered again if he should’ve chosen robots instead of living organisms to do the job. He sighed and said, “If only I didn't like people...”

